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1. Introduction

The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ’s teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal for all members of the Catholic school community.

‘I have come that you may have life and have it to the full’. (John 10:10)

Pastoral Care Policy in Catholic School Communities: A Vision 2008. South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools

1.1 We believe regular attendance and punctuality at school provides our students with maximum opportunity to develop skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to be successful in their learning at Marymount College and beyond. The findings of international research demonstrate a strong correlation between student learning, longer-term life outcomes and attendance and punctuality at school.

1.2 Absenteeism is the non-attendance of a student in schooling. It may be due to a range of factors, which can be complex and specific to individual students and family situations.

1.3 Students with poor patterns of attendance are at risk of not achieving their full potential and are disadvantaged in the choices they are able to make later in life.

1.4 In order to be effective, an attendance policy and procedures must be part of a comprehensive plan to create and maintain student- centred, achievement focused learning communities. Student attendance is really only an outcome, as factors affecting attendance are what need to be considered and addressed.

We believe a partnership between the school and parents and carers is a significant element in the attendance and punctuality of our students.
2. **Guiding Principles**

2.1 **Hospitality**

In practice a commitment to hospitality means that:

2.1.1 The individuality of students is valued, but students should realise that their attendance at school affects their learning.

2.1.2 The Attendance Policy exists to ensure that students and staff feel safe in the expression of their ideas, beliefs and values.

2.1.3 The Attendance Policy aims to develop in students an understanding that attendance is linked to personal responsibility, personal choice and self-discipline.

2.1.4 Marymount builds a sense of connectedness and belonging for students with their community.

2.2 **Stewardship**

In practice a commitment to stewardship means that:

2.2.1 The Attendance Policy recognises that all students have gifts and talents that must be nurtured through a caring and consistent approach that grows from the fundamental importance of attendance at school.

2.2.2 The Attendance Policy recognises that by law students are required to attend school between the ages of 6-16 in South Australia.

2.2.3 The Attendance Policy is underpinned by the belief that the College and parents and carers are in a collaborative partnership to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for all students.

2.2.4 The Attendance Policy in line with the Personal Responsibility Policy recognises that students are co-responsible for their attendance.

2.2.5 The Attendance Policy is based on an understanding of individual circumstances and responses to non-attendance are made appropriately and professionally.

2.3 **Compassion and Reconciliation**

In practice a commitment to compassion and reconciliation means that:

2.3.1 Forgiveness and reconciliation are important elements of the Attendance Policy.

2.3.2 The Attendance Policy is underpinned by the belief that parents and carers support consistent and punctual attendance at the College.
3. **Policy Statement**

3.1 **Attendance and participation expectation**

3.1.1 The Education Act 1972 provides for compulsory attendance of any child required to be enrolled at the school for which she or he has been enrolled on every day, and for such parts of every day, as instruction is provided at the school for the child (subsection 76(1)) between the ages of 6 and 16 years. The Compulsory Education Legislation, implemented at the beginning of 2009, requires all young people between the ages of 16 and 17 to participate in a fulltime approved learning program.

3.1.2 A condition of that enrolment is that a student is required to fully participate in the education program arranged and approved by the enrolling school. Such participation is to include engagement and attendance as required by the program. Under the Education Act of South Australia, parents and carers are responsible for the regular attendance of all children in their care between the ages of 6 and 16 years. (Education Act of South Australia, part VI Section 74-81). They are legally required to ensure their children attend school and penalties may apply when children are absent without a valid reason.

3.1.3 In keeping with current legislation, it is the policy of Marymount College that any student enrolled must attend every school day, unless the school receives a valid reason for absence.

3.2 **Importance of regular attendance and intervention**

3.2.1 The likelihood of success in learning is strongly linked to regular attendance and appropriate participation in educational programs. Habits of regular attendance at school are critical as students with poor patterns of attendance are at risk of not achieving their educational, social or emotional potential. (refer Appendix A)

3.2.2 Intervention for students at risk of developing irregular patterns of attendance is crucial so patterns can be reversed. School attendance needs to be seen as part of the student’s whole life, and we recognise there are instances whereby school may be just one of the priorities for a student and significant factors in the ranking of these priorities may lie outside a school’s sphere of influence. Therefore in these instances, it is imperative to develop strategies in collaboration with the student, families and community to address any issues. At Marymount we build links with community and service providers so that we can work together with families where needed. Sharing common understandings will help all stakeholders support each other’s efforts.

3.2.3 As a school we also recognise the importance of relationships and connectedness to others in the school community. Building a supportive school culture, establishing mutually respectful teacher-student relationships, providing opportunities for cooperative learning and providing avenues for student participation, are ways in which we seek to build a sense of connectedness and belonging for students with the community.

3.2.4 At Marymount College we use a range of strategies to support student attendance, punctuality and engagement, including:

- case management for students at risk
- learning approaches that recognise and build on students’ strengths and areas of interests
- programs and structures to promote student wellbeing and good mental health
- early intervention responses to students at risk of disengagement
pastoral care for families and students
school counsellor and chaplain available to work with and meet with students and families
skill development in students to build resilience to buffer against stresses that could lead to non-attendance.

3.2.5 There will be times when parents and carers request their daughter be absent from school for reasons other than illness. This may include an extended family holiday. If families are undertaking these, they need to write to the school Principal to request this leave if it is occurring during the school term. However, we ask families to try to avoid taking holidays during the school term as this can be disruptive to their daughter’s learning.

3.2.6 As with many aspects of school life we ask for a reasonable balance in looking at the question of attendance and punctuality. There may be occasions when students will arrive at school late but when lack of punctuality is habitual this creates disruption for the students and impacts on the teacher’s capacity to engage the student in their learning. In these circumstances, it is necessary the school contacts and works with the student and family. (refer Appendix B)
4. Responsibilities

4.1 Parent and Carer Responsibilities

4.1.1 In working with parents and carers, we focus on building a collaborative home and school partnership. This enables us to work with parents and carers in a number of areas. It may include emphasising the value and importance of education and the discussion and provision of information about the legal, social, and educational implications of non-attendance. We work with parents to highlight the priority given to regular school attendance by providing them with information such as school expectations regarding attendance, how much school their daughter may in fact be missing, representing lateness and absences on reports and having the expectation that parents and carers are to explain a girl’s absences.

4.1.2 Parents and carers are responsible for ensuring their daughter attends school unless a valid reason exists to prevent attendance.

4.2 Student Responsibilities

4.2.1 All students have a responsibility to the College in regards to late arrival and attendance. Students need to ensure they:

4.2.2 Arrive at school and be in their Base Group classroom ready to start by 8.35 am.

4.2.3 If a late arrival occurs between 8:35 am and 9:00 am, students need to present directly to their classroom, to check whether absences have been completed. In the event that they have, students need to report to the front office then to advise school staff of their arrival at school.

4.2.4 Failure to present to the front office when arriving after 8:50 am will mean the student is recorded as absent and their parent or carer will be notified of her absence by SMS.

4.3 School Responsibilities

4.3.1 Marymount College has the responsibility to fulfil its legal and moral obligation to monitor and record attendance and punctuality and take appropriate action to rectify problems of attendance. The following procedures exist at Marymount:

Upon completion of recording absences each day, the Base Group teacher will send the absentee details to the front office between 8:50a.m. and 9:00 am.

4.3.2 Absentee lists for all students will be sent by email from front office staff to school staff by 11:00 am. An SMS text will be sent by the school between 10 am- 10.30am to parents and carers of students who are absent on each day and for whom a reason has not being provided.

4.3.3 Base Group teachers, in conjunction with the Year Level Leaders of Student Learning and Wellbeing will monitor and be aware of patterns of absenteeism and punctuality and follow up by making contact with parents and carers.

4.3.4 Subject teachers will notify the Year Level Leader of Student and Learning and Wellbeing if a student is at school but has not attended the lesson.

4.3.5 In cases of persistent absenteeism and/or lateness to school, the school counsellor and Deputy Principal will provide support to staff in working with students and families to address this.
4.3.6 The Principal and Deputy Principal will be informed by the Base Group teacher or relevant Leader of Student Learning and Wellbeing if a reason for ongoing non-attendance is not given (unexplained absence) or if a student is absent for more than 5 days in a term irrespective of the reason. In these circumstances, the student’s absenteeism will be discussed and follow-up by the school will occur with the student and family.

4.3.7 In cases of persistent absenteeism and lateness to school, the Deputy Principal or Principal will also meet with the student and family or carer to discuss the situation and determine appropriate actions and pathways for referral as appropriate. If the situation does not improve after interventions, or the family are not willing to meet with school staff, then a referral by the school to the Attendance Counsellor will occur.
5. **Implementation Procedures**

Attendance and punctuality is monitored daily and recorded systematically (including non-attendance due to illness or other reasons) by Base Group teachers and front office staff.

5.1 Students must arrive at school by 8.30 am and be in their Base Group classroom by 8.35 am.

5.2 Students cannot be supervised in the morning before 8.00 am. Students who arrive at school between 8.00 am and 8.20 am must report to the Resource Centre.

5.3 Students must be picked up and/or leave the school grounds by 3.30pm. Students who are unable to be picked up by this time will be supervised in the Resource Centre until 4.00 pm.

5.4 Parents and carers must contact the school before 9.00 am to record a girl’s non-attendance on that day. The absentee line is 8179 4444.

5.5 Parents and carers must provide the school with an appropriate explanation for a girl’s non-attendance. This can be via a phone call, note in the diary or SMS text. This explanation must be provided during the first 24 hours of the student’s absence from school. In the event of absences due to medical reasons that are more than 3 days, parents and carers must provide a doctor’s certificate to the school upon her return.

5.6 If a student arrives unusually late to the front office to check in at school (from 9:00 am onwards), they must have a signed note from their parent or carer explaining the reason for the lateness.

5.7 In the event a student arrives after 9:00 am without a note, then a phone call or SMS message will be made by school staff in an attempt to clarify a girl’s non-attendance.

6. **Conclusion**

Regular attendance and punctuality at school is a significant and important element in the success of students. Everyone connected with the school has a responsibility for ensuring regular attendance of students. Marymount College will work with our school community to promote the importance of regular attendance so that it is valued and understood by all. It is anticipated that an increased level of understanding will be reflected in improved attendance rates.

7. **References**

Attendance Policy – Attendance Improvement Package – Department of Education and Children’s Services 2009

8. Appendixes

Appendix A

Students with poor patterns of attendance may:

- be socially isolated
- place themselves at risk of harm during times of absence
- be more likely to be involved in socially unacceptable and/or illegal activities
- have gaps in their knowledge and understanding of basic concepts
- feel insecure in the school environment
- be more likely to leave school early
- be over-represented in the juvenile justice system
- be the victims of bullying and harassment.

Intervention for students at risk of developing irregular patterns of attendance is crucial so these patterns can be reversed. Indicators for students at risk of developing these patterns may include the following:

- frequent lateness
- leaving school early
- missing lessons
- being the victim of bullying and harassment
- learning difficulties
- many days absent, either through illness, unexplained reasons or family commitments
- unresolved issues with school personnel (staff or students)
- social or emotional issues
- difficulties at times of transition
- health issues experienced by the student and/or family members.
Appendix B

Acceptable reasons for student non-attendance include:

- sickness
- danger of being affected by an infectious or contagious disease
- supporting a sick family member
- temporary or permanent infirmity
- unavoidable and sufficient cause, e.g.
  - bereavement within the family or of a close friend; or
  - family trauma
- attending a school organised activity, e.g. excursion, camp, sporting or cultural event.

Unacceptable reasons for non-attendance are:

- truancy.
- shopping expeditions with or without a parent or carer
- helping out with jobs at home or at parent or carers place of work
- appointments which could be made out of school hours
- excessive time for appointments which are avoidable.

Examples of acceptable reasons for lateness include:

- accident on the way to school
- transport breakdown on the way to school
- public transport lateness
- other unavoidable and sufficient reasons.

Examples of unacceptable reasons for lateness include:

- truancy
- sleeping in
- just late
- hair cut
- shopping
- appointments which could have been made out of school hours
- other avoidable and insufficient reasons.