INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Student Absences from School

This leaflet contains information for parents/caregivers about the requirements and processes involved when a student is absent from Hunter River Community School.

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June 2014
All children have a right to an education. Only by regular school attendance can children make the most of educational opportunities, leading to greater social and economic outcomes.

Schools play a vital role in the social and emotional development of children. Regular attendance enables students to develop a sense of belonging to a peer group and assists in building important coping and friendship skills. Confident children are less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour.

If students miss out on the basic skills in the early years of school, they may experience learning problems in later years. Ultimately, unsatisfactory attendance at school may affect the awarding of the School Certificate.

Schools, in partnership with parents, are responsible for promoting the regular attendance of their children, school staff, as a part of their duty of care, monitor part or whole day absences. Parents and schools have specific responsibilities concerning children’s attendance at school.

Responsibilities of the principal

Principals are legally responsible for maintaining accurate records of student attendance. When reasons for absences are provided to the school by parents, principals are accountable for their decision to record a student’s absence as justified. Principals may decline to accept as satisfactory an explanation for an absence and will record that absence as unjustified.

Principals may request medical certificates or other documentation when absences explained as being due to illness are frequent or prolonged.

Responsibilities of parents

The Education Act 1990 requires that parents (including carers) ensure that children of compulsory school age are enrolled at and regularly attend school, or are registered with the Office of the Board of Studies NSW for home schooling. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training may take legal action against parents and carers who do not send their children to school without a valid reason.

What is a justified reason for being absent from school?

Justified reasons for absences may include the student:

- having an unavoidable medical or dental appointment (preferably, these should be made after school or during holidays)
- being required to attend a recognised religious holiday
- being required to attend an exceptional or urgent family circumstance (such as attending a funeral)
- being sick, or having an infectious disease.
Head lice infestations can be a common occurrence, particularly in primary schools. Parents should check their child's hair regularly for head lice and undertake treatment where eggs or lice are identified. Information on how schools can support parents to manage and prevent the spread of head lice can be accessed from the student health section of the Department's website at http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studenthealth/conditions/headlice/index.php. Advice from NSW Health indicates that there is no need for students to be sent home or excluded from school because of head lice. Having head lice is not a justified reason for prolonged absences from school.

Absences for reasons such as some of the following may not be justified:
- Shopping
- Sleeping in
- Working around the house
- Minding younger siblings and other children
- Minor family events such as birthdays
- Hair cuts.

It is important to realise that parents (including carers) may be prosecuted if children have recurring unjustified absences from school.

Keeping the school informed

If your child has to be absent from school, it is important to tell the school and provide a reason for the absence. To explain an absence parents and carers may:
- send a note, fax or email to the school
- telephone the school, or
- visit the school.

Whenever possible, parents and carers are encouraged to provide an explanation for absences before the absences occur.

The principal of the school has the right to question parents' requests for their child to be absent from school. They may also question an explanation given for a child's absence from school.

Holidays

Parents and carers are encouraged not to withdraw their children from school for family holidays. If this is necessary parents should discuss these absences with the principal and may be requested to apply for a Certificate of Exemption from attendance at school. This will ensure that these absences are not permanently recorded as unjustified.

When considering applications for Certificates of Exemption, principals may consider a variety of factors. These may include compassionate reasons, family reunions, the educational merits of the holiday and agreement for the student to complete assignments while on holiday. In some cases application for Distance Education may be more appropriate than seeking an exemption from school attendance.

Arrival on time

Arriving at school and class on time:
- ensures that students don't miss out on the important learning activities scheduled early in the day when the students are most alert
- helps students learn the importance of punctuality and routine
- gives students time to greet their friends before class and therefore,
- reduces the opportunity for classroom disruption.

Need help?

If you are having difficulty getting your child to attend school regularly, you might like to talk to the school principal or the school counsellor. In primary school you could also approach the assistant principal and in secondary school, your child's year adviser would be a good contact.

Home school liaison officers offer support with attendance at school. Some school areas also have Aboriginal student liaison officers who support the attendance of Aboriginal students.

Telephone your local Department of Education and Training regional office and speak to the student welfare consultant if you would like further support. A list of regional office telephone numbers can be accessed at the web site address: www.det.nsw.edu.au/contactus/index.htm or by telephoning 131 536.

Lateness is recorded as partial absence and must be explained by parents or carers in the same way as other forms of absence.

Must my child attend all activities, including sport?

YES. Sport and other physical activities help the healthy physical and mental development of children. Sports and sports carnivals are normal school activities and students must attend.
School Attendance Requirements

Regular attendance at Hunter River Community School is important and essential to assist students to maximise their potential. Hunter River Community School, in partnership with parents, is responsible for promoting the regular attendance of students.

Under the Education Act (1990), parents/caregivers are required to:
• ensure that children attend school every day that instruction is provided;
• provide an explanation for absences (including late arrivals) promptly and within seven school days of the unexplained absence occurring; and
• take measures to resolve attendance issues involving their children.

Hunter River Community School has a duty of care, and will contact parents/caregivers about unexplained absences as follows:
• giving students an Absentee Slip to take home (usually on the first day the student attends school following the absence);
• sending home an Absentee Notice in the mail (at least seven days after the absence); or
• telephoning home (at any time, as required).

Please contact the school on 4933 5844 if you are concerned about your child’s attendance at Hunter River Community School. School staff will work with you to address any issues and improve unsatisfactory attendance.

Telephone Advice
Hunter River Community School welcomes parents calling to advise staff of their child’s absence. This information is recorded and passed on to the class teacher. Despite having advised the school of your child’s absence, staff will continue to send an Absentee Note home for you to complete and return as we feel that a written explanation is important.

Late Arrivals / Early Leavers
Students arriving at school after 9:15am will need a “Late Note”. Parents and carers are requested to enter the school via the Office and request a “Late Note from staff.

Students leaving the school before 2:45pm will require a “Leavers Pass”. Parents and Carers are requested to enter the school via the Office and request a “Leavers Pass” from staff.

Examples of Absence Types
All absences from school (such as unexplained, leave, sick, suspended or unjustified) are listed on student reports.

The table on the following page gives examples of valid and invalid reasons for a student being absent from school, and shows the coding the school is required to use to record explained absences in our electronic attendance register, OASIS.
# EXPLAINED ABSENCE CODING FOR WEBATTEND

(only to be used with note/phone call from home or notification from staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sick (S)</td>
<td>Medical Certificate required for duration more than 4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Short illness advised by parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Medical or paramedical appointments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Going home from sick bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Known medical issues (with Executive approval)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave (L)</td>
<td>Valid reason supplied and/or approved by Executive, including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Misadventure or unforeseen event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Participation in special events not related to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(eg. personal sporting events, family events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- domestic necessity (eg. serious illness of immediate family member)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- attendance at funerals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- home for lunch (with Lunch Pass approved by Executive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Attendance Plan (approved by School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Special attendance arrangements (approved by Principal/DP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 15 days per school year, or more for students above compulsory age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unjustified (A)</td>
<td>Valid reason not supplied, including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- family holiday during school term</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- out of town without explanation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- family reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- awaiting documentation (ie. medical certificate, proof of work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Business (B)</td>
<td>Excursions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Representative Sporting events (including travel to/from)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- SkillCentre courses (eg. Welding/Life skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Work Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Work Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible (F)</td>
<td>Senior study periods (with Leave Pass authorised by parents &amp; Principal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspended (E)</td>
<td>USE ON DEPUTY/PRINCIPAL ADVICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Enrolment (H)</td>
<td>USE ON TEACHER/EXECUTIVE ADVICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TAFE course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- RASP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tutorial Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempt (M)</td>
<td>Personalised Attendance Plan (approved by DET)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not to be used unless advised by an attendance officer*
Dear ____________________,

The Education Act 1990 requires enrolled students to attend school each day that instruction is provided unless prevented from doing so by sickness or other good reason. Regular attendance at school is important for students to reach their potential. It is a requirement that absences from school are explained within seven days of their occurrence.

Your child ________________________ was absent from school on; _______________________________ and to date no explanation has been received by the school office. Please assist by providing an explanation for the absence(s) by completing the attached form and return it to school with your child as soon as possible.

If you feel you may have received this notice in error, or you would like to discuss matters relating to your child’s attendance please contact the school on 4933 5844.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Hughes
PRINCIPAL

(Please return to the school office)

REASON FOR ABSENCE:

Signed: .................................
Date: .................................
Examples of Notes to Explain Absences

Note is unacceptable as student’s full name is missing, there are no dates and no valid reason for absence.

Note is acceptable as it has full student name, dates and a valid reason for the absence.

Note is unacceptable as student’s full name is missing, there is no date.

Note is valid but the reason for the absence may be questionable. Please speak to your Principal.
Sample Absent Notes for Home Use

Please excuse my child _____________________________ of Class ________
For being absent from school on _________________________________
because _______________________________________________________
Parent/Carer Name and Signature: ___________________________________
Date: _______________________ contact Number: ____________________

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Please excuse my child _____________________________ of Class ________
For being absent from school on _________________________________
because _______________________________________________________
Parent/Carer Name and Signature: ___________________________________
Date: _______________________ contact Number: ____________________

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Please excuse my child _____________________________ of Class ________
For being absent from school on _________________________________
because _______________________________________________________
Parent/Carer Name and Signature: ___________________________________
Date: _______________________ contact Number: ____________________

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Please excuse my child _____________________________ of Class ________
For being absent from school on _________________________________
because _______________________________________________________
Parent/Carer Name and Signature: ___________________________________
Date: _______________________ contact Number: ____________________