

# Attendance and Exemption Policy



Updated June 2024

## Policy Statement

The Executive Principal of Hunter Christian School, in accordance with Section 24 of the NSW Education Act 1990, is responsible to maintain an attendance register, in a form approved by the Minister, of the enrolments and daily attendances of all children at the school, which includes information for students as required by Section B7 of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) *Registered and Accredited Individual Non-government Schools (NSW) Manual*.

All students who are enrolled at Hunter Christian School, regardless of their age, are expected to attend school whenever instruction is provided. Student absence and variation to attendance will be recorded using the Minister's codes.

Hunter Christian School will monitor student attendance data and implement intervention strategies to improve the unsatisfactory attendance of students.

Where the parents of a student of compulsory school age seeks an exemption from attendance at school or an exemption from enrolment, the Executive Principal will process the parent's application in accordance with the guidelines from NSW Department of Education.

The Executive Principal may exercise the Minister's delegation under Section 25 of the NSW *Education Act* 1990 in relation to granting and cancelling a certificate of exemption from being enrolled and attending school in certain prescribed circumstances.

## Responsibilities and Authorities

### *Parent's Responsibility*

In accordance with Sections 22 and 23 of the NSW Education Act 1990, it is the duty of the parent of a child of compulsory school age, above the age of 6 years and below the minimum school leaving age of 17 years, to:

- be enrolled at and to attend, a government school or a registered non-government school, or be registered for home schooling with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and to receive instruction in accordance with the conditions to which the registration is subject.
- explain the absences of their child/ren from school promptly and within seven days to the school. An explanation for absence must be provided to the school within 7 days of the first day of any period of absence or the student's absence will be recorded as 'unjustified'.

## ***Executive Principal's Responsibility***

in accordance with Section 24 of the *NSW Education Act 1990*, the Executive Principal (or delegate) is responsible for maintaining an attendance register, in a form approved by the Minister and to:

- provide clear information to students and parents regarding attendance requirements and the consequences of unsatisfactory attendance;
- promote regular student attendance to assist students to maximise their potential;
- ensure the school has effective measures in place to monitor and follow up student absences;
- undertake all reasonable measures to contact parents promptly and within two school days of an absence being unexplained, if contact has not already been made. An absence is unexplained if parents have failed to provide an explanation to the school within 7 days;
- ensure that attendance records are maintained in an approved format and are an accurate record of the attendance of students;
- ensure that for students with attendance concerns, the learning and support needs of those students are addressed in consultation with parents;
- be responsible for ensuring that when frequent absences are explained as being due to illness that:
  - consultation occurs with parents regarding the healthcare needs of the student;
  - medical certificates are sought for the absences (if applicable);
  - where there are ongoing concerns, approval is sought from parents to contact the student's doctor so the school has all relevant information regarding the student's healthcare needs (if applicable);
  - strategies are developed to ensure regular attendance at school.
- ensure that school staff are provided with information on attendance requirements and their obligation to monitor and promote regular attendance at school;
- ensure that any matter relating to school attendance where safety, welfare or wellbeing concerns arise for a student are reported to the relevant authorities;
- monitor the regular attendance of students and develop and implement strategies to support students with identified attendance issues (with support from relevant staff);
- approve the participation of a student in an alternative school-based program, leading to full-time attendance, prior to part-day exemption from attendance at school being granted.

## ***Executive Principal's Authority***

in accordance with the *NSW Education Act 1990*, the Executive Principal has been delegated, by the Minister, the authority to:

- grant sick leave to students whose absences are satisfactorily explained as being due to illness;
- accept other explanations for absence and record the absence as 'L';
- decline to accept an explanation for absence and record the absence as 'unjustified';
- grant an exemption from school attendance for periods totalling up to 100 days in a 12-month period for any one student provided certain conditions are met;
- grant part-day exemptions from school for periods totalling up to 100 days in a 12-month period;

- grant exemption from enrolment for students who have completed Year 10 and have the required approval to be in paid work (15+ years) and/or training on a full-time basis (average 25 hrs/week over 4 weeks);
- grant exemption from enrolment for students who have completed Year 10 and have the required approval to complete their education in special circumstances through an apprenticeship or traineeship;

## Procedures

### ***Roll Marking***

Hunter Christian School's rolls are marked using the exception method, students are present at school unless there is an official code to show that there has been either a variation in attendance or the reason for the student's absence.

Primary and Secondary class rolls are marked electronically by the class/homeroom teacher at the start of each school day and stored via the school management system as Hunter Christian School's official school attendance. Each teacher has a unique teacher sign-in username and password. Teachers are only required to indicate if a student is present or absent at the time of marking the roll.

Primary and Secondary teachers are expected to record attendance for each class or session of the day. Staff are asked to flag immediately with senior leadership and/or delegate if a student fails to attend class as expected; a follow-up process is activated.

In the event that a casual teacher is required to mark the roll, a loan device will be issued to the casual teacher to mark the roll. Casual teachers are only required to indicate if a student is present or absent at the time of marking the roll.

If no loan device is available, the casual teacher will be issued a paper roll and is required to indicate which students are absent and sign and date the roll. These paper rolls are then submitted to the Family Engagement Team for processing in the School Management System.

In the event of a natural disaster, major weather event, staff development day or other reason resulting in school closure, as there is no tuition provided for the students, the Family Engagement Team will note the school closure and the reason via the school management system in accordance with the Minister's codes. The Family Engagement Team will not count these days for reporting purposes as absences.

Once the official roll has been recorded for the day, a notification will be sent to the parents of students absent from school without explanation via SMS through the school management system.

### ***Late Arrivals***

Any students arriving late for school (i.e. any time after the morning roll has been marked) will be required to sign in (using the school management system) at the front office. The school management system will record a partial absence.

The family engagement team will regularly review each student's attendance records to identify any concerning patterns of behaviour including if a student is consistently late to school. The family engagement team will notify the Head of School and/or delegate of any student patterns that may be a cause for concern. The Head of School and/or delegate will liaise with the family regarding attendance if deemed appropriate.

### ***Early Departures***

Any students who leave school before the designated end of the day will be required to have a parent or guardian sign them out and indicate their reason for the early departure. Early departing students will be required to sign out (via the school management system) at the front office and a partial absence will be recorded on the school management system.

### ***Absence Notes***

Students who are absent from school are required to supply an explanation for their absence within 7 days from their parent or guardian via one of the following acceptable methods:

- a written or typed note explaining the absence,
- a medical certificate,
- information provided by the parent through the parent app/parent portal via the school management system,
- a logged telephone call to the Family Engagement Team,
- an SMS message, in response to our school management system.

All absence explanations are submitted to the Family Engagement Team for processing on the school management system and must contain the student's name, the date of the absence, the reason, and the date that the explanation was provided.

Requests for explanations for unexplained absences are regularly sent by the Family Engagement Team to parents via the school management system.

If a reason for an absence has not been provided to the school within 7 days of the date of the absence or has not been accepted by the Executive Principal, the Family Engagement Team will record the absence as unexplained or unjustified in accordance with the Minister's codes. The Family Engagement Team will endeavour to follow up the reason for the absence with the parents even when the absence is recorded as unexplained.

Where a student has been absent regularly due to illness, the Family Engagement Team will refer the matter to the school leadership and/or delegate who may request that the parent supply a medical certificate or contact the treating medical practitioner to discuss the child's healthcare plan and establish support for the child's educational progress.

## ***Register of Attendance***

In accordance with Hunter Christian School's requirements, the Family Engagement Team use the school management system to monitor and record the attendance and full or partial absence of every student enrolled at the school. For partial absences, the Family Engagement Team will record the time the student arrived or left the school via the school management system. An absence will be recorded for any student who is not present on the school premises.

An attendance register code will be used to identify explanations of student absences or variations in attendance using the Minister's codes. The school management system is maintained and backed up according to school policy requirements.

The Executive Principal has the discretion to:

- determine the Minister's code that will be recorded in the attendance register
- accept or reject a reason for student absence,
- request documentation for requirements to substantiate an absence or to further substantiate an absence.

The register of daily attendance will be retained for a period of no less than seven (7) years after the last entry was made.

## ***Absence Recording***

School reports indicate the number of absences for each student each semester.

## ***Strategies to Improve Attendance***

Strategies to improve attendance for students with or without attendance concerns may include:

- Implementation of whole school strategies to improve attendance by promoting high expectations for attendance through various forums e.g. school assemblies, school website, etc.
- Creating a welcoming, engaging and safe environment for students.
- Fostering positive relationships with students and parents.
- Promoting Hunter Christian School's RISE (Respect, Inclusion, Safety, Excellence) program.
- Referral to the Heads of School to identify and implement formal strategies for attendance improvement planning when a student's attendance is of concern and a student attendance plan is required.
- Referral to the Wellbeing team and/or Heads of School to identify and implement interventions and regular monitoring of student attendance and the use of whole school strategies to address and support the needs of all students.
- Referral to the Wellbeing team and/or Heads of School to identify and implement responsible strategies that provide interventions and regular monitoring of individual students of concern to address and support improvement in their attendance, engagement in school and learning.
- Communicating regularly with parents to keep them informed of the student's progress at school.
- Referral to the school counsellor with the student and parent for the development of an attendance improvement plan and/or a meeting with the Heads of School and/or

Director of Studies (for Secondary) to develop a plan to catch up on missed learning (often a significant barrier to students feeling able to return to school).

- Requesting to work collaboratively with other government or non-government agencies and seek advice about culturally appropriate responses from relevant services.
- Identifying if other agencies are involved with the family and consult with them when a student's attendance is of concern and where it is determined that the issues impacting attendance are outside of the role of the school to address in isolation.
- Arranging family case discussions attended by school representatives for students whose attendance is a concern. Meetings and interviews at the school may also involve representatives from support agencies. E.g., the Association of Independent Schools, the Police Liaison Officer or the Department of Community Services and Justice.

### **Exemption from Attendance at School**

The Executive Principal can on reasonable grounds, following the online application from a parent/guardian, grant and cancel a certificate of exemption from being enrolled and attending school for periods totalling up to 100 days in a twelve month period.

The Executive Principal may grant or cancel a certificate of exemption from being enrolled and attending school for an indefinite period for students who have completed Year 9 of Secondary education and who have been approved to undertake full-time apprenticeship or traineeship.

Procedural fairness must be shown to an applicant for an exemption. The Executive Principal will write to the parent if the child's exemption has been refused and provide an opportunity for the parent to respond to outlined concerns.

The Executive Principal will complete the appropriate Certificate of Exemption, depending on the reasons and provide a copy to the parents with a copy uploaded to the student's file on the school management system.

Certificates of Exemption from the compulsory schooling requirements of the Education Act (1990) must only be granted by the Executive Principal when it has been clearly demonstrated by the applicant that an exemption is in the student's best interests in the short and long term and that alternatives to exemption have been considered.

### **Applications for Extended Leave (travel or holiday)**

Family holidays and travel are no longer considered as an Exemption from School. Travel outside of vacation period is now counted as an absence for statistical Purposes and must be approved by the Executive Principal.

Parents can apply for an exemption from attendance for leave – travel for their child/ren using the online form via the school management system. All decisions are final and at the discretion of the Executive Principal. A Certificate of Extended Leave – Travel will be provided as evidence of approval.

A Certificate of Extended Leave – Travel will not be issued where the Executive Principal is aware that the student has been the subject of contact with the Department of Family and Community Services and for whom unresolved issues concerning a risk of harm remain.

The Executive Principal will not accept a reason for travel during school term if it is not in the best interests of the student. Where the Executive Principal considers that the travel is appropriate during school term and the application is approved, the absences will be recorded as leave.

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Other Policy & Legislation Relationships	Enrolment Policy Staff Handbook Annual School Report NSW Education Act (1990) Safe & Supportive Environment – Student Welfare (requirement 3.6.2) Registered and Accredited Individual Non-Government Schools (NSW) Manual (2021) Disability Discrimination Act (1992) Sex Discrimination Act (1984) Racial Discrimination Act (1975) Anti-Discrimination Act (1991)
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Review Date	June 2025

## Appendix 1.

### School Attendance Register Codes

Code	
<b>a</b>	<b>The student was absent for the whole day</b> - Used as a placeholder until the official reason for the absence is provided by the parent or carer.
<b>A</b>	<b>Unexplained or Unjustified</b> - Used when an explanation for an absence has not been provided to the school by a parent or carer within 7 school days, or when the explanation that has been provided is not accepted by the school.
<b>S</b>	<b>Sick/Medical Appointment</b> - The student has been absent from school because they were sick or had a medical reason such as a specialist appointment, a dental, mental health or other allied health professional appointment. Also used to provide an explanation for a part day absence, e.g. when a student leaves early because they have fallen ill during a school day.
<b>L</b>	<b>Leave</b> - Used to explain a misadventure or unexpected event, participation in special events not related to the school, domestic necessity such as serious illness of an immediate family member, attendance at funerals, recognised religious festivals or ceremonial occasions. It also is used when a family applies to the school to travel during the school term and is granted approval prior to departure. When the application is declined, but the family still travels, the A code would be appropriate.
<b>E</b>	<b>Suspended from School</b> - This code is used when a student is asked to stay away from school for disciplinary reasons. It is not used when a student is on an 'in school' suspension, as the student is present at the school.
<b>M</b>	<b>Exempted</b> - This code is used when an application for exemption from attendance has been approved by the Executive Principal of the school. Approval must be given prior to the proposed period of exemption and cannot be granted retrospectively.
<b>F</b>	<b>Flexible Timetable</b> - The student is not present at school because they are not required to be there. Most commonly used when a student is completing a Pathways progression to the HSC, or when an examination schedule has started, it can also be used when children are starting school and assessments might be taking place over a number of days.
<b>B</b>	<b>School Business</b> - The student is away from school representing the school at an organised event such as a sporting activity or debating competition; or attending an excursion.
<b>H</b>	<b>Hospital Schools</b> - This code is not commonly used in the independent sector, except when a student is attending school in another setting because they have no choice, such as in a hospital school. The temporary school would be expected to provide attendance information to the student's main school.
<b>P</b>	<b>Part Day</b> - The 'P' code shows that the student was absent for a part of the day, either late for school, left early in the day or was absent for a portion of the middle of the day. It is important that this is accompanied by a reason code and the time that the student arrived or left the school.
<b>X</b>	<b>First and Last Day</b> - This is used to show the first day and the last day of the school term that the student attended.



## Appendix 2.

### School Attendance Improvement Plan

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

#### Strategies:

Barrier	Family/Student Responsibilities	School Responsibilities	Intended Outcomes

#### Agreement:

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Principal                      Parent/Carer 1                      Parent/Carer 2                      Student

Review Date: ___ / ___ / ___ Plan is to be extended: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Recommendations: Executive Principal signature: _____ Date: ___ / ___ / ___	Parent/Carer has meaningfully engaged with the plan: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Student has meaningfully engaged with the plan: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
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