

# Absentee Policy & Guidelines

Bethania Lutheran School is committed to providing the best educational outcomes for its students. Parents/caregivers and the school work in partnership to provide students with learning opportunities that will provide a solid foundation for the future. Children need to maximise attendance at school to gain optimum benefit from education. Ensuring regular attendance at school is a shared responsibility between parents/caregivers and the school. Research shows that success in learning is directly proportional to regular attendance and participation in education programs. Non-attendance and irregular attendance can be viewed as early indicators of the potential for disengagement from the education program. Absence from school can limit a student's achievement of essential knowledge and skills required for effective participation in work, relationships and families, and active citizenship. Children who attend school regularly learn better, make friends, are happier and have a brighter future.

The issue of absenteeism is complex and covers a range of behaviours including chronic absenteeism, school refusal, truancy and part day attendance. Bethania Lutheran School is committed to address the issue of absenteeism through both proactive approaches and intervention strategies.

- The benefits of regular school attendance and the school's policies and procedures in relation to school non attendance are consistently communicated to students and the school community. Clear expectations about attendance are communicated through the school's website, newsletters, parent information evenings and in the school's enrolment package.
- The early identification of students with high levels of absenteeism and communication with parents/caregivers is vital. High absentee rates would be considered to be 10% or more school days absent. Teachers should alert administration staff to high absentee rates in their classes and unexplained absences should be followed up consistently. Once a pattern of high absentee rates is established, early communication with parents/caregivers is recommended to ascertain the reasons for absence and reiterate the importance of regular school attendance.
- It is important to investigate the patterns and underlying causes of non-attendance so that appropriate strategies that address the specific type of absenteeism can be implemented. See table below.
- Bethania Lutheran School strives to develop a safe and supportive school environment that promotes positive relationships and includes the implementation of programs which develop social and emotional skills, peer tutoring and mentoring, and anti-bullying strategies. It is also important to establish positive home-school relationships to assist parents to support their child's attendance at school.

## Types of absenteeism and response alternatives:

	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Possible Responses</b>
<b>Chronic absenteeism</b>	<p>Persistent or habitual absence or lateness</p> <p>Students with high levels of absences, variously defined as 10% or more school days absent</p> <p>Parents may provide explanations for absences, but these explanations may be considered unreasonable.</p>	<p>Parents and family members play an important role in assisting the student to reintegrate back and remain engaged in school. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• notify parents of their legal obligations and the importance of schooling and of continuity in learning from the early years</li> <li>• encourage parents to participate in parenting skills training (e.g. organisational skills)</li> <li>• encourage the development of supportive networks with other parents (e.g. establish a parents club)</li> <li>• encourage parents to seek support from and communicate regularly with teachers and the school.</li> </ul>
<b>School refusal</b>	<p>A form of chronic absenteeism</p> <p>Parents often are aware of the absenteeism but are unable to address it</p> <p>Students who are almost completely unwilling or unable to attend school because of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their past school experiences</li> <li>• psycho-social reasons related to clinical levels of anxiety</li> <li>• a developed habit of absence</li> </ul>	<p>The school gathers information about the student and family to help understand the nature of and reasons for the absences.</p> <p>The school implements strategies to address issues like learning problems or bullying where appropriate.</p> <p>Where appropriate the school refers students and parents to relevant professionals (e.g. counsellors and psychologists) for programs according to the individual student's needs.</p> <p>Solutions may require whole-of-government intervention and support, as for truancy (see below).</p>
<b>Truancy</b>	<p>Disengagement from school</p> <p>May be accompanied by alienation from the school culture</p> <p>Unexplained absences from school perhaps without the knowledge of the parent/s</p>	<p>Where the reasons for truancy pertain to aspects of the school (e.g. poor relationships with teachers), the school implements strategies to address these aspects.</p> <p>The school alone may not be able to address all of the needs of the student (e.g. domestic violence at home, child abuse, etc). In this case the school should work with the family and liaise with other agencies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Child Safety,</li> <li>• Department of Communities,</li> <li>• Queensland Police Child Protection Investigation Unit, and</li> <li>• other relevant non-government organisations.</li> </ul>

Table adapted from: Department of Education and Training, *Every Day Counts*,

<<http://education.qld.gov.au/everydaycounts/index.html>>, Accessed 27th October 2010

# Student Absence

