



# Attendance Policy

## Introduction

Plenty River College (the College) is an independent, specialist senior secondary school, delivering the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) and VCE Vocational Major (VM). It provides a safe and inclusive learning environment for young people aged 15-20 years who may have been disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education.

Plenty River College is a school of opportunities in which all students are empowered to achieve their personal best. Our mission is to assist students to develop life and work skills and achieve in their learning by:

- re-engaging them in education;
- fostering their social and emotional development; and
- providing a supportive and safe environment for them.

## Rationale

Under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, schooling is compulsory for students aged between 6 and 17 years unless an exemption from enrolment or attendance has been granted.

Daily attendance at the College is important for all students to succeed in education and to ensure they do not fall behind both socially and developmentally. College participation maximizes life opportunities for our students by providing them with education and support networks. Attendance helps our students develop important skills, knowledge and values that set them up for further learning and participation in their community.

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- ensure that all enrolled students of compulsory school age attend the College every day it is open for instruction;
- ensure students, staff and parents have a shared understanding of the importance of student attendance;
- explain to the College community the key practices and procedures the College has in place to:
  - support, monitor and maintain student attendance; and
  - record, monitor and follow up student absences.

## Scope

This policy applies to the Executive Principal, Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader, teaching staff, the Student Support Team, administration staff, parents and students at the College.

## Definitions

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Approved reasons for student absence</b>                | A reason for student absence that has been approved by the College.   |
| <b>Attendance rate</b>                                     | Students must maintain an attendance rate at the College of 80% of scheduled classes  |
| <b>Attendance Improvement Plan</b>                         | An Attendance Improvement Plan will be implemented for a student where their attendance is of concern. This plan will be developed with the student, so they have ownership over the plan, together with student's parent.                                      |
| <b>College community</b>                                   | All members of the college staff – both teaching and non-teaching, all students enrolled at the College and all parents.  |
| <b>Parent/s</b>  | Includes parents, guardians, step-parents and/or carers as listed in the College Enrolment Form.  |
| <b>Student</b>   | Child or young person named on the College's Enrolment Form.  |
| <b>Student Health Support Plan</b>                         | Plan developed for students at the College who have an identified health support need. This plan is developed in consultation with the student's parents.   |
| <b>Student Support Group</b>                               | A Student Support Group is normally made up of made up of the Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader, relevant teachers and education support staff. If appropriate, the Student Support Group can seek family involvement and support from specialist consultants. |
| <b>Student Support Team</b>                                | The Student Support Team comprises youth welfare workers and education support workers. Other specialists such as the College psychologist or external case managers may also be included or consulted.   |
| <b>Student Absence Learning Plan/Return to School Plan</b> | Students who are taking known extended absences or students who have been away for extended absences from the College must have a Student Absence Learning Plan/Return to School Plan to support their education.   |
| <b>Unapproved reasons for student absence</b>              | A reason for student absence that has not been approved by the College.   |

## Responsibility

1. The College Board is responsible for authorising this policy.
2. The Executive Principal is responsible for:

- Articulating to the College community that the College has high expectations about student attendance;
- Creating a safe, supportive learning environment where all students experience success through active participation and engagement in purposeful learning through attendance at the College;
- Whole-College modelling of punctuality including staff and students;
- Ensuring that consistent, rigorous procedures to monitor and record student absences are in place;
- Ensuring that data-driven attendance improvement strategies are implemented; and
- Linking with local community groups and agencies to maximise prevention and early intervention strategies such as:
  - Clear written and verbal statements are made regularly to parents and students about the College's attendance expectations;
  - Student attendance appears as a regular item on the College meeting agendas;
  - Delegation of responsibilities to all staff, with a key member of staff leading attendance improvement initiatives; and
  - Understanding the causal factors of absence and the need for targeted interventions, and communicating this to the College community.

3. The Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader is responsible for:

- Monitoring of student attendance data and the immediate follow up of individual student absences;
- Organising attendance focused meetings with parents and students;
- Forming Student Support Groups to enable a coordinated response to individual student attendance issues;
- Individual student attendance goal setting through the development of an Attendance Improvement Plan (**see Appendix 1 for more details**);
- Formal procedures for supporting the learning of a student absent for an extended period by developing a Student Absence Learning Plan/Return to School Plan (**see Appendix 2 for more details**); and
- Referring individual students and parents to community agencies for additional support.

4. Teachers are responsible for:

- Promoting student attendance through clear statements and expectations in their classrooms;
- Ensuring that student attendance is recorded twice per day in their classes; and

- Pursuing and recording an explanation for every absence on the attendance roll.
5. The Student Support Team are responsible for:
- Telephoning/texting parents of any absent student each day; and
  - Communicating the reasons for student absences to the classroom teacher, to be recorded on the class roll.
6. Administration staff are responsible for:
- Collating attendance data weekly using Synergenic or an equivalent student management system, and submitting the data to the Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader; and
  - Enabling the College to collate data according to reasons for absence.
7. A College Parent is responsible for:
- Ensuring that the student attends College at all times when the College is open for instruction;
  - Promoting and supporting the student to achieve full attendance and participation in the College;
  - Notifying the College of the student's absence as soon as possible;
  - Notifying the College in advance of any prolonged student absence;
  - Supporting the student's learning during a continued or prolonged absence; and
  - Ensuring that their contact details are up-to-date.
8. A College Student is responsible for:
- Attending the College at all times when the College is open for instruction;
  - Arriving on time to the College, and attending every class where possible;
  - Provide a written explanation or verbal explanation from their parents when they have been absent from the College;
  - Remaining on College premises during the normal scheduled time unless they have permission to leave from both the College and their parents; and
  - Working cooperatively with the College to develop personal attendance improvement goals and strategies when their attendance has been inconsistent.

## **Implementation**

Students are expected to attend the College from 9.30am to 3.30pm every day of each term unless:

- there is an approved exemption from College attendance for the student;
- the student has a dual enrolment with another school and has only a partial enrolment in the College, or

- the student is registered for home schooling and has only a partial enrolment in the College for particular activities.

The College will identify individual students or cohorts who are vulnerable, and whose attendance is at risk and/or declining, and will work with these students and their parents to improve their attendance through a range of interventions and supports.

Students are expected to attend the College every day, arriving on time and prepared to learn. Students are encouraged to approach a teacher or a youth welfare worker to seek assistance if there are any issues that are affecting their attendance.

Parents are expected to ensure that students attend the College on time every day unless otherwise advised by the College, to communicate openly with the College, and to provide valid explanations for any absence.

Parents are expected to communicate with the Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader about any issues affecting their child's attendance, and work in partnership with the College to address any concerns.

Parents are expected to provide a reasonable explanation for a student's absence from the College and endeavour to schedule family holidays, appointments and other activities outside of College hours.

### **Supporting and promoting attendance**

Our College promotes student attendance by:

- providing programs that encourage positive decision making and assist students in managing conflict;
- involving students in planning and decision-making related to their learning and self-development;
- assigning a youth welfare worker to each class who will work with students and parents to support their attendance and provide wellbeing services or referrals to welfare and support agencies; and
- developing activities that encourage attendance, such as providing breakfast, light lunches and a range of sports and other activities.

### **Recording attendance**

The College will record attendance in every class to:

- meet legislative requirements;
- discharge the College's duty of care for all students; and
- meet Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority requirements for all students.

Attendance will be recorded by the classroom teacher twice per day, using Synergic /or compatible student management software.

If students are attending a College approved outside activity, the teacher in charge of the activity will record them as being present.

An Attendance Register (**see Appendix 3**) will record student attendance twice per day and record any given or apparent reason for student absences.

### Recording absences

For absences where there is no exemption in place, either a parent (for students under the age of 18 years) or the student (aged over 18 years) must provide an explanation on each occasion to the College.

Parents should notify the College of absences by:

- contacting reception if it is an unplanned absence, or
- informing the classroom teacher if it is a planned absence.

If a student is absent on a particular day and the College has not been previously notified by a parent, or the absence is otherwise unexplained, the College will notify parents by text or telephone. The College will attempt to contact parents as soon as practicable on the same day of the unexplained absence, allowing time for the parent to respond.

If contact cannot be made with the parent (due to incorrect contact details), the College will attempt to contact any emergency contact/s nominated on the student's file held by the College, where possible, on the day of the unexplained absence.

The College will keep a record of the reason given for each absence. The Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader will determine if the explanation provided is a **reasonable excuse** for the purposes of the parent meeting their responsibilities under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and the College's Attendance Policy.

Students at the College are required to maintain an attendance rate of **80%** for each unit of VCAL and VET.

Reasons for absences fall into two groups – **approved** or **unapproved** reasons.

Students therefore cannot miss more than **20%** of each unit of VCAL and VET for unapproved reasons.

Examples of approved and unapproved reasons for absence:

| Examples of approved reasons for absence and evidence required  | Examples of unapproved reasons for absence   |
|---|--|
| Illness – <i>medical certificate</i>  | Driving lessons  |
| Bereavement or attendance at a funeral–<br><i>notice from paper and note from home</i>                                      | Personal issues (without further explanation)  |
| Job interview – <i>letter from employer</i>   | Family commitments   |
| Medical/dental appointments (which cannot be arranged out of class time) – <i>medical certificate</i>                       | Assessment Task preparation for other VCAL or VET units  |
| Attendance at training and/or work placement for School Based Apprenticeship or VET program outside of Plenty River College | Part time work commitments with the exception of School Based Apprenticeship work placement and training |

| Examples of approved reasons for absence and evidence required   | Examples of unapproved reasons for absence              |
|--|---|
| Court appointments and counselling – <i>letter from the court or certificate of attendance from counsellor</i>                                       | Sleeping in or missing the bus<br>Car or bike breakdown |
| License testing (one attempt only) - <i>receipt</i>  | Supporting upset friends<br>Timetable mix-ups           |
| School refusal, if a plan is in place with parent to address causes and support student's return to the College – <i>Attendance Improvement Plan</i> | Centrelink appointments                                 |
| Cultural observance if the parent notified the College in advance – <i>note from home</i>  |   |
| Family holidays, where the parent notified the College in advance – <i>note from home</i>  |   |

If the College considers that the parent has provided a **reasonable excuse** for their student's absence, the absence will be marked as an **approved** absence.

If the Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader determines that no reasonable excuse has been provided, the absence will be marked as an **unapproved absence**.

If no explanation is provided by the parent within 10 school days of an absence, it will be recorded as an **unapproved absence** and recorded on the student's file.

### Attendance Monitoring:

In order to monitor attendance, our College will:

- check and record the daily attendance of all students;
- monitor attendance twice daily and identify absences from each class;
- identify the person(s) with responsibility for monitoring daily attendance;
- follow up unexplained absences on the day of a student's absence;
- notify parents of unsatisfactory attendance;
- maintain current contact details for parents; and
- accurately record attendance on student files.

### Managing non-attendance and supporting student engagement

Where students have been absent for more than 20% of each unit of VCAL or VET, the College will work collaboratively with parents, the student, and other professionals, where appropriate, to develop strategies to improve attendance, including:

- establishing a Student Support Group;
- implementing an Attendance Improvement Plan;
- developing or updating a Student Health Support Plan; and

- implementing a Student Absence Learning Plan/Return to School Plan for students who will be absent for an extended period.

The College understands that, from time to time, some students will need additional support and assistance. In collaboration with the student and their parent, the College will endeavour to provide this support when it is required through the Student Support Team, and Student Support Groups.

## **Communication**

1. This policy will be communicated to the College community through the College website.
2. College teachers and the Student Support Team will be informed of their obligations in relation to student attendance by:
  - attending the College induction program for new staff;
  - receiving a copy of this policy at the first staff meeting at start of the College year;
  - retaining 'student attendance' as an item on staff meeting agendas to facilitate improvement; and
  - receiving a copy of the College's Teacher Handbook
  - Parents and students will be informed through the Student and Parent/Guardian Handbook.



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| <b>Appendices:</b>   |
| Appendix 1: Attendance Improvement Plan<br>Appendix 2: Student Absence Learning/Return to Learning Plan<br>Appendix 3: Attendance Register Template  |
| <b>Related Policies:</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camps and Excursions</li> <li>• Child Safe</li> <li>• Child Safe Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Coronavirus</li> <li>• Duty of Care</li> <li>• External Providers</li> <li>• Student Behaviour Management</li> <li>• Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Inclusion</li> </ul> |
| <b>Related Legislation</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)</li> <li>• Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic)</li> <li>• Ministerial Order (MO) 1359: Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises</li> </ul>                                |

## Appendix 1: Attendance Improvement Plan



### Attendance Improvement Plan

An Attendance Improvement Plan should be implemented for a student where their attendance is of concern. This Plan (using the template below) should be developed with the student, so they have ownership over the plan, together with the student's parent and any support worker where appropriate.

#### Instructions

*Please add/delete wherever applicable when preparing the Attendance Improvement Plan from the examples and other suggestions given in each box below.*

|   |                             |                         |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Student Name:</b>  | <b>Class Group:</b>         | <b>Date of Meeting</b>  |
| <b>Attendees at meeting:</b>  |                             |                         |
| <b>Objectives of meeting:</b>   |                             |                         |
| E.g. to support student to improve their school attendance and to ensure she/he continues to achieve academically and feels socially connected to her/his peers.                              |                             |                         |
| <b>Background – attendance data</b>   |                             |                         |
| E.g. Over the past month/term the student has missed x days of school   |                             |                         |
| Analyse the student data and investigate relationship to such factors as day of the week, time of day, class/subject/timetable, gender/cultural groups, family obligations/commitments/issues |                             |                         |
| <b>The following areas are strengths and interests of the student.</b>  |                             |                         |
| Outline the student's strengths and interests so that the plan can use these as a means of engaging the student   |                             |                         |
| <b>The reasons the student finds it hard to get to school</b>   |                             |                         |
| <b>The following is an assessment of the student's work habits.</b>   |                             |                         |
| <b>Effort in class:</b>   | <b>Initiative in class:</b> | <b>Class behaviour:</b> |
| <b>The student's attendance goals are (for example):</b>  |                             |                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To attend three days a week for the rest of term 2</li> <li>2. To increase my attendance from 55% to 75% by the end of the term.</li> </ul>            |                             |                         |
| <b>Ensure the student's goals are SMART goals – specific, measurable, achievable, timely &amp; realistic</b>  |                             |                         |
| <b>The student will take the following actions to achieve their goal</b>  |                             |                         |
| Amongst other things, consider:   |                             |                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Morning and bedtime routines to enable to get to class on time each morning at 9.30am.</li> <li>Technology in the bedroom</li> </ul>                   |                             |                         |

**Staff will take the following actions to help the student achieve these goals**

Amongst other things, consider:

- Adjustments to curriculum e.g. concentrating on core or favourite subjects for a period of time e.g. providing additional scaffolds
- A staged return or temporary part time attendance
- Referrals to community agencies/supports
- Identifying a school-based support person and/or student support group
- A referral to the Careers and Pathways Advisor

**The student's parent will take the following actions to help the student achieve these goals**

Amongst other things, consider:

- Morning and bedtime routines
- Technology in the bedroom
- Communication with the College
- Accessing support from community agencies
- A visit to the family GP for a check-up

**The plan will be monitored in the following way:**

Amongst other things, consider:

- Attendance data
- Tasks completed
- Participation in class
- Student observations
- Parent observations
- College observations from teaching and youth support workers

**Implementation start date:****Review date:****Student Signature:****Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader Signature:****Notes**

Other factors to consider in the Student Attendance Improvement Plan:

- The important role relationships play in increasing connectedness/engagement;
- Identify a supportive staff member who can check in with the student;
- Some kind of reward system or a way of acknowledging the student's efforts to improve their attendance;
- Comprehensive learning assessments and additional supports or adjustments if required;
- Additional family support via community services;
- Referring the student to alternative programs, reengagement programs or local youth services;
- Structured Workplace Learning options.

## Appendix 2: Student Absence Learning/Return to School Plan



### Student Absence Learning Plan/Return to School Plan

Students who are taking extended absences from the College must have a Student Absence Learning Plan to support their education. This plan can also be used to develop a Return to School Plan for students who have been absent for an extended period

#### Instructions

The Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader is to complete the following template in consultation with the class teacher, student and parent

|  |  |                     |  |             |  |
|--|--|---------------------|--|-------------|--|
| <b>Student Name:</b>   |  | <b>Class Group:</b> |  | <b>Date</b> |  |
| <b>Reason for Absence</b>  |  |                     |  |             |  |
| <b>Date of last day at the College:</b>  |  |                     | <b>Date of return to the College:</b>                |             |  |
| <b>Description of educational plan</b>   |  |                     |  |             |  |
| Teachers should include the units as part of the learning programs the student will be missing while away. The learning program should enable the student to more easily re-engage in class activities when they return. |  |                     |  |             |  |
| <b>Activities for the student to undertake while away from the College</b>   |  |                     |  |             |  |
| E.g. if a student is travelling, what research can they undertake, or what presentations can be prepared.  |  |                     |  |             |  |
| <b>VCE VM or VPC Unit outcomes the student is to achieve</b>   |  |                     |  |             |  |
| Outline the student's strengths and interests so that the plan can use these as a means of engaging the student  |  |                     |  |             |  |
| <b>Resources the student will need while away</b>  |  |                     |  |             |  |
| <b>Agreed role of parent in supporting the student's learning program</b>  |  |                     |  |             |  |
| <b>Contact details for the student to stay in touch with the College;</b>  |  |                     |  |             |  |
| <b>Name of College contact person:</b>   |  |                     | <b>College telephone number:</b>                     |             |  |
| <b>Parent Signature:</b>   |  |                     | <b>Deputy Principal/Curriculum Leader Signature:</b> |             |  |

Appendix 3: Attendance Register



| ATTENDANCE REGISTER - TEMPLATE |                 |                   |                               |                |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| STUDENT NAME                   | Morning Session | Afternoon Session | Reason for absence (if known) | Parent Contact |
|                                |                 |                   |                               |                |
|                                |                 |                   |                               |                |
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