



Department of
Education

STUDENT ATTENDANCE

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1 POLICY STATEMENT

The Department of Education (the Department) monitors the attendance of all students enrolled in school, identifies students with attendance issues and implements appropriate measures to restore regular attendance.

2 BACKGROUND

Where a student is enrolled in a public school, the *School Education Act 1999* (the Act) requires that the student attends the school on site or an educational program of the school elsewhere as directed by the principal.

The parents of a child who is enrolled in a school are responsible under the Act for ensuring their child is attending on a daily basis. Parents or other responsible persons may be asked to provide an acceptable explanation for any absence to the principal. For the purpose of this policy, parent is defined as the parent at law. Further information about the terms *parent* and *responsible person* can be found in the definitions section.

The principal is responsible for creating and maintaining a safe and positive learning environment which promotes engagement and participation, and for the management of regular school attendance.

Consistent attendance and participation at school are essential factors in achieving social and academic learning outcomes. Schools that develop a supportive learning environment and an engaging and relevant curriculum create conditions conducive to regular school attendance.

3 SCOPE

This policy applies to principals and Regional Executive Directors and their nominees.

4 PROCEDURES

4.1 ATTENDANCE RECORDS

The principal or their nominee will:

- keep accurate attendance records for every student enrolled at the school (including attendance at both morning and afternoon sessions for kindergarten, pre-primary and primary students, and every lesson/period for secondary students) that are able to be reproduced in a written form;
- record whether a student's absence was authorised or unauthorised;
- issue a leave pass to a student who has been granted permission to leave the school unaccompanied by a responsible adult; and
- record a student as:
 - present for a half day when the student has attended at least two hours of instruction;
 - attending if they are on a school-approved activity;

- an authorised absence during the period of suspension;
- an authorised absence if they are absent due to cultural/religious events.

Guidelines

- *Students who arrive late or leave early but still attend two hours of instruction are recorded as attending a half day.*
- *All students enrolled in the school are required to have their attendance recorded, irrespective of where the educational program is delivered. This includes students who may be attending either part-time or full-time programs offsite as part of an educational program under a Section 24 Arrangement (see Enrolment policy) and those with a Notice of Arrangements that involves a component of school attendance.*
- *Schools should refer to the STIMS website for the full description of SIS Lesson Attendance codes.*
- *Authorised absences for religious observance or cultural reasons are best negotiated prior to the absence to avoid repetitive follow-up on the school's behalf and to support planning for the student.*
- *Leave passes allow students to be readily recognised by police and other agencies when legitimately off school site during school hours. The leave pass may be used in instances such as medical appointments or travel to another site to access an Endorsed Community Based Course (see Guidelines for the use of Standardised Leave Passes).*

4.1.1 RETENTION OF RECORDS

The principal or nominee will:

- keep records of all contact, or attempts to make contact, with the student's family;
- maintain documentation of all intervention strategies implemented in attempts to restore a student's attendance; and
- retain attendance records in accordance with the *School Education Regulations 2000 (Regulations)* and the *Retention and Disposal Schedule for Department of Education School, College and Campus Records*.

Guidelines

Relevant documentation to retain includes:

- *absentee notes that are not part of the student's file for two years from the date of receipt, including details recorded by the school when a parent provides the school with a verbal reason;*
- *attendance records for students in each year level for seven years; and*
- *unsatisfactory student attendance reports, including written notes and records of verbal explanations of absences, psychological reports, records of interviews with students and significant records relating to individual students until the student is 25 years of age (7 years after a mature aged (>18 years) student has left school).*

4.2 MANAGEMENT OF NON-ATTENDANCE

The principal or nominee will:

- request an explanation from the student's parent or responsible person when a student has been absent from school and an acceptable explanation has not been provided after three days from the beginning of the absence;
- manage absences in conjunction with the alternative provider for students participating in alternative attendance arrangements under Section 24 of the Act (see Enrolment policy);
- develop documented plans for Aboriginal students as per Appendix A: *Documented plans for Aboriginal students*;

- refer a student to the Student Tracking Coordinator when he or she is deemed to be a 'child whose whereabouts is unknown'; and
- where attendance falls below 90 per cent over a term:
 - further investigate the reasons for the student's absence;
 - organise a parent/teacher meeting and/or case conference at the earliest opportunity to identify the issues related to the non-attendance and plan for improvement; and
 - document all attendance improvement plans.

Guidelines

- *Student attendance is considered to be 'at-risk' if less than 90%.*
- *Where a student's attendance falls below 90% and acceptable reasons have not been provided for a number of absences, further investigation may assist the return to regular attendance. See Appendix B - Attendance Intervention Flowchart.*
- *In most instances, where an acceptable explanation for the absence has been provided, further action is not required.*
- *Principals or nominees should refer to Guidelines for Implementing Documented Plans in Public Schools and/or Improving Attendance: A Resource Package for Schools for further information and guidance on developing attendance improvement plans. Any plan developed should clearly indicate support to be provided by the school and/or network or regional officer, actions agreed to by the parent and timelines for achievement. Plans should be formally reviewed. Principals should offer support for parents from appropriate agencies at the earliest opportunity.*
- *Principals or nominees should request a medical certificate for prolonged absences due to sickness or injury. In the instance of long term/severe medical conditions impacting on the student's attendance, the principal or nominee need not investigate further if documentary evidence has been provided outlining the nature of the illness and the expected duration of the absence.*
- *Western Australia's schools operate in various cultural and geographical contexts. Relationships between schools and the community are vital to establishing an improved understanding of the factors contributing to absences and their expected duration.*
- *Students up until the end of Year 10 must not be employed during the hours when required to attend school or otherwise participate in an educational program. Employment is only permitted as part of the student's educational program through an arrangement under Section 24 of the Act or through an Exemption from enrolment. Further information can be found in the Enrolment policy.*
- *Students in Year 11 or 12 are able to participate in an approved full-time option other than school under a Notice of Arrangements. Options include training (public and private registered training organisations), apprenticeships and traineeships, endorsed community based courses and employment.*
- *Principals (and nominees) should use all appropriate school based resources in the support of students, parents and their families.*
- *Principals may wish to use one of the checklists in Improving Attendance: A Resource Package for Schools to identify factors contributing to non-attendance and assist with planning.*
- *See Appendix C - Information regarding Children Whose Whereabouts are Unknown.*

4.2.1 PERSISTENT NON-ATTENDANCE

If a student has been identified as being an irregular or chronic non-attende and repeated efforts to work with parents to restore attendance have not been successful, the principal or nominee will:

- consult with an appropriate network or regional officer (or officers);
- inform the parent, using Appendix D: *Letter to parent from principal advising of consultation with network or regional officer*; and
- revise any attendance improvement plan developed.

Guidelines

- *The principal or nominee may ask the network or regional officer to assist in revising existing strategies and the attendance improvement plan.*
- *The principal or nominee retains responsibility for restoring school attendance or engagement in an educational program and works collaboratively with the network or regional officer, the student's family and other agencies.*
- *For students in Year 11 or 12, the principal or nominee may refer the student's case to the appropriate regional officer using Request for assistance from a school to the regional participation team.*
- *Principals and nominees should be mindful of the cultural background and literacy levels of parents and any written communication to parents should also be explained face to face or verbally if required.*

4.2.2 FORMAL MEETING

If school attendance or engagement in an educational program is not successfully restored through consultation with an appropriate network or regional officer, the principal will request the parent attends a formal meeting using Appendix E: *Letter from principal to parent regarding formal meeting*.

At the formal meeting, the principal or nominee will:

- ensure any factors preventing attendance or participation are explored;
- request the parent engages with alternative strategies to improve attendance; and
- document a formal attendance improvement plan.

Guidelines

- *The principal may request assistance from the network or region in facilitation of the formal meeting.*
- *The reasons for the failure to comply with attendance requirements should be explored, including any social, cultural, lingual, economic, geographic or learning difficulties.*
- *Parents (and students as appropriate) should be fully supported to attend and participate in the meeting.*
- *A formal meeting may address concerns relating to more than one family member.*
- *The principal may determine that a Responsible Parenting Agreement may be an appropriate course of action. Responsible Parenting Agreements may be drafted by principals but must be signed by an officer authorised under the Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008. Authorised officers in regions will differ according to regional structure. Principals should refer to Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Agreements for guidance on whether a Responsible Parenting Agreement is appropriate and seek further advice if necessary. Parents should be provided with Responsible Parenting Agreements – a guide for parents.*
- *A process to monitor engagement with any plan or agreement developed in a formal meeting should be developed. The resulting plan should be documented and a date for review determined.*
- *Improving Attendance: a resource package for schools, provides guidance on the facilitation of meetings, including the documentation of attendance improvement plans.*

4.2.3 RECOMMENDING PROSECUTION OF THE PARENT OR APPLICATION FOR A RESPONSIBLE PARENTING ORDER

The principal will refer the matter to the Regional Executive Director where:

- a formal meeting has been unable to secure parental engagement and improvement in school attendance (or engagement in another educational program); and
- it is determined that either prosecution of the parent or application to the Children's Court for a Responsible Parenting Order is appropriate.

Guidelines

- *The prosecution of a parent or an application for a Responsible Parenting Order should be an action of last resort.*
- *Prior to referring the matter, the principal may wish to consult with the Regional Executive Director or nominee.*
- *Principals should refer to Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Orders and Guidelines for the use of prosecution in determining whether either of these actions are appropriate.*

If the principal decides to refer the matter, he or she will:

- complete and forward Appendix F: *Referral to Regional Executive Director – recommendation for consideration of legal action.*

If the Regional Executive Director endorses the principal's recommendation, he or she will refer to the relevant guideline document in order to:

- inform the parent and the principal of the outcome; and
- facilitate the required process.

Guidelines

- *Principals and Regional Executive Directors (and nominees) should refer to Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Orders, Guidelines for the use of prosecution and Guidelines for the use of attendance panels in determining whether any of these actions are appropriate.*
- *Prior to the commencement of prosecution under the School Education Act 1999, the Director General is required to certify that all reasonable practical steps have been taken to secure compliance with attendance requirements but that breaches (of the Act) have continued.*
- *The formation of an attendance panel is not required prior to referral for consideration of prosecution of the parent under the School Education Act 1999.*
- *Consultation should occur with the Participation Branch regarding the use of prosecution in cases where the student is turning 16 or 17 in the calendar year.*
- *Under the Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008 (PSR Act), the Children's Court will not make a Responsible Parenting Order without demonstration that all other efforts to engage a parent voluntarily have been unsuccessful. This includes attempts to engage the parent in a Responsible Parenting Agreement.*

4.3 REPORTING AND DISCLOSURE OF ATTENDANCE DATA

The principal will comply with requests from regional offices and Central Office to provide information on student attendance.

Requests for school attendance data (for example, participation in the Attendance Audit) must include the attendance data of every student enrolled.

Guideline

Principals may seek advice from an appropriate network or regional officer regarding requests for individual or group attendance data from an external agency.

5 RELATED DOCUMENTS

5.1 RELEVANT LEGISLATION OR AUTHORITY

Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008
Public Sector Management Act 1994
School Education Act 1999
School Education Regulations 2000

5.2 RELATED DEPARTMENT POLICIES

Behaviour Management in Schools
Duty of Care for Students
Enrolment
Excursions – Off School Site Activities
Family Court Orders in Schools

5.3 OTHER DOCUMENTS

Improving Attendance: A Resource Package for Schools
Student Tracking System Guidelines
Standardised Leave Pass Guidelines
Guidelines for Implementing Documented Plans in Public Schools
Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Agreements
Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Orders
Guidelines for the use of attendance panels
Guidelines for the use of prosecution
Responsible Parenting Agreements – a guide for parents
Responsible Parenting Orders – a guide for parents

6 DEFINITIONS

ATTENDANCE PANEL

A small group of people appointed under the *School Education Act 1999* to provide advice and assistance to students and the parents of students who are not fulfilling the legal requirements of school attendance. An attendance panel may recommend (via a Regional Executive Director) that the Director General make an application to the Children's Court for a Responsible Parenting Order. An attendance panel is not required prior to commencement of prosecution of a parent under the Act.

AUTHORISED ABSENCE

An absence where the reason provided by the parent or Department is considered to be legitimate and deemed acceptable by the principal or their nominee.

CHILDREN WHOSE WHEREABOUTS ARE UNKNOWN (CWU) list

A list, usually referred to as the CWU List, contains the names of children who are missing from schools and educational programs in Western Australia. This list is distributed to administrators in private schools and some agencies by agreement.

EMPLOYEE

A person who is currently employed under the *School Education Act 1999* or the *Public Sector Management Act 1994*.

PARENT

A person who at law has responsibility:

- a) for the long-term care, welfare and development of the child; or
- b) for the day to day care, welfare and development of the child.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON

A person:

- who is a parent of the student;
- who, in the case of a student who has turned 18 or is a prescribed child, the student; or
- who is an adult, responsible for the child and whose details have been provided on enrolment.

RESPONSIBLE PARENTING AGREEMENT

A formal written agreement between a parent and an authorised officer in one of the Departments of Education, Child Protection or Corrective Services. Parents may be asked to enter into a Responsible Parenting Agreement where the child is under 15 years of age and demonstrating anti-social or offending behaviour, not attending school where there is no reasonable cause for the absence or is at risk of developing such behaviours. Agreements document support to be provided by the Department (and/or other agencies) and actions to be undertaken by parents.

RESPONSIBLE PARENTING ORDER

A Responsible Parenting Order compels a parent(s) to take up the support offered by agencies and to meet their responsibilities in exercising appropriate control over their child's anti-social, offending or truanting behaviour. A Regional Executive Director may endorse a principal's recommendation to the Director General that an application for an order be made in respect of the child, where every effort to engage the parent voluntarily has failed and it is considered that it will make a positive difference to the child's behaviour.

UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

Unauthorised absences encompass truancy, those not considered acceptable by the principal, nominee or the Department and where an explanation has not been provided by the parent.

7 CONTACT INFORMATION

Enquiries should initially be directed to the school or regional education office.

For further information please visit www.bswb.det.wa.edu.au or contact:

Student Services Directorate
Behaviour and Wellbeing Branch
Department of Education
151 Royal Street
East Perth WA 6004
T: (08) 9264 5341

APPENDIX A DOCUMENTED PLANS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

The Australian Government commitments in *New Directions: An Equal Start in Life for Indigenous Students* (May 2007) and budget announcements in May 2008 indicate that every Aboriginal student in Years 1 to 10 will have an individual learning plan as one of the strategies to help close the educational gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Regular attendance at school is a critical element in improving students' literacy and numeracy skills. This in turn impacts on the development of skills and knowledge that improve pathways to work, career choices and financial independence. From Term 1 2010 all Aboriginal students with an attendance rate below 80 per cent are required to have a documented plan to address barriers to attendance, respond to identified educational needs and improve attendance.

There are four phases for implementation in schools:

- Phase 1 - currently in place: all Aboriginal students performing below minimum standards and receiving support from the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS), and students enrolled in Follow the Dream require documented plans.
- Phase 2 - expected to start in Term 1 2010: all Aboriginal students with an attendance rate below 80 per cent require a documented plan.
- Phase 3 - from Term 1 2012: all Aboriginal students with an attendance rate below 90 per cent require a documented plan.
- Phase 4 – still under discussion: all Aboriginal students will require a documented plan.

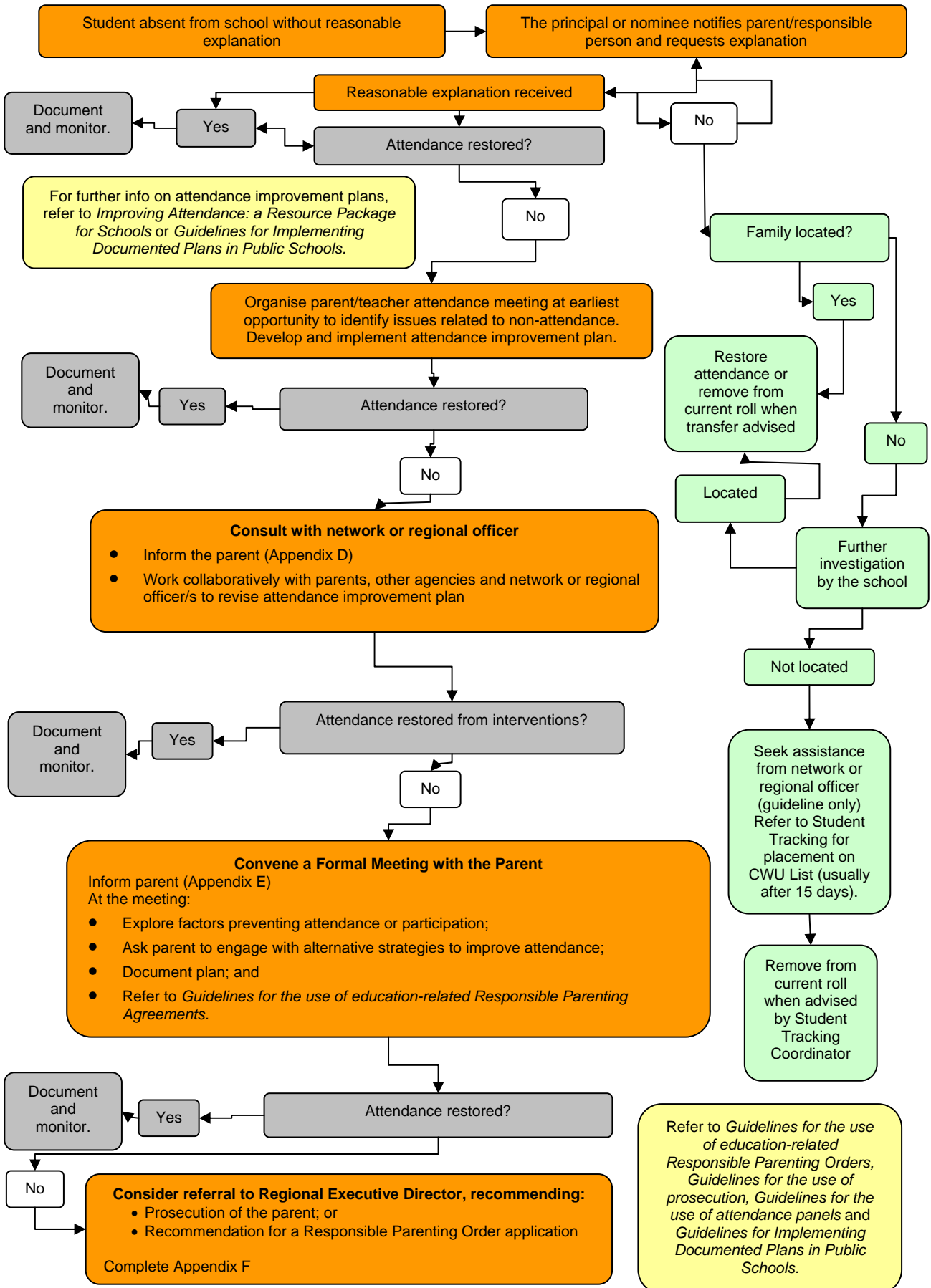
All schools are expected to set targets for Aboriginal students, including attendance targets, and implement strategies to address these targets as part of their core business. The use of documented plans will help to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students at risk.

A documented plan does not necessarily need to address all aspects of a student's educational program, only those aspects that require an individual approach. Schools may develop whole school strategies and write group plans where appropriate.

Samples of documented plans are on [Policies](#).

For more information see, [New Directions – an equal start in life for Indigenous children](#).

APPENDIX B ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION FLOWCHART



Student Attendance

All policy and procedural statements contained within this document are lawful orders for the purposes of section 80(a) of the Public Sector Management Act 1994 (WA) and are therefore to be observed by all Department of Education employees.



APPENDIX C INFORMATION REGARDING CHILDREN WHOSE WHEREABOUTS ARE UNKNOWN

A Request to place a student on the 'children whose whereabouts are unknown' list form is completed by the principal or nominee when:

- a student cannot be located within a reasonable amount of time (usually 15 school days), and is deemed as missing;
- attempts to locate a student have failed through efforts to contact parents, peers and relevant interagency groups; and
- the school has not received advice that the student has enrolled at another school or moved interstate.

All absences are recorded by the principal or nominee until they are advised by the student tracking coordinator to remove the student from the current roll.

A student is not considered missing when the principal is aware of the student's location but he or she is not attending.

Missing students who have enrolled in public schools are automatically detected by the Student Tracking System.

Guideline

Principals may seek the advice of a relevant network or regional officer in determining the whereabouts of a student.

APPENDIX D LETTER TO PARENT FROM PRINCIPAL ADVISING OF CONSULTATION WITH NETWORK OR REGIONAL OFFICER

School Letterhead

[Parent First Name] [Parent Last Name]
[Address]
[SUBURB] WA [POSTCODE]

Dear [Title] [Parent Last Name]

I am writing regarding the attendance of your son/daughter, [Student Name] at school.

The *School Education Act 1999* requires parents to ensure that children of compulsory school age attend school on each day that the school is open for instruction. If children are absent from school, a parent or responsible person must provide the school with an acceptable explanation within three days of the absence. Attendance requirements do not apply for students undertaking home education.

I have previously advised you that [Student Name]'s attendance is a matter of concern. We have tried to work with you and implemented a range of strategies to encourage [Student Name]'s regular attendance at school without success.

Strategies attempted include the following:

- [insert a list of strategies offered or attempted here]

I have recently reviewed [Student Name]'s pattern of attendance and it is clear that absences without a good reason being provided are still at an unacceptable level. A summary of absences is attached for your reference. It is very important that we work together to resolve this issue and I intend to consult with [Name and Role of Appropriate Network or Regional Officer], at [Location of Officer] to provide additional support and advice.

I will ask the officer to assist me to review the case and provide advice to the school. As part of this process, the officer may contact you directly and arrange a meeting to discuss [Student Name]'s attendance or attend a planning meeting so we can develop further strategies together.

If [Student Name]'s attendance does not improve through these strategies, I may ask you to attend a formal meeting to discuss the situation and will advise you in writing if this will happen.

In the event that we are unable to resolve this situation together it may be necessary to refer the matter to the Department's solicitors for legal action.

It is important that we work together to resolve the issue.

Yours sincerely

[Principal Name]
Principal
[Date]

Attach. [attach SIS Lesson Attendance report documenting unauthorised absences]

CC: [Appropriate Network or Regional Officer]

APPENDIX E LETTER FROM PRINCIPAL TO PARENT REGARDING FORMAL MEETING

School Letterhead

[Parent First Name] [Parent Last Name]
[Address]
[SUBURB] WA [POSTCODE]

Dear [Title] [Parent Last Name]

NOTIFICATION OF FORMAL MEETING REQUIRED

I am writing regarding the attendance of your son/daughter, [Student Name] at school. The *School Education Act 1999* requires parents to ensure their children of compulsory school age attend school on each day that the school is open for instruction unless there is good reason for them not to attend. If students are absent, a parent or responsible person is required to provide the school with an acceptable explanation within three days of the absence.

Parents who fail to ensure that their children attend school regularly or who fail to provide satisfactory explanations for absences may be committing a serious offence. The maximum penalty is \$1 000 for each offence.

I have previously advised you that [Student Name]'s attendance is a matter of great concern. I have also consulted with [Name and Role of Network or Regional Officer] to provide additional advice and support and develop alternative strategies with us to improve the situation.

I am very concerned that [Student Name]'s attendance is still at an unacceptable level and that we need to work together to resolve this issue.

I am now asking you to attend a formal meeting to discuss this matter.

At this meeting it will be important for you to talk about any problems that might be preventing [Student Name]'s attendance. A plan will be developed with you to improve [Student Name]'s attendance and it will be expected you take all reasonable steps to ensure your child attends school.

[Name of Organising Officer] will be contacting you shortly to arrange the formal meeting. Alternatively you may wish to make contact on telephone number [Phone Number]. It is very important that you attend the formal meeting and work closely with the school to avoid the matter being referred to the Department's solicitors for legal action.

Yours sincerely

[Name of Principal]
PRINCIPAL
[Date]

APPENDIX F REFERRAL TO REGIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - RECOMMENDATION FOR CONSIDERATION OF LEGAL ACTION

CONFIDENTIAL NOTIFICATION TO REGIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Student details

Student name:	
Date of birth:	
Year level:	
School enrolled:	
Parent 1 name:	
Parent 2 name:	
Address:	

School details

Principal's name:	
Telephone number:	
Email:	

Actions taken

Policy section	Comment on outcome and evidence available
4.2 <input type="checkbox"/> Parent correspondence and contact following absences from school without acceptable explanation.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent/teacher meeting/s	
<input type="checkbox"/> Case conference	
<input type="checkbox"/> Attendance Checklist (<i>guideline</i>)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Documented plan/s	
<input type="checkbox"/> Engagement with school based supports and other agencies (as appropriate) (<i>guideline</i>)	
4.2.1 <input type="checkbox"/> Consultation with appropriate network or regional officer/s	

Student Attendance

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<input type="checkbox"/> Parent sent Appendix D	
4.2.2 <input type="checkbox"/> Formal meeting	
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent sent Appendix E	
<input type="checkbox"/> Documented formal attendance improvement plan	
4.2.3 <input type="checkbox"/> Consultation with Regional Executive Director or nominee (<i>guideline</i>)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Referred to <i>Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Orders and Guidelines for the use of prosecution (guideline)</i>	

Principal's recommendation

Recommended action	Comment
<input type="checkbox"/> Prosecution	
<input type="checkbox"/> Application for Responsible Parenting Order	

Principal's signature:	Date:
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