GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of
Education

Student Attendance in Public Schools procedures

Effective date: 8 September 2026

Version: 5.0

Table of contents

1. Scope **3**

2. Procedures **3**

2.1 Approaches 3

2.2 Promoting student attendance 3

2.3 Monitoring student attendance 4

2.4 Attendance records 5

2.4.1 Retention of records 6

2.4.2 Reporting and disclosure of attendance data 6

2.5 Early intervention and support to restore attendance 6

2.6 Addressing persistent student absence 7

2.7 Alternative attendance arrangements under Section 24 of the School Education Act 8

2.7.1 Access to the curriculum for students with illness and/or health conditions 10

3. Definitions **10**

4. Related documents **12**

5. Contact information **13**

6. History of changes **13**

7. More information **16**

Supporting content 16

Procedure review date 16

1. Scope

This policy applies to Directors of Education, principals in public schools and the Executive Director, Statewide Services.

2. Procedures

2.1 Approaches

Principals must develop approaches relevant to their particular context to support student attendance. This will include:

- **Promotion approaches** that focus on building student, family, school and community resilience, and the promotion of protective factors.
- **Prevention approaches** that are designed to prevent poor attendance for those students most at risk.
- **Response approaches** that provide support or interventions for those students who are not attending.

2.2 Promoting student attendance

The principal:

- builds positive relationships with students, parents and communities;
- communicates the importance of school attendance to students, their parent/s, and the broader school community;
- engages in community-initiated approaches to strengthen student attendance; and
- encourages attendance by providing school environments that engage and support students to thrive.

Guidance

- The Department encourages school leaders and staff to build and maintain mutually respectful relationships with parents and the local community and to engage authentically. In collaboration with local Aboriginal community members, school leaders and staff are expected to develop strong, sustainable education partnerships that reflect the expectations and aspirations of Aboriginal students.

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.

- All teaching and other relevant staff play an important role in developing shared understandings and expectations regarding school attendance.
- In interpreting these policy documents, refer to the definition of Parent which has been framed to include other responsible adults operating in a guardian/carer role.
- Note also that 'child' in these documents refers to children and young people.
- Resources to support this process are available in the Student Attendance Toolkit (staff only) .
- The Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework (staff only) and the Engaging and Working with your Community Framework (staff only) should be used to inform and guide this work.
- Through the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework (staff only), schools are supported to use place-based approaches that are developed in consultation with their local Aboriginal communities, to strengthen the participation and engagement of Aboriginal students.
- Refer to Every day matters: 10-point plan to improve attendance for further information about promoting student attendance.

2.3 Monitoring student attendance

The principal:

- where a student is participating in a section 24 arrangement, manages the student's attendance in conjunction with the alternative school or provider;
- requests a reason for a student's absence be provided to the principal's satisfaction; and
- if a student cannot be located, and their parent/s cannot be contacted, the principal, within 15 days of the start of an absence:
  - completes an SWU Request Form and submit it electronically;
  - retains the student on the school's current enrolment register until email notification is received from the Student Tracking Coordinator that the student has been placed on the SWU List; and
  - continues to record the student's unexplained absence until this notification has been received, at which time the student can be removed from the register from the last date of attendance or authorised absence.

Guidance

- The School Education Act 1999 requires that an explanation of a student's absence is provided within three school days from the start of the absence.
- Principals should request a medical certificate for prolonged absences that are due to sickness or injury.

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.

- 18 year olds enrolled in school are subject to the same attendance requirements as other students.
- Badged Attendance Officers assist in the management of addressing student absence. For information about the authorisation and designation of Badged Attendance Officers refer to Badged Attendance Officers (staff only).
- A student can be regarded as 'missing' when, within 15 days of the start of an absence, they cannot be located, their parent/s cannot be contacted, and the school has not received advice that the student is being educated elsewhere.
- The school may refer to the education regional office for support and assistance in their attempts to locate a student.
- The Student Tracking Coordinator processes the request and informs the school by email within 15 school days of receiving the request.
- For further information refer to the Students whose Whereabouts are Unknown Guidelines.
- The Students whose Whereabouts are Unknown Flowchart describes steps in this process.

2.4 Attendance records

The principal:

- keeps 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;
- records whether a student's absence was authorised or unauthorised;
- issues a leave pass to a student under the age of 18 who has been granted permission to leave the school unaccompanied by a responsible adult; and
- records a student as:
  - present for a half day when the student has attended at least two hours and five minutes of instruction; and
  - present if they are on a school-approved activity or attending off-site under a section 24 arrangement.

Guidance

- A full description of the School Information System (SIS) Lesson Attendance codes used to record student attendance is provided online (staff only) .

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.

- Additional information on the correct use of these codes is provided in the Student Attendance Toolkit (staff only).
- For information about the use of leave passes refer to Standardised Leave Passes (staff only).

2.4.1 Retention of records

The principal:

- retains attendance records in accordance with the School Education Regulations 2000 and the Retention and Disposal Schedule for Department of Education, School, College and Campus Records (staff only); and
- retains documentation of all contact and intervention strategies implemented in addressing a student's absence.

Guidance

Systems like Student Attendance Reporting (staff only) that are provided by the Department are compliant with these requirements. Schools using third party software for generating attendance records will need to confirm that the records they create are also compliant.

2.4.2 Reporting and disclosure of attendance data

The principal:

- complies with requests from their education regional office and Central Office to provide information on student attendance; and
- include the attendance data of every student enrolled in response to requests for school attendance data (e.g. participation in the Attendance Data Collection).

Guidance

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

2.5 Early intervention and support to restore attendance

The principal:

- identifies when a student's attendance is declining or continues to place them at risk;

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.

- investigates the causes;
- intervenes with the aim of restoring student attendance; and
- consults as appropriate with the student, their parents and other stakeholders to develop approaches that are context specific and culturally responsive.

Guidance

Education regional offices support schools to monitor attendance rates and as required, assist them to implement place-based responses, including working in coordination with other government agencies to improve student attendance.

- To support this process, an Increasing Unauthorised Absences Report is accessible through an icon on the school's Student Attendance Reporting (staff only) application. This report will identify students whose unauthorised absences have increased within the reporting period.
- Strategies and advice on appropriate interventions are available in the Student Attendance Toolkit (staff only).
- The Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework (staff only) should guide what approaches are used to restore the attendance of Aboriginal students and how they are implemented.
- Culturally responsive approaches and practices respond to and address the needs of individual students and take into account the social, cultural and historical contexts that impact them.
- Knowledge of the student's cultural and linguistic background, and family and community connections is key information that informs decision making and intervention.
- The presence of multiple risk factors should be considered when determining if and when intervention is required and/or when it should be prioritised. For example, those students who:
  - have experienced cumulative harm resulting from trauma/child maltreatment;
  - have been suspended from school on two or more occasions; and/or
  - are at risk of being excluded.
- Persistent or sudden absence from school may be an indicator of concern for a student being at risk of suicidal behaviour or non-suicidal self-injury. Refer to School Response and Planning Guidelines for Students with Suicidal Behaviour and Non-Suicidal Self-Injury for further information.

2.6 Addressing persistent student absence

The principal:

- develops, implements and keeps records of documented plans to address persistent student absence;

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.

- documents the intervention strategies undertaken to address a student's absence;
- engages in community-initiated approaches designed to strengthen student attendance;
- consults with their education regional office to determine further actions if persistent absence continues after meeting with the student's parents and taking all reasonable steps to work with them to improve the student's attendance; and
- offers the option of an attendance panel to parents before prosecution can be considered.

Directors of Education, where appropriate, will refer the case to the relevant cross-agency or community group (for example, the District Leadership Group) and, in consultation with them, provide advice to the principal about how to proceed and whether a principal should proceed to an attendance panel.

Guidance

- It is the principal's responsibility to determine when persistent absence may require the support of a documented plan. Refer to Support documented planning and case management for individual students (staff only) for further information.
- The principal should consider whether the persistent absence places the child or young person at suspected risk of harm and/or what other elements of risk to the student's wellbeing may be indicated by persistent absence from school.
- The Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework (staff only) should guide what approaches are included in a documented plan for an Aboriginal student and how they are implemented.
- In the consultation process, the principal should offer the parent the opportunity to enter into a Responsible Parenting Agreement in circumstances where this may be appropriate. Refer to Develop a responsible parenting agreement (staff only) for further information.
- Refer to Organise an attendance advisory panel (staff only) for further information.
- If a decision is made to proceed to prosecution, relevant documentation may be used as evidence that reasonably practicable steps to restore attendance have been taken. Refer to Legal Services for information on prosecution.

2.7 Alternative attendance arrangements under Section 24 of the School Education Act

Where it is deemed to be in the best interests of an enrolled student, the principal of the school in which the student is enrolled:

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.

- only enters into a section 24 arrangement where a student will undertake a program provided by another school or training organisation, and where the combination of arrangements equates to full-time attendance;
- formalises an alternative attendance arrangement (staff only) for the student in accordance with section 24 of the School Education Act 1999;
- approves the section 24 arrangement and end date the arrangement;
- issues a Certificate of Approval: Alternative Attendance Arrangement (Section 24 Arrangement) outlining the details of the alternative attendance arrangements;
- appoints a school-based case manager to monitor the arrangement and to work in consultation with the student, the parents of students under the age of 18 and the alternative school or provider;
- confirms that the duty of care provision for the student meets Department requirements; and
- records the student's attendance using the E code and provide the student with a leave pass (staff only)

Guidance

- A section 24 arrangement is used for primary or secondary students who are temporarily attending another school or who wish to undertake an alternative attendance arrangement for short term programs provided by another school or training organisation away from the student's current school. The formal arrangement in writing between a principal and parent of a student under the age of 18, or student who has turned 18, allows the student to participate in an educational program delivered by a third party. This is not required for VET for school students.
- Section 24 arrangements may include courses provided by a TAFE, a private Registered Training Organisation (RTO),a Community Based Course, the At-Risk-School-Aged Students programs, engagement with School of Special Educational Needs: Sensory and Medical/Mental Health or temporary attendance at another school.
- The principal should review the alternative attendance arrangement in cases of persistent student absence.
- Vocational Education and Training Courses including VET for school students, School Based Apprenticeships (SBA), School Based Traineeships (SBT), Aboriginal School Based Training (ASBT) and Pre-Apprenticeships in Schools (PAiS) or Workplace Learning (WPL) which are part of the educational program of the school and contribute to a student's Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE), do not require a section 24 arrangement.
- Students in Years 11 or 12 are able to participate in an approved full-time option other than school under

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.

a Notice of Arrangements. Refer to the Alternatives to full-time schooling website for further information.

- Refer to Organise an alternative attendance arrangement (staff only) for further information.

2.7.1 Access to the curriculum for students with illness and/or health conditions

Where a student has a mental or physical illness and/or health care needs which may impact their ability to attend the usual school site, the principal:

- communicates with the parent of a student under the age of 18 regarding the nature of a health-related absence and health professional recommendations to provide reasonable and appropriate adjustments to curriculum access are implemented by the school;
- informs the student and parent of a student under the age of 18 of the student's right to an educational program and actively engage the parent and the student in negotiating access to a relevant program; and
- arranges access to an educational program for a student who has a physical and/or mental health condition and/or health care needs and who cannot attend the regular site.

Guidance

- School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health (SSEN: MMH) teachers provide in-home educational support to school students in the metropolitan area who cannot attend school for medical reasons. The program targets students likely to be absent from school for more than 10 days who have a medical certificate.
- Refer to the Health resources in the Student Attendance Toolkit (staff only) for further information.
- Refer to School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health for further information.
- For information about Liaison teachers based in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) clinics in non-metropolitan regions, refer to Our Programs on the SSEN: MMH website.
- For longer-term health conditions that preclude school attendance, a section 24 arrangement with, or enrolment at, the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) may be the best way for the student to access an appropriate educational program.

3. Definitions

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.

A student is considered to be in attendance when present for, or participating in the school's formal instructional program. Typically, this will be on the school site, but also includes off-site arrangements that respond to the student's learning needs and circumstances.

Attendance Panel

A panel appointed under the School Education Act 1999 (the Act) in circumstances where a principal is of the opinion the reasons given for absence have persistently:

been not genuine; or
not amounted to sufficient cause.
The primary function of an attendance panel is to provide advice or assistance to students and parents in order to restore attendance and ensure that future absences only occur where there is reasonable cause. Community representation on the panel provides a fresh perspective on the causes of absence and ways in which these may be addressed.

Prosecution of a student or parents under section 38 of the Act cannot be commenced unless a non-compliance certificate has been issued by the attendance panel to which the child's case was referred. This certifies that reasonably practicable steps have been taken to address persistent absence, but non-compliance has continued.

Authorised absence

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

Community

Local people, groups and organisations in and around schools in remote, regional and metropolitan areas. This includes, but is not limited to, students, families, principals, teachers and other school staff, community leaders, local government agency staff and not-for-profit organisations.

Documented plan

A documented plan records the actions in place to address the specific learning support needs of an individual student.

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.

Parent

In relation to a child, means a person who at law has responsibility for the long-term care, welfare and development of the child; or the day-to-day care, welfare and development of the child.

Students whose whereabouts are unknown (SWU) list

A list, usually referred to as the SWU List, that contains the names of children who are missing from schools and educational programs in Western Australia. This list is distributed by the Department to administrators in non-government schools and some other agencies by agreement between the parties.

4. Related documents

Relevant Legislation or Authority

Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)

Public Sector Management Act 1994 (WA)

School Education Act 1999 (WA)

School Education Regulations 2000 (WA)

Related department policies

Duty of Care for Students for Public Schools policy

Enrolment in Public Schools policy

Excursions in Public Schools Procedure

Student Behaviour in Public Schools policy

Student Health Care in Public Schools policy

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.

Other documents

Assist with a family court order involving your students (staff only)

Develop a responsible parenting agreement (staff only)

Every day matters: 10-point plan to improve attendance

Organise an attendance advisory panel (staff only)

Request to become a badged attendance officer (staff only)

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Department of Education School, College and Campus Records

School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health (Guidelines)

Students Whose Whereabouts Are Unknown Flowchart

Students Whose Whereabouts Are Unknown Guidelines

5. Contact information

Policy manager:

Director, Student Engagement and Wellbeing

T: (08) 9402 6100

Policy contact officer:

Principal Consultant, Student Engagement and Wellbeing

T: (08) 9402 6448

6. History of changes

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.

Effective date	1 January 2015
Last update date **Procedure version no.**	3.0
Notes	Major review undertaken, Student Attendance Policy and Procedures endorsed by Director General on 19 September 2014.

Effective date	1 January 2015
Last update date	16 July 2015
Procedure version no.	3.1
Notes	Updated links as per approval D15/0265969

Effective date	1 January 2015
Last update date	11 August 2016
Procedure version no.	3.2
Notes	Updated contact information D16/0522722

Effective date	1 January 2015
Last update date	31 July 2017
Procedure version no.	3.3
Notes	Updated links as per approval D17/0323036

Effective date	1 January 2015
Last update date	22 February 2018
Procedure version no.	3.4
Notes	Updated links as per approval D18/0078789

Effective date	1 January 2015
Last update date	3 October 2018
Procedure version no.	3.5

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.

Notes	Minor changes to include reference to Public Schools D18/0151652 and updated legislation links D18/0207680.
Effective date	1 January 2015
Last update date	11 March 2020
Procedure version no.	3.6
Notes	Minor change to contact details. D20/0130875
Effective date	1 January 2015
Last update date	8 February 2021
Procedure version no.	3.7
Notes	Minor changes to replace the Regional Executive Director position title with Director of Education D20/0647278.
Effective date	19 July 2021
Last update date **Procedure version no.**	4.0
Notes	Major review undertaken. Endorsed by Director General on 23 November 2020 D20/0629917.
Effective date	19 July 2021
Last update date **Procedure version no.**	4.1
Notes	Minor change to update links and definitions D20/0657410
Effective date	19 July 2021
Last update date **Procedure version no.**	4.2
Notes	Minor change to guidance D21/0147760

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.

Effective date	19 July 2021
Last update date **Procedure version no.**	4.3
Notes	Minor change to s3.4 to be consistent with legislation D21/0320603

Effective date	19 July 2021
Last update date **Procedure version no.**	4.4
Notes	Minor changes to update links and Other Documents D21/0388622

Effective date	19 July 2021
Last update date	4 October 2023
Procedure version no.	4.5
Notes	Minor changes to update contact details D23/1582068

Effective date	8 September 2026
Last update date **Procedure version no.**	5.0
Notes	Major review approved by the Director General on 3 August 2026 (D26/0116687). Updated definition and language of documented plan.

7. More information

Supporting content

No supporting content found.

Procedure review date

8 September 2029

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.