

## INTRODUCTION

All staff members of Bairnsdale Secondary College are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of children. Our College Values of Respect, Resilience and Responsibility provide a strong foundation for this policy:

## AIM

The purpose of this policy is to:

- ensure all children of compulsory school age are enrolled in a registered school and attend school every day the school is open for instruction
- ensure students, staff and parents/carers have a shared understanding of the importance of attending school
- explain to school staff and parents the key practices and procedures Bairnsdale Secondary College has in place to:
  - support, monitor and maintain student attendance
  - record, monitor and follow up student absences.

Recording and monitoring attendance and absences is important for schools to meet the duty of care owed to students, as well as the requirements of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

## SCOPE

This policy applies to all students at Bairnsdale Secondary College. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Department of Education and Training's School Attendance Guidelines. It does not replace or change the obligations of Bairnsdale Secondary College, parents and School Attendance Officers under legislation or the School Attendance Guidelines.

## DEFINITIONS

*Parent*: includes a parent, guardian, carer and every person who has parental responsibility for the child, including parental responsibility under the *Family Law Act 1975* and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

## POLICY

### School Profile

Bairnsdale Secondary College is sited on Gunai Kurnai land and has approximately 1200 students enrolled, drawing on local communities. Over 60% of these students travel to school by bus.

The College's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage is below the average school in Australia.

10% of the school population is Koorie.

There are 3 Learning Hubs at the College, which are named in the Gunai Kurnai language, symbolising students' journeys through the College:

- Year 7 - Wargomerrin (morning)
- Year 8/9 - Wurrin (day)
- Year 10/11/12 - Malgobila (night)

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Each Hub is supported by an assistant principal, leading teachers, coordinators, education support staff, learning support assistants and the Student Wellbeing Team. The Malgobila Hub also integrates VCE VM staff and a careers counsellor. This structure enables a holistic approach to the needs of individual students, encompassing our school values and emphasising the strong link between attendance at school to educational outcomes and student wellbeing.

BSC also has a satellite site providing an alternative VCE VM study centre (Ngooloo) for regional youth disengaged from mainstream education and potentially at risk.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Schooling is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 to 17 years, unless an exemption from attendance or enrolment has been granted.

Daily attendance is important for all children and young people to succeed in education and to ensure they do not fall behind both socially and developmentally. School participation maximises life opportunities for children and young people by providing them with education and support networks. School helps people to develop important skills, knowledge and values that set them up for further learning and participation in their community.

Students are expected to attend Bairnsdale Secondary College during normal school hours every day of each term unless:

- there is an approved exemption from school attendance for the student
- the student has a dual enrolment with another school and has only a partial enrolment in Bairnsdale Secondary College, or
- the student is registered for home schooling and has only a partial enrolment in Bairnsdale Secondary College for particular activities.

Both schools and parents have an important role to play in supporting students to attend school every day. Bairnsdale Secondary College believes all students should attend school all day, every day when the school is open for instruction and is committed to working with its school community to encourage and support full school attendance.

Our school will identify individual students or cohorts who are vulnerable and whose attendance is at risk and/or declining and will work with these students and their parents to improve their attendance through a range of interventions and supports.

Students are committed to attending school every day, arriving on time and are prepared to learn. Our students are encouraged approach a teacher and seek assistance if there are any issues that are affecting their attendance.

Bairnsdale Secondary College parents are committed to ensuring their child/children attend school on time every day when instruction is offered, to communicating openly with the school and providing valid explanations for any absence.

Parents will communicate with the relevant staff at Bairnsdale Secondary College about any issues affecting their child's attendance and work in partnership with the school to address any concerns.

Parents will provide a reasonable explanation for their child's absence from school and endeavour to schedule family holidays, appointments and other activities outside of school hours.

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## Supporting and promoting attendance

Bairnsdale Secondary School's *Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy* supports student attendance. Our school also promotes student attendance by:

- providing a breakfast club
- having Girls at the Centre and Clontarf programs to support engagement of Aboriginal students
- openly discussing the importance of attendance at school for all students and visibly rewarding students with high attendance
- having extensive wellbeing supports for vulnerable students and those at risk of chronic absence
- offering an alternative VCAL program at a separate campus for at risk students.

## VCE Attendance

All VCE units involve minimum requirements for scheduled classroom instruction. A student needs to attend sufficient class time to meet the learning outcomes of each unit and to have their work authenticated as their own.

If a student's VCE attendance is below 90%, the VCE Attendance Review Panel will convene to determine if the student has met the learning outcomes and if work can be authenticated as their own. Each student's individual circumstances will be considered by the panel.

If a student cannot demonstrate the learning outcomes and/or work cannot be authenticated, the panel will assign an N for the Outcome.

## Recording attendance

Bairnsdale Secondary College must record attendance in every class. This is necessary to:

- meet legislative requirements
- discharge Bairnsdale Secondary College's duty of care for all students
- meet Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority requirements for VCE students.

Attendance will be recorded by the classroom teacher at the start of each lesson using Compass (and if unable to do so by making other arrangements). If students are in attendance at a school approved activity, the teacher in charge of the activity will record them as being present.

## Recording absences

For absences where there is no exemption in place, a parent must provide an explanation on each occasion to the school. Parents should notify the College of absences by:

- adding the attendance record directly into Compass
- phoning the Administration Office
- providing a written notice to the appropriate Learning Hub (if absence is known in advance).

If a student is absent on a particular day and the school has not been previously notified by a parent, or the absence is otherwise unexplained, BSC will notify parents by SMS message. The College will attempt to contact parents as soon as practicable on the same day of the unexplained absence, allowing time for the parent to respond. Parents should respond to the SMS absence message from the College as soon as possible. If contact cannot be made with the parent, or the College receives no response, the College will attempt to make contact with any emergency contact/s nominated on the student's file held by the school on the day of the unexplained absence.

Bairnsdale Secondary College will keep a record of the reason given for each absence. The Principal will determine if the explanation provided is a reasonable excuse for the purposes of the parent meeting their responsibilities under *the Education Training Reform Act 2006* and the School Attendance Guidelines.

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If Bairnsdale Secondary College considers that the parent has provided a **reasonable excuse** for their child's absence the absence will be marked as '**excused absence**'. If the school determines that no reasonable excuse has been provided, the absence will be marked as '**unexcused absence**'.

The Principal has the discretion to accept a reason given by a parent for a student's absence. The Principal will generally excuse:

- medical and dental appointments, where out of hours appointments are not possible or appropriate
- bereavement or attendance at the funeral of a relative or friend of the student, including a student required to attend Sorry Business
- school refusal, if a plan is in place with the parent to address causes and support the student's return to school
- cultural observance if the parent/carer notifies the school in advance
- family holidays where the parent notifies the school in advance.

If no explanation is provided by the parent within 10 school days of an absence, it will be recorded as an 'unexplained absence' and recorded on the student's file.

Parents will be notified if an absence has not been excused.

### **Managing non-attendance and supporting student engagement**

Where absences are of concern due to their nature or frequency, or where a student has been absent for more than five days, Bairnsdale Secondary College will work collaboratively with parents, the student, and other professionals, where appropriate, to develop strategies to improve attendance, including:

- establishing a Student Support Group (SSG)
- implementing a Reengagement Plan or Return to School Plan
- arranging for assistance from relevant school staff, external agencies and/or departmental Student Support Services staff
- implementing an Individual Education Plan.

We understand from time to time that some students will need additional supports and assistance, and in collaboration with the student and their family, will endeavour to provide this support when it is required.

### **Referral to School Attendance Officer**

If Bairnsdale Secondary College decides that it has exhausted strategies for addressing a student's unsatisfactory attendance, we may, in accordance with the School Attendance Guidelines refer the non-attendance to a School Attendance Officer in the SEVR Regional Office for further action.

If, from multiple attempts to contact with a parent, it becomes apparent that a student will not be returning to the school, the Principal may make a referral to a School Attendance Officer if:

- the student has been absent from school on at least five full days in the previous 12 months where:
  - the parent has not provided a reasonable excuse for these absences; and
  - measures to improve the student's attendance have been undertaken and have been unsuccessful.
- the student's whereabouts are unknown and:
  - the student has been absent for 10 consecutive school days; or
  - no alternative education destination can be found for the student.

## **RELATED DOCUMENTS / KEY REFERENCES**

- BSC Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- DET School Attendance Guidelines
- School Policy and Advisory Guide: Attendance
- Education Training Reform Act 2006

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