



Attendance Policy

Ratified: 6/8/2024

Review Date: August 2027

Rationale

This policy aligns with the South Australian Department for Education's Attendance Policy.

Ridgehaven Primary School (RPS) recognises that school attendance is a complex issue which requires understanding, commitment and teamwork from all stakeholders.

School Attendance and the Law

RPS is committed to providing a culturally safe and inclusive environment for all. Attendance at school is compulsory. The Education and Children's Services Act (2019) states that all children must attend school from 6 until they turn 17. This could be in a school or another approved learning activity.

Legal guardians can be prosecuted if they do not make sure their child attends school without a prescribed reason for absence. This can mean being fined or receiving a criminal conviction.

Commitment to Inclusive Attendance Support

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families have often been impacted by systemic and interpersonal racism in many education settings and we are committed to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for students.

RPS also recognises the additional challenges which can result in the marginalisation of neurodiverse, disabled and chronically ill students and families. This marginalisation may mean that some students may face unique challenges in maintaining regular attendance. While RPS is required to adhere to Education Department and Government Legislative Requirements, we are committed to working with families to support attendance.

To support our diverse school community:

- Aboriginal Community Education Officers (ACEOs) will be engaged to support all families with policy concerns and school attendance.
- Individualised support for otherwise marginalised students and their families.

Aims

- To reflect the intent of the Education and Children's Services Act 2019 and the associated Children's Services Regulations 2020 all students from age 6 to 17 are required to attend education programs.
- To guide the actions of staff working with young people and their guardians in relation to school attendance and participation.
- To promote and support attendance at school and preschool which as integral part of community participation.
- To actively engage and educate learners and their families around the importance of school attendance.
- To provide support to address barriers to attendance, learning and wellbeing, ensuring inclusive support for students so they can be physically present and engaged in education.

Attendance Expectations

School Attendance

School starts at 8:50am each day (yard supervision is provided from 8:35am) and finishes at 3:00pm. Early dismissal is at 2pm on the final day of each term.

While RPS maintains high expectations of attendance for all students, we recognise that some students may require individualised attendance plans. These plans will be developed in consultation with the student, their guardians and relevant professionals.

Preschool Attendance

Preschool sessions start at 9am and finish at 3pm, unless otherwise communicated.

Before commencing school, students are entitled access to 15 hours of preschool a week. Preschool attendance is not compulsory, but regular attendance is strongly encouraged to establish a positive attendance relationship with the school.

Students at Risk from Missing School

RPS uses the following categories to identify children at risk:

- Habitual non-attendance: a student has 5 to 9 days absent in a term.
- Chronic non-attendance: a student has 10 or more days absent in a term.

Attendance Improvement Plans

RPS develops and implements an attendance improvement plan as a part of our School Improvement Planning (SIP) cycle. This plan is informed by attendance data analysis and aims to address patterns of non-attendance.

Individualised attendance improvement plans will be engaged for students who are experiencing habitual or chronic non-attendance.

Communication Strategies

RPS is committed to clear, accessible and culturally appropriate communication about attendance, including:

- Regular updates through school newsletters, website and information sessions.
- Engagement with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in developing and sharing attendance strategies.
- Utilising interpreters or translated materials where needed.
- Regular consultation with families to ensure our approaches are responsive to diverse needs.

Roles and Responsibilities

Leadership Team

- Ensure attendance strategies and interventions are flexible, culturally appropriate, and can be adapted to meet diverse student needs, and are communicated to all stakeholders.
- Develop and implement the school's attendance improvement plan.
- Analyse attendance data to inform strategies and review procedures.
- Communicate with guardians, and document all communication attempts.
- Make mandatory notifications about chronic non-attendance as legally required.
- Collaborate with Student Support Services when additional support is needed.
- Create partnerships in alignment with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to support student engagement and attendance.
- Make certain ACEOs are involved to support families with attendance concerns.
- Inform students and their families about this policy.
- Ensure accurate recording and follow-up of student absences.
- Be aware of and accommodate cultural events or obligations that may affect student attendance.
- Address cultural safety, mental health, neurodiversity and bullying issues that may impact attendance.
- Approve exemptions within their authority and forward others to the Education Department's central office.

Teaching and Support Staff

- Accurately record each absence, late arrival or early departure with the appropriate code.
- Contact guardians if there is no explanation for an absence, or there is a pattern of absence.
- Document this contact with guardians, including attempts to contact, and engage leadership when necessary
- Request a medical certificate from guardians as required.
- Be aware and sensitive to the diverse needs of students and families that may impact their attendance or punctuality.
- Demonstrate cultural competence and respect for all cultures in interactions with students and families.
- Participate in required training, and implementation of the policy.
- Support students and guardians to engage in learning at home where appropriate.

Students

- Attend school every day the school is open unless they are ill or have an approved exemption.
- Arrive at school and to all lessons and activities on time.
- Participate positively in all learning activities.
- Report to the front office if they arrive late.

- Communicate with teachers or school leadership about any challenges they face in attending school regularly or on time.

Guardians

- Enrol their child or young person in a school or approved learning program.
- Provide all relevant information to the school that will assist the student's learning, for example; medical conditions, neurodiversity, cultural needs, and other family complexities.
- Ensure their student attends school punctually every day the school is open unless they are ill or have an approved exemption.
- Provide the school with up-to-date contact information.
- Provide a reason to the school if their child is absent, late, or leaving early.
- Provide a medical certificate or written explanation if their child is ill for 3 or more days in a row.
- Attempt to make appointments outside of school hours where possible.
- Monitor their student's attendance and classwork and support them to catch up on work where appropriate.
- Work collaboratively with the school and Education Department to develop strategies that support their student's attendance, taking into account any factors that may impact attendance.
- Feel empowered to communicate with the school about cultural events and obligations, or other factors that may impact their child's attendance.

Accommodations and Support

RPS will consider reasonable accommodations to support the attendance of all students, we have a commitment to making school a safe space for students and families. Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Flexible arrival times.
- Sensory breaks during the school day.
- Quiet spaces to assist in regulation.
- Support for transition between activities and classes.
- Flexibility around attendance for significant cultural events or Sorry Business.
- Understanding of the fluctuating capacity that can impact school attendance for neurodiverse and otherwise disabled students and working with guardians to maximise educational benefit.

Exemptions

In some circumstances, the principal has the authority to approve an exemption from school for up to 1 month, or up to 12 months for a family holiday. Guardians must apply for an exemption and receive approval before the absence.

The policy does not apply where:

- a child or young person is exempt from attendance at school under the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* (for example under an approved exemption for a home education program).
- a child or young person is subject to a legal condition imposed by the South Australia Police (SAPOL), a court or an authorised officer that requires they be exempt from attendance.

Definitions

- Guardians: Includes biological parents, legal guardians and persons standing in loco parentis.
- Authorised officer: Includes specified department staff and SAPOL members who can enquire about a child's non-attendance.
- Cultural safety: An environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safer for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need.
- Neurodiversity: the concept that neurological differences are a normal part of human diversity, including conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and others.
- Prescribed Reason: Under the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019*, the following are prescribed reasons for non-attendance at school and approved learning programs by children and young people:
 - The child was prevented from attending on the occasion in question by his or her sickness, or by his or her temporary or permanent infirmity.
 - There was a danger of the child being affected by an infectious or contagious disease.
 - The child was prevented from attending on the occasion in question by some other unavoidable and sufficient cause.
 - The child was prevented from participating in the approved learning program on the occasion in question by reason of having to care for a member of their family.

Review Process

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or earlier if required by changes in Department or legislative requirements. Our review will include consideration of how well our attendance policies and practices support our diverse stakeholders.