



Catholic Schools Office Diocese of Lismore

STUDENT NON-ATTENDANCE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

SOP Number:	SNASOP02:02
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SOP Contact Officer:	Assistant Director – Learning Services
Related Documentation:	Catholic Education in the Diocese of Lismore Foundational Values for Catholic Identity and Mission. Student Attendance Policy and Standard Operating Procedure Parent and Caregiver Complaints Policy and Standard Operating Procedure Privacy Policy and Standard Operating Procedure <i>Education Act 1990</i>

RATIONALE

Regular attendance at school for every student is essential if students are to achieve their potential, and increase their career and life options. Student non-attendance at school places the student's learning, social and emotional growth at risk.

Schools in partnerships with families are responsible for promoting the regular attendance of students and for ensuring that non-attendance is addressed effectively. While families are legally responsible for the regular attendance of their children, school staff, as part of their duty of care, record and monitor part and whole day absences. The school has legal obligations to follow up with the family when non-attendance becomes a concern.

A set of procedures for managing student non-attendance is outlined in this document.

A separate policy for monitoring Student Attendance is in place. The Student Non-Attendance Standard Operating Procedure needs to be read in conjunction with Sections 1 and 2 of the Attendance Policy and Procedures.

Section 1 relates to Responsibilities (parents, school staff, the Principal, the Catholic Schools Office). Section 2 relates to School Attendance Records Requirements.

In both the Policy and Standard Operating Procedures an attendance concern is defined as 3 consecutive days of unapproved leave or any 5 days of unapproved leave in 10 days or any other pattern observed (such as regular Fridays away).

SCOPE

This Standard Operating Procedure applies to all staff and students in parish schools in the Diocese of Lismore.

1. DEFINITIONS

1.1 **Attendance concern** means the following:

- I. Less than 95% attendance or;
- II. 3 consecutive days of unapproved leave; or
- III. Any 5 days of unapproved leave or any other pattern observed (such as regular Mondays and Fridays away or habitual partial non-attendance).

1.2 **Attendance Improvement Meetings** involve the student and addresses school concerns, allows the family the opportunity to respond and a written agreement to improve attendance is developed. Where a student presents with a medical diagnosis related to anxiety, phobia or similar, additional outside professional support may be required in the construction of the Attendance Improvement Plan.

1.3 **Attendance Improvement Plan (AIP) means** a plan developed by the school in collaboration with the student and family with the involvement of any support services used by the student, if appropriate. The purpose is to develop a mutually agreed upon plan to assure regular school attendance. Attendance Improvement Plans provide all parties with the opportunity to identify, understand and explore the issues contributing to the student's non-attendance, at a school level.

- 1.4 **Chronic absenteeism** means the following:
- I. Less than 80% attendance; or
 - II. 11 to 20 days of unapproved leave (not necessarily consecutive).
- 1.5 **Complex Absenteeism** means the following:
- I. Less than 70% attendance; or
 - II. 21 days of unapproved leave (not necessarily consecutive).
- 1.6 **Compulsory Schooling Conference - Attendance** means a conference for the purpose of ensuring a student is provided with compulsory education. It aims to bring together the family, student, a member of the school executive nominated by the Principal, and where appropriate, relevant agencies to help families to resolve the underlying issues that have led to the student's unsatisfactory attendance. Conferences are convened by a CSO facilitator who is an appropriately trained and authorised person. A Compulsory Schooling Conference may be authorised by the CSO or ordered by the Children's Court. Students under the age of 12 are not required to attend Compulsory Schooling Conferences. These conferences are sometimes referred to as Secretary's Conferences referring to the facilitator as being a representative of the Secretary of the Department of Education and Communities.
- 1.7 **Emerging absenteeism** means the following:
- I. Less than 90% attendance; or
 - II. 3 to 10 days of unapproved leave (not necessarily consecutive).
- 1.8 **Undertakings** means written agreed commitments from the family and students over the age of 12 regarding action that will be taken to resolve the student's unsatisfactory attendance. Undertakings are formalised at Compulsory Schooling Conferences and can be entered into evidence in any future court action.

2. PROCEDURES FOR ADDRESSING STUDENT NON-ATTENDANCE

Please refer to Appendix 1 for a School Action Plan that provides a simplified model of the procedures for addressing student non-attendance.

It is the responsibility of class teachers/home room teachers to monitor the attendance of students in their class and discuss concerns and possible actions with an identified staff member in their school, for example Assistant Principal, Pastoral Leader.

The ongoing monitoring of attendance data should be the responsibility of the school Pastoral Care/ Wellbeing team. Non-attendance can be turned around if data is used to identify and connect the school with the family as early as possible so as to engage the student in support that motivates them to attend school and address challenging barriers.

CSO staff assist schools in the monitoring of non-attendance.

- 2.1 **Attendance Concern.** (Less than 95% Attendance. This refers to unexplained absences only).

The following action is required in respect of attendance concerns:

- I. Daily phone call to the family on the occasion of each unexplained absence;
- II. Discussions and monitoring with the student in regards to attendance; and
- III. Review the student's support and implement pastoral care and learning strategies that address the needs of the student.

2.2 **Emerging Absenteeism.** (Less than 90% Attendance. This refers to both explained and/or unexplained absences).

The following action is required in respect of emerging absenteeism:

- I. Alert communicated to Principal or delegate who will review the non-attendance. At this point a decision may need to be made as to whether or not the inclusion of approved leave, family holidays and other leave contributing to the total percentage warrants investigation or just continued monitoring. If further action is required, the principal or delegate contacts the family to discuss the matter. If the family's response to the telephone call is satisfactory continued monitoring of the situation would follow. If the family explanation was not accepted the school would proceed with the following steps;
- II. Registered letter to the family detailing concern in response to initial contact as per Point I above. (See Appendix 2. Sample Letter 1. Emerging Absenteeism. Notification of family of school based meeting and Attendance Improvement Plan);
- III. School Counsellor and other appropriate school staff e.g. Year Coordinator, Pastoral Care Coordinator and IEW are notified and involved in formulating attendance improvement strategies; and
- IV. Appropriate medical or cultural advice and response sought from relevant personnel and appropriate strategies implemented. This step could include obtaining a medical diagnosis related to anxiety, phobia or similar and additional outside professional support may be required;
- V. The student, family, school staff and appropriate CSO Officers meet and formulate an Attendance Improvement Plan. (See Appendix 3. Attendance Improvement Plan Template). The appropriate CSO Officer is the Inclusion Officer if the student has a diagnosed disability, the Aboriginal Education Officer if the student is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or the Pastoral Care Officer in all other situations.

2.3 **Chronic Absenteeism.** (Less than 80% attendance. This refers to both explained and/or unexplained absences).

The following action is required in respect of chronic absenteeism:

- I. Alert communicated to Principal or delegate who will review the non-attendance. At this point a decision may need to be made as to whether or not the inclusion of approved leave, family holidays and other leave contributing to the total percentage warrants investigation or just continued monitoring. If further action is required, the principal or delegate contacts the family to discuss the matter. If the family's response to the telephone call is satisfactory continued monitoring of the situation would follow. If the family explanation was not accepted the school would proceed with the following steps;
- II. Registered letter to the family detailing continued concern in response to contact as per Point 1 above. (See Appendix 4. Sample Letter 2. Chronic Absenteeism. Notification to family of School Based Meeting to Review Attendance Improvement Plan.)
- III. The school learning team is reconvened to meet with the student and family to review the Attendance Improvement Plan. A Consultant should attend this meeting to emphasise the role of the CSO in non-attendance.
- IV. A *Risk of Significant Harm Education Neglect Report (ROSH)* <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au> for educational neglect should be

submitted for any 30 Days of Unapproved Leave in 100 Days or if the student's attendance should fall below 80%; and

- V. A student whose whereabouts is unknown and has been absent for 10 days should be reported to attendance@det.nsw.edu.au using a D3 Form from the CSO Intranet site.

2.4 Complex Absenteeism. (Less than 70% attendance. This refers to both explained and/or unexplained absences.).

The following action is required in respect of complex absenteeism:

- I. Alert communicated to Principal or delegate who will review the non-attendance. At this point a decision may need to be made as to whether or not the inclusion of approved leave, family holidays and other leave contributing to the total percentage warrants investigation or just continued monitoring. If further action is required, the school would proceed with the following steps;
- II. School registered letter to family detailing continued concern and to indicate that the matter has been referred to the CSO (See Appendix 5. Sample Letter 3. Complex Absenteeism. Notification to family of referral of non-attendance to CSO.
- II. Referral of Non-Attendance Concern to the CSO Audit and Compliance Officer (See Appendix 6. Referral to CSO of Non Attendance Concern).
- III. CSO Audit and Compliance Officer, after consultation with the appropriate school and CSO staff, will determine whether to proceed with a Compulsory School Conference, Referral to Legal or an Abandonment of Enrolment process.

3. PROCEDURE FOR AN ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- 3.1 When a student non-attendance issue is identified, the parents and student should be contacted and given the opportunity to provide a response at a formal meeting, an Attendance Improvement Meeting (See 1.2 Definitions).
- 3.2 Attendance Improvement Meetings should be chaired by the appropriate school representative, either the Principal, Assistant Principal or designated staff member. Also in attendance should be a CSO representative, such as a CSO Officer, School Services Consultant or Pastoral Care Consultant.
- 3.3 The outcome of the meeting should be the development of an Attendance Improvement Plan (See 1.3 Definitions). The AIP should include mutually identified strategies that will assist in improving attendance. Strategies should be achievable, and the Plan should be signed by the student if over 12 years of age, parent/s and school representative. (See Appendix 3 – Attendance Improvement Plan template.
- 3.4 More than one Attendance Improvement Meeting may be held at the discretion of the Principal.
- 3.5 If the attendance issue remains unresolved, the matter may be referred to the CSO for a Compulsory Schooling Conference.

4. PROCEDURE FOR A COMPULSORY SCHOOLING CONFERENCE

Compulsory Schooling Conferences require CSO support by a trained officer acting as Convenor of the conference.

- 4.1 Compulsory Schooling Conferences may be held when a referral is made by a school or when an issue is identified by an outside agency including the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) or the when the matter is made known to the CSO through the family or a member of the community.
- 4.2 The CSO Audit and Compliance Officer will appoint an appropriately trained convenor to facilitate the Compulsory Schooling Conference.
- 4.3 The convenor decides on who attends the conference, consults with the Principal, contacts the family by telephone and registered letter and considers both the agenda, venue and the approach. This approach is consistent with Department of Education models for such conferences.
- 4.4 Compulsory Schooling Conferences maybe conducted at a venue outside the school.
- 4.5 The purpose of a Compulsory Schooling Conference is to secure undertakings from the family and the students to improve the attendance situation in a non-threatening manner. It aims to bring together the family, student, a member of the school executive nominated by the Principal, and where appropriate, relevant agencies to help the family to resolve the underlying issues that have led to the student's unsatisfactory attendance.
- 4.6 Students under 12 are not required to attend a conference. However, a representative from another agency if deemed relevant to the non-attendance of the student may attend. This might be a representative from Headspace or a Counsellor.
- 4.7 Following a Compulsory Schooling Conference, a set of agreed undertakings (See Appendix 7 Compulsory Schooling Conference-Attendance Agreed Undertakings) are signed by the family and student (if over 12 years of age) and provided to all parties present. These undertakings are expressed in the Department of Education format and importantly do not include any undertakings by the school or staff.
- 4.8 The Principal will contact the CSO Audit and Compliance Officer if the undertakings are not being followed. Undertakings are written agreed commitments regarding action that will be taken to resolve the student's unsatisfactory attendance. Undertakings can also be obtained with the family at any time and independently of the conferencing process. They can be entered into evidence in any future court action.
- 4.9 The Audit and Compliance Officer will stay in contact with the school.
- 4.10 The Audit and Compliance Officer will notify the Assistant Director – Learning Services if the undertakings are unobserved and the matter is to be referred to legal action.
- 4.11 Legal advice may be sought from CSNSW if the undertakings continue to be unobserved or the matter is to be referred for legal action.

5. FURTHER MEASURES IF THE COMPULSORY SCHOOLING CONFERENCE UNDERTAKINGS ARE UNOBSERVED

- 5.1 If previous measures have been unsuccessful in improving student attendance, the matter may be referred to the Department of Education via the CSNSW for an application to be made to the Children's Court for a School Attendance Order and/or a Compulsory Schooling Conference Order.

- 5.2 Continued non-attendance may result in prosecution by the Department of Education against either the family or student in the Children's Court or Local Court.
- 5.3 An earlier referral to the CSNSW can be considered particularly when Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) issues to the student are observed by the school or other agencies and reported to the school.

6. APPLICATIONS TO THE CHILDREN'S COURT

- 6.1 An application to the Children's Court for a School Attendance Order and/or a Compulsory Schooling Conference Order is made to the CSNSW who refer the matter to the Department of Education.
- 6.2 An application should be made by the appropriate CSO Officer, not by the Compulsory Schooling Conference convenor.
- 6.3 There are 3 versions of an application to the Children's Court that can be made:
 - I. Action against both parents/carers;
 - II. Action against a single parent/carer; or
 - III. Action against the student.
- 6.4 Application templates are located on the CSO intranet.
- 6.5 An application to the Children's Court is to be accompanied by a report in support of the application. Reports can be in support of any of the applications referred to in 5.3.
- 6.6 A Court ordered Compulsory Schooling Conference will follow the same procedure as set out in **3. Procedure for a Compulsory Schooling Conference**.
- 6.7 If, after a Compulsory Schooling Order or a Court ordered Compulsory Schooling Conference there is still no improvement in attendance, the Department of Education may then prosecute the family in the Local Court, or the student in the Children's Court for breaching Court Orders.

7. ABANDONMENT OF ENROLMENT

- 7.1 In considering referral for legal action, consideration should be given to the individual circumstances of the non-attendance matter, including the impact of prosecution on a family and the likelihood of legal action resulting in improved attendance.
- 7.2 An alternative to legal action may be in considering prolonged non-attendance as an abandonment of enrolment. An application to have an enrolment deemed as abandoned should be made to the Assistant Director – Learning Services.

8. RECORD KEEPING

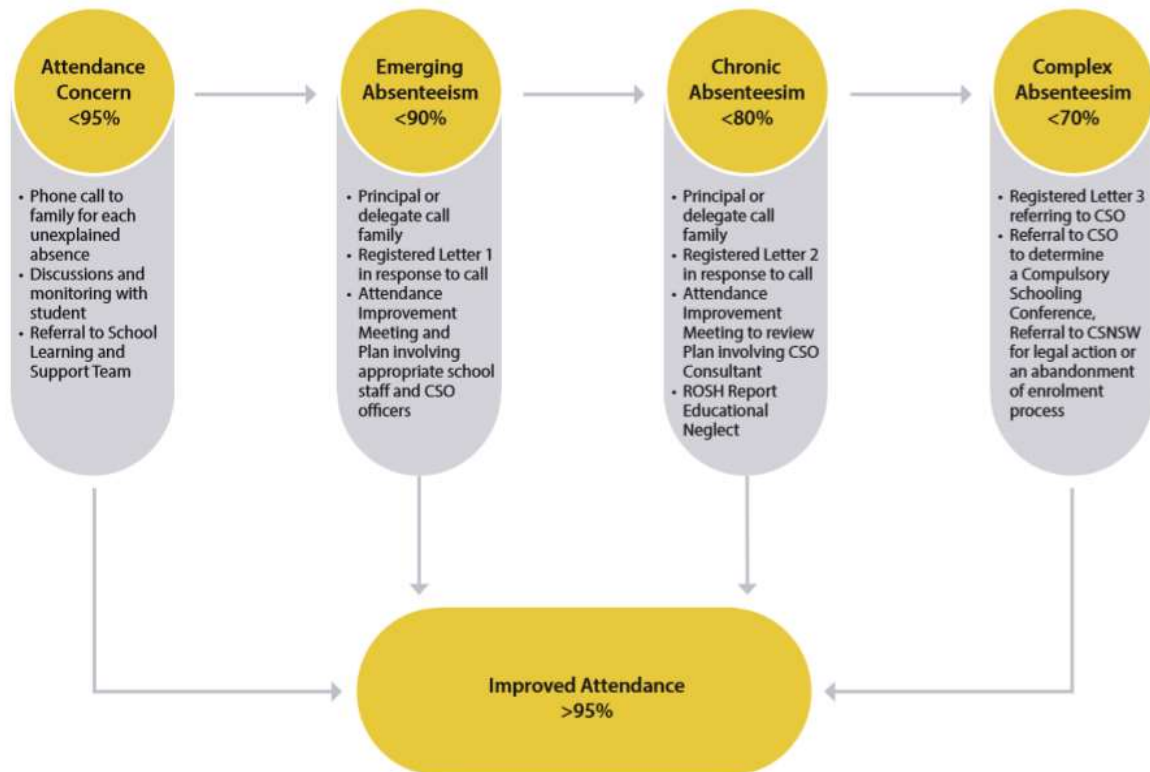
- 8.1 Schools should document the range of strategies they have tried to address a student's poor school attendance. Schools using Schoolworx are advised to store all records in regards to non-attendance in the student's Schoolworx file so there will be no need to duplicate records and provide them to staff should the matter need to be referred to the CSO.
- 8.2 The Mandatory Reporter Guide has been developed to assist staff in making decisions about the nature and seriousness of child protection concerns and what

action should be taken in response to these concerns. This guide can be accessed at <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au>. A copy of this report and the response should be attached to the student's file in the Welfare tab.

- 8.3 If a report to Community Services is made, but the report is 'screened out' by Community Services as not reaching the suspected risk of significant harm threshold, documentation must be kept in the Welfare TAB.
- 8.4 Records need to be made and kept in relation to safety, welfare and wellbeing actions and decisions. These records can be required or requested under various legislation. Best practice for record keeping includes the following:
 - I. Detailed records to be kept by each staff person involved in the handling of safety, welfare and wellbeing concerns;
 - II. In relation to handling of child protection and wellbeing concerns, it is important to record the reasons why actions and decisions are taken; and
 - III. A record must be kept when a report has been made to Community Services or contact has been made with the CSO.



SCHOOL ACTION PLAN - NON ATTENDANCE



Sample Letter 1.

Appendix 2

Emerging Absenteeism. Notification of school based meeting and Attendance Improvement Plan.

(School Letter Head)

<Insert Date>

<Parent/Carer>

< Insert Parent Address>

Dear < Insert Parent's/Carer's Name/s>

As discussed in our recent telephone call the school would like to meet to assist you with strategies to improve your child's attendance.

We note that <Student First Name> has had <Insert number> days absent. Your child's attendance rate is currently <Insert> % and <Insert> % partial attendance.

There can be a variety of reasons why children's attendance can be a concern, it is important that we work together to improve <Student First Name>'s attendance.

It should be noted that the *NSW Education Act (1990)* and the Catholic Schools Office Lismore require Parents/Carers to ensure that children of compulsory age attend school on each day that the school is open for instruction.

Meeting details

Date: <Insert>

Time: <Insert>

Present at the meeting will be < Include teaching staff and appropriate CSO Officers>.

During the meeting we will document an Attendance Improvement Plan to assist <Student First Name>'s attendance.

Please contact me if you require the date or time of the meeting to change.

Yours sincerely,

<Insert Name>
(Principal)

Attendance Improvement Plan Template

Appendix 3

ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

School		Student		Grade		Date of Birth	
Does the student have a Personalised Plan?				Is the student Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?			
Attendees at Meeting (include appropriate CSO Officer or Consultant)						Date of Meeting	
Attendance Data Patterns, days this year absent, previous years							
Student Strengths and Interests							
Any underlying psychological condition?							
Primary reason/s for absences		<input type="checkbox"/> Academic difficulties <input type="checkbox"/> Not having friends <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/> Teasing <input type="checkbox"/> Separation difficulties <input type="checkbox"/> Poor sleeping patterns <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties in the playground <input type="checkbox"/> Transport <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties with a teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Medical/Illness <input type="checkbox"/> Truancy <input type="checkbox"/> Traumatic event <input type="checkbox"/> Family event <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty returning after being away <input type="checkbox"/> Staying at home is rewarding e.g. computer, TV, sleeping <input type="checkbox"/> Feels safe at home <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding school activities e.g. camp, swimming, excursion, sport <input type="checkbox"/> Other:					

Functional Profile Hypothesise reinforcers As a result of the primary reason/s selected above for absences what is the hypothesise?	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid fear/anxiety producing situations at school Examples: Bus, teachers, fire drill, school bell, and playgrounds and other physical features such as toilets, explaining to peers and/or staff where they have been. <input type="checkbox"/> Escape from negative social and/or evaluative situations Examples: Assessments, group work, interacting with peers at lunch time or sport <input type="checkbox"/> Attention-seeking Examples: Attention from a significant person or being anxious when separated. <input type="checkbox"/> To pursue rewards Examples: Able to pursue enjoyable experience such as computer, TV or sleep.
Explanation of hypothesise	
Attendance Goal	

Attendance Improvement Strategies:

Family Responsibilities	Student Responsibilities	School Responsibilities

Commencement Date of Plan		Review Date	
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Signatures:

Student		Family Member		Principal/Delegate	
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Review Recommendations	
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Chronic Absenteeism. Notification to family of school based meeting to review Attendance Improvement Plan.

(School Letterhead)

<Insert Date>

<Insert Parent(s)/Carer(s) Name(s)>

<Insert Parent Address>

Dear < Insert Parent's/Carer's Name/s>

As discussed in our recent telephone call <name>'s attendance is still a matter of concern and the strategies we implemented in consultation with you in the Attendance Improvement Plan do not seem to be working.

We note that <name > has had <Insert number> days absent. Your child's attendance rate is currently <Insert> % and <Insert> % partial attendance

The *NSW Education Act (1990)* and the Catholic Schools Office Lismore require Parents/Carers to ensure that children of compulsory age attend school on each day that the school is open for instruction.

I am obliged under the *NSW Education Act (1990)* to support the regular attendance of students therefore I request that you attend the school for an Attendance Meeting. The meeting will include the review of the Attendance Improvement Plan that was developed at a previous meeting and as agreed to by you and your child.

Meeting details

Date: <Insert>

Time: <Insert>

Present at the meeting will be < Include teaching staff and appropriate CSO Consultant>.

If you do not meaningfully engage in assisting the school with <name> attendance, then the matter may be referred for further action to the Catholic Schools Office Lismore.

It is important that you work with us to resolve the issue of <name> attendance.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature of Principal>
(Principal)

Sample Letter 3.

Appendix 5.

Complex Absenteeism. Notification to family of referral of non-attendance to CSO.

(School Letter Head)

<Insert Date>

<Parent/Carer>

< Insert Parent Address>

Dear < Insert Parent's/Carer's Name/s>

I refer to the attendance of <Student First Name> at school.

Despite our recent Attendance Improvement Meetings <Insert dates> and the strategies agreed to in the Attendance Improvement Plan <Insert date of plan> and reviewed on <insert date> there has been no significant improvement in your child's attendance.

I note that <Student First Name>'s attendance rate is currently <Insert> % and <Insert> % partial attendance.

As I am obliged under the NSW Education Act (1990) to support the regular attendance of students at school and therefore I have no option at this stage but to refer <Insert student's first name>'s non-attendance to the Catholic Schools Office Lismore for appropriate action, this may include a referral to the Department of Education for legal action.

A representative from the Office will contact you in regards to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

<Insert Name>
(Principal)

Referral to CSO Non-attendance Concern Form

Please email completed applications to CSO Audit and Compliance Officer and cc Parish School Consultant and if the student is Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander to the Diocesan Aboriginal Education Officer.

School:	
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Section A: Student Details

Surname		Given Names	
Date of Birth			

Background (Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander/English as a Second Language/Other)	
Language spoken at home	
Does the student have any risk factors such as mental health issues, disability, drug and or alcohol abuse of a parent? Please provide details.	
Has the student a history of violence or suspension? Please provide details.	
Is there a court order awarding custody? If so, please provide details.	
Are there other known risk factors – such as domestic violence, mental health issues, disability, drug and or alcohol abuse of a parent? (Please provide details).	
Details of any other agencies/health professionals involved with the child or young person, and where possible, contact details for these other agencies. These may include agencies such as Community Health, Community Services, Paediatricians, Psychologists, Counsellors, Police or Juvenile Justice.	

Section B: School Intervention Records

(Please attach electronic copies of the following documents **if they are not accessible on Schoolworx**)

Attendance Concern

Date and details of telephone calls to family
Notes detailing discussion with student
Record of School Learning and Support Team Meetings

Emerging Absenteeism

Date and details of telephone call to family by principal or delegate
Registered Letter 1 and confirmation of delivery
Attendance Improvement Plan and Meeting Notes

Chronic Absenteeism

Date and details of any telephone calls or contact by principal or delegate with family
Registered Letter 2 and confirmation of delivery
Attendance Improvement Plan and Meeting Notes
ROSH Report

Complex Absenteeism

Registered Letter 3 and confirmation of delivery

Date of Referral:

Principal's Signature:

Compulsory Schooling Conference – Attendance Agreed Undertakings

Section 22C (5) (c) Education Act 1990

Student's Name	
Venue	
Date	
Meeting Participants	

We the parents agree to (up to 6 undertakings)	
As the young person involved (over 12 years of age) I agree to (up to 6 undertakings)	
Signed Parent 1	
Signed Parent 2	
Student	
Review Date	

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Approval Date	Authorised By	Notes
1	May 2017	Assistant Director – Learning Services	Originally released
2	August 2019	CSO Executive	Revised version