



Compulsory attendance conferences

If school attendance does not improve, parents and sometimes their child, can be asked to attend a compulsory attendance conference. The conference, which will be run by a trained conference convenor, aims to help the school, parents and other agencies to further identify the issue impacting on a child's attendance. The outcome of a compulsory attendance conference is for the parties to agree to undertake certain actions to improve the child's attendance. These actions are agreed in writing.

Compulsory schooling order

If previous attempts to resolve the issue of a child's attendance are not successful, legal compliance can be sought through an application to the Children's Court for a Compulsory Schooling Order. The aim is to assist a family and/or child to address the issues preventing satisfactory school attendance. This has the added enforcement of a Court's powers.

Prosecution

If all attempts by schools, the Catholic Education Office and DEC regional support staff fail to improve a child's attendance, action can be taken in the Local Court with the result of fines being imposed up to a maximum of \$11,000.

Further information is available from

1

Catholic Education Commission policy and information
www.cecnsw.catholic.edu.au - search 'student attendance'
or <http://bit.ly/zdLonM>

2

NSW Department of Education and Communities
<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/leavingschool/index.php>

Do you need an interpreter?

Interpreting services are provided where possible for parents and carers who do not speak or understand English well and for Deaf parents and carers who use sign language. For more information on interpreter services contact your school or phone the telephone interpreter service on 131 450. Ask for an interpreter in the required language and the interpreter will call the school and stay on the line to assist you with your conversation. You will not be charged for this service.



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Compulsory school attendance

Information for parents



Dear parents and carers,

Since 1870, schooling has been compulsory in Australia. Unfortunately, for many children learning at school has been optional. The learning needs of some students have not always been adequately catered for in a traditional, one-size-fits-all approach to learning and teaching.

While schooling remains compulsory today, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Parramatta also want **learning to be compulsory** by delivering a schooling experience that caters to the needs, abilities and interests of each student. Our school leaders and teachers are working hard to ensure students receive a personalised, relevant and meaningful Catholic education.

There are many ways in which families can support their children to be prepared for learning at school. For example, by making school attendance a high priority in your family; by ensuring children get enough sleep, a good diet and regular exercise; by encouraging reading from an early age; by sharing the learning journey through an active involvement in your child's school, hobbies and extra-curricular activities, and so on.

Of course, in order for students to learn at school, they need to show up. In fact, it is illegal for school-aged child not to attend school. Even more troubling though, is the learning a child will miss if they do not attend school. **If a student misses as little as eight days each term, by the end of primary school they will have missed over a year of learning.**

This brochure outlines the compulsory attendance guidelines from the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Communities – guidelines that apply to our own Parramatta diocesan Catholic schools – and your responsibilities as a parent or carer.

Please take the time to read this important information and also to consider why schooling is compulsory... so children can be active and successful learners now and in the future.



Greg Whitby
Executive Director of Schools



NSW school attendance

In NSW school attendance is compulsory for children over the age of six years until the minimum school leaving age of 17 years. Students must complete Year 10 and after Year 10 (until they turn 17 years of age) students must be:

- in school or registered for home schooling, or
- in approved education or training (e.g. TAFE, traineeship, apprenticeship)
- in full-time, paid employment (average 25 hours per week) or in a combination of work, education and/or training

What if my child has to be away from school?

If your child has to be absent from school, you must tell the school and provide a reason for your child's absence. To explain an absence parents and carers may:

- send a note or email the school
- telephone the school, or
- visit the school

Your school will inform you of the required procedures for notifying them.

A small number of absences may be justified if your child:

- has to attend a special religious ceremony
- is required to attend to a serious and/or urgent family situation (e.g. a funeral)
- is too sick to go to school or has an infectious illness

Children need to arrive on school and class on time. Lateness to school or leaving early from school must be recorded as a partial absence. Your school will inform you of the required procedures for late arrivals and early departures from school.

Application for exemption

If you consider that it is in your child's best interests to be exempted from the legal requirement to attend school for any length of time, you must apply to the principal for an exemption. The school will provide an Application for Exemption from Attendance at School form, and assist you to complete it, if necessary. The principal will consider your application and decide whether to grant a Certificate of Exemption from Attendance at School.

Responsibilities of the school principal

Principals help to ensure the safety, welfare and wellbeing of your child. They must also keep accurate records of student attendance. Principals are able to question requests for a child to be absent from school and are also responsible for deciding if the reason given for an absence is justified. Principals may request medical certificates or other documentation for long or frequent absences explained as being due to illness.

When absences are unexplained by parents, or explanations are not accepted by the principal, the school will work with parents to identify the reasons for non-attendance and put in place strategies so the child can return to school. Principals may ask support staff or other agencies to assist.

What if my child continues to have unsatisfactory attendance?

It is important to understand that the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), on behalf of the State Minister for Education, may take further action in cases where children of compulsory school age have recurring numbers of unexplained or unacceptable absences from school. The following actions may be taken in these cases:

Attendance meetings

Parents, and sometimes their child, can be asked to attend a meeting with school and Catholic Education Office personnel and in some cases, DEC regional officers. The aim of the meeting is to help identify strategies to support the child and family and remove barriers to non-attendance. Other agencies may also be invited, if parents agree.