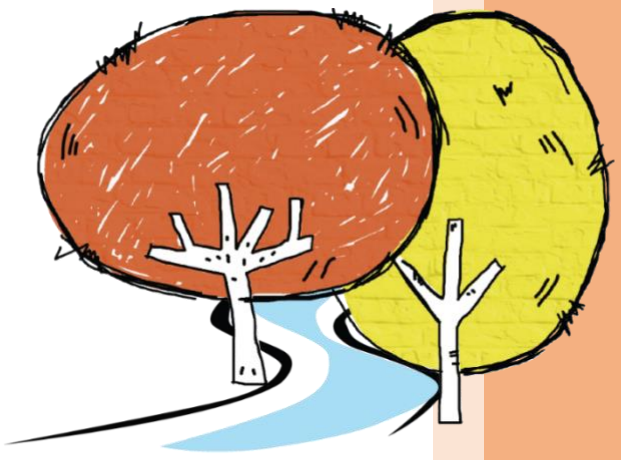


SOUTHSIDE

Montessori School

Student Attendance Policy and Procedures

Version Control

Version number	Date	Details	Approved by
V1.0	9 June 2022	AISNSW	Principal
V2.0	1 June 2023	Revised	Principal
V3.0	2024	Updated to reflect NESA Manual published September 2023	Principal
V4.0	March 2025	Revised procedures	Ratified by Board on:

Policy Statement

Southside Montessori School is committed to maintaining a safe, inclusive, and nurturing educational environment for all students. This document outlines our expectations and obligations to ensuring that each child receives quality education in compliance with legislative requirements for student attendance at school. It also aims to ensure that all staff, volunteers, contractors as well as parents/carers understand their roles and responsibilities for children's attendance at school.

It is the legal duty of parents/carers to ensure a child of compulsory school age (6-17yrs)) is enrolled at, and attending, a government school, registered non-government school or registered for home schooling. It is an offence under The Education Act 1990 if a parent fails to meet this duty.

This Policy and its Procedures apply to all staff, volunteers, contractors, and parents/carers at the school.
The Leadership Team is responsible for the effective implementation of this Policy.

Related policies:
SSM Exemption Policy and Procedures
SSM Enrolment Policy and Procedures

Legislative Registration Requirements

Southside Montessori School has a comprehensive attendance policy designed to ensure that every child receives an education of the highest quality. This policy helps ensure operations are aligned with the following legal obligations:

- The Education Act 1990: requires the school to maintain a register of enrolment and attendance, monitor attendance, follow-up absences, implement intervention strategies to improve student engagement and school attendance, as well as exercise the Minister's delegation for exemptions.
- The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) Registered and Accredited Individual Non-government Schools (NSW) Manual (2023) – section B7: requires the Principal of the School to keep a register, in a form approved by the Minister, of the daily attendances of all children at the school. Absences and variations to attendance will be recorded using the Minister's codes.
- ACECQA Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety - Delivery of children to, and collection from, education and care service premises.
- The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) Registered and Accredited Individual Non-government Schools (NSW) Manual (2023) – section B2: requires the school to participate in annual reporting to determine the performance measures relating to student attendance and management of unsatisfactory or non-attendance.

Rationale

Building upon the core tenets of Montessori education, we assert that consistent school attendance is a fundamental prerequisite for a child's optimal development. Our carefully curated prepared environment thrives on continuity, allowing children to immerse themselves in learning experiences that foster deep concentration and self-directed exploration. Interruptions can disrupt these critical work cycles, hindering the development of independence and the ability to absorb knowledge in a sequential, meaningful way.

The Montessori classroom is a vibrant social ecosystem, where children learn valuable interpersonal skills through collaboration and interaction. Regular attendance cultivates a strong sense of belonging and community, vital for emotional well-being and social competence. By consistently participating, children capitalise on sensitive periods for learning, crucial stages of growth.

Punctuality demonstrates respect for the prepared environment and the work of others, allowing for a smooth transition into the school day and minimising disruption. Grace and courtesy are integral to our community, and arriving on time allows children to fully participate in the social dynamics of the classroom, practicing respectful interactions and contributing to a harmonious atmosphere.

In essence, attendance is an act of respect—respect for the prepared environment, for the learning community, and for the child's own inherent drive to learn and grow. We view parents as essential partners in this endeavour, and we are committed to working collaboratively to support every child's consistent engagement in their educational journey.

Daily Attendance Register

A student is marked absent if they are not present on the school's premises. This includes where there is a variation to the student's attendance, for example where the student is engaging in their schooling at another location such as during an excursion.

If a student is absent, the attendance register records a full or partial absence, and an attendance register code will be used to identify an explanation of student absence or variation in attendance using the Minister's codes.

It is at the Principal's discretion to determine the Minister's code that will be recorded in the attendance register for the absence.

The Principal has the discretion to accept or decline a reason for a student's absence.

It is at the Principal's discretion to require documentation to substantiate an absence.

The Principal or delegate retains the attendance register for a period of seven years after the last entry is made, and copies of information in the register are stored in the Archive Room at regular intervals.

Whole-school Staff Training

Staff are informed of their responsibilities related to student attendance and articulates the expectations and responsibilities of every classroom educator with regards to monitoring and following up of attendance. Staff will bring concerns to the Principal or Leadership Team. Professional learning for staff regarding the Department of Education's School Attendance Policy will be provided by the school at the first Staff development Day of every year. .

A training register will be maintained on SharePoint.
Procedures will be reviewed and training provided to relevant staff as needed and decided by the Principal or Leadership Team.

Recording Daily Attendance

Southside Montessori School maintains an electronic register of the daily attendance of all students enrolled at the school. The digital platform used is the School's Student Management & Administration System (Sentral).
Each school day, classroom educators from all programs record daily attendance digitally between 8:30-9:00am.
Students are automatically marked by Sentral as present, unless the teacher declares them absent where the code is changed in the system to (W-absent) (this is a Sentral place-holder code). This code is applied temporarily until the absence is justified by the parent/carer.
The Minister's code (A-unexplained or unjustified) is used when an explanation has not been provided within 7 days of absence or if the explanation is not accepted by the principal.
The attendance register also includes information about any students granted an exemption from attending school.
Refer to SSM Exemption Policy and Procedures.

Late Arrival and Early Departure

The Minister's code (Pa-partial attendance) is used when the student is absent for part of the day; late for school, early departure or is absent for a portion of the middle of the day. It is important that parents/carers provide an explanation either via email or by phone to the office. It is at the Principal's discretion to ask the parent/carer to supply evidence to support partial absences.
An attendance code is used to categorise the justified reason for the partial attendance:
(S) if the child is sick or is attending a medical/allied health appointment or (L) in case of sickness of a family member, misfortune or unforeseen event.
If the explanation provided by the parent/carer is not accepted by the Principal, then partial attendance remains unjustified and partial attendance is recorded using the Minister's code (A-unexplained/unjustified).

Data on partial absences is included in Student Progress Reports and discussed at parent-teacher conferences.

Primary Children (6-12)

If a student is not in attendance by 9:00am, then the classroom educator marks the absence in Sentral using the Sentral register code (W-absent).

Late Arrival

When a student arrives late to school, the parent/carer must check in at the office first to provide an explanation for the late arrival.

If the parent/carer does not come into the office, the student signs themselves in and a staff member calls the parent immediately seeking a reason.

A staff member checks whether it is a planned or unplanned lateness by referring to an email correspondence or a note in Sentral provided in advance by the parent.

If a reason has not been provided, then the staff member seeks clarification from the parent to justify lateness.

The staff member adjusts the student's absence in Sentral using the relevant Minister's code, records the time of arrival and the reason and prints a late slip to the student who then hands the late slip to the classroom educator/assistant to indicate they checked-in at the office before entry.

Early Departure

In the event of a student requiring early departure from school, the parent/carer or authorised adult must check in at the office first to justify the early departure.

A staff member records the reason on Sentral, notes the time of departure and adjusts attendance using the relevant Minister's code.

A staff member rings the classroom educator/assistant to ask the student to come to the office where they depart the school with their parent/carer.

If parents notify the school of another adult picking up their child, a staff member rings the classroom educator/assistant to inform the student.

The identity of unknown adults should be checked by a staff member before releasing the student into the care of that person.

If a student appears anxious about the identity of an adult arriving to pick them up, a staff member should ask the child to wait in the office foyer, and inform the Principal or the Leadership Team of the circumstances.

Pre-Primary Children (3-6)

The school offers supervision for children from 8:30am. The morning work cycle formally begins at 9:00am.

To help facilitate a smooth start to the day, parents and carers are asked to drop off their children, by 9:00am at the latest, at the 3-6 gate. A staff member greets your child and assists with the transition. Upon arrival, please ensure that you sign in your child using the designated timesheet, which is located at the drop-off area.

By 9:00am, a staff member submits children's attendance using our school management system, Sentral. Once this process is complete, the staff member locks the 3-6 gate, which signals the end of the morning drop-off period.

Late Arrival

If your child arrives after 9:00am, please proceed to the main office to sign them in.
After signing in, you are welcome to walk your child to their 3-6 classroom.

Early Departure

Should you wish to pick-up your child early on a designated day, please communicate this to the educator during morning handover. When you arrive to school for pick-up, check in at the main office to provide a reason for the early departure. A staff member records the reason in Sentral, noting the exact time of departure. This process ensures that early departures are properly recorded, and that children's safety is maintained.

Following-up Unexplained Absences

Parents are responsible for ensuring that they notify the school to explain the absence of their child on any school day. Notification may be provided via phone/email or by submitting an absentee form via the School App (School Stream). Parents are encouraged to do so before the commencement of the school day.

By 10:00am, Sentral generates an automated text message notifying parents/carers of an absence and requesting they contact the school to provide justification. If no response has been received by 12:00pm, then staff member calls the parents/carers to seek clarification and explain an absence.

When parents/carers justify an absence, the staff member updates Sentral with the relevant Minister's code and records the reason and the mode of communication.

When parents/carers fail to justify an absence, then a staff member sends an email requesting that they provide an explanation within 7 days of absence.

When parents/carers fail to justify an absence within 7 days, then the absence is recorded in Sentral using the Minister's code (A- unexplained/unjustified) and parents/carers are once again prompted to provide an explanation when they receive their child's end of term attendance report.

The Principal has the discretion to decline a reason provided for an absence if it is deemed unsatisfactory or if it is not in the best interest of the student.

The Principal can request further documentation from parents/carers to substantiate an absence. Where frequent absences are explained as being due to illness, the Principal may request medical certificates for the absences and may consult with parents/carers regarding the needs of the student.

Information in relation to unsatisfactory attendance and full absences is transferred to student files, and attendance data is provided in Student Progress Reports each Semester.

Leave

The Minister's code (L-leave) is used to explain student absences due to the following reasons:

- Serious illness of an immediate family member,
- Misadventure or unexpected event such as storm damage to the family home, attendance at funerals, and recognised religious festivals or ceremonial occasions,
- Travel: Southside Montessori School does not approve travel leave during the school term. Arrangements for family holidays and special events should be made during the term breaks and summer holidays. It is at the discretion of the principal to consider exceptional circumstances and to decide based on the best interests of the student.

Parents/carers should apply for leave (sickness of a family member, misfortune or travel) and provide any relevant documentation to substantiate leave and support the application process such as airline tickets unless in the case of an emergency where other evidence is forthcoming.

Refer to Appendix A - Leave Application Form

The parent/carer should email the office with their request to access a leave application form: office@southsidemontessori.edu.au.

Parents/carers are expected to apply for leave at least two weeks prior to the leave date. Under extenuating circumstances, the two-week period may be waived following formal communication between the parent/carer and the Principal.

Short-term leave duration: 3 consecutive days and up to 5 consecutive school days

Extended leave duration: more than 5 consecutive school days

The Principal reviews the application and it is at their discretion to approve a full or partial leave duration, whether short-term or extended, during school term.

When determining whether to accept an application for leave during term time, the Principal considers the following factors:

- The number of absences that have occurred during the current school year.
- The type of absences that have occurred during the current school year.
- The purpose of the leave.
- The student's progress against the relevant milestones in the curriculum.
- Any child protection matters related to the child.

The Principal sends a letter via email to the parent/carer notifying them of the decision and a Certificate of Leave will be issued and transferred to the student file.

The Principal notifies a staff member of the decision who subsequently records the leave on Sentral using the Minister's code (L).

If the application for leave is declined, parents/carers are required to submit a student absence note when their child returns to school and a staff member uses the Minister's code (A-unexplained/unjustified) to record absence(s) in Sentral. The Principal then sends a letter to the parents advising them that their child's absences have been recorded as unjustified.

Information in relation to leave is transferred to student files, and attendance data is provided in Student Progress Reports each Semester.

Monitoring Attendance Data

The school encourages parents/carers to understand their legal obligations in ensuring their child attends school, and does not condone absences for unauthorised reasons, including, but not limited to events such as birthdays, holidays and/or other leisure activities. Regular meetings are conducted by the Leadership Team to address student absences.

Students with habitual low attendance are monitored, and personalised strategies implemented in consultation with the family to increase their attendance and/or engage them in their child's education. For students requiring more intensive support, one-on-one meetings and alternative arrangements may be organised in consultation with parents/carers.

Identifying Attendance Concerns

The classroom educator accesses Sentral fortnightly to track individual student attendance and to identify attendance anomalies due to frequent absences, or a pattern of lateness or absences, even if notification is provided.

5 days of absence per term [10% threshold of school days] will be flagged.

The staff member follows up absences to complete administration requirements, and will notify the Principal of a student's pattern of frequent absences.

If a student's attendance falls below 90% (with unexplained or unacceptable reasons for absence), the Principal will email the parents flagging the concern in a formal letter.

A staff member will continue to monitor the student's attendance. If the student's attendance falls below 80%, the Principal will send a second formal letter. The Principal will also arrange a meeting with the parents to discuss intervention strategies. Meeting minutes are kept by the Principal in a restricted file in SharePoint.

When a student has frequent medical absences, the Principal may:

- consult with parents regarding the health care of the student
- seek medical certificates

Refer to Responsive Individual Strategies Flowchart.

Intervention Strategies

Southside Montessori School is required to implement proactive strategies to support student engagement in school. As such, the Leadership Team works collaboratively to intervene and support students at risk of developing attendance concerns. Intervention strategies proceed along a continuum through to legal measures to return a child to school.

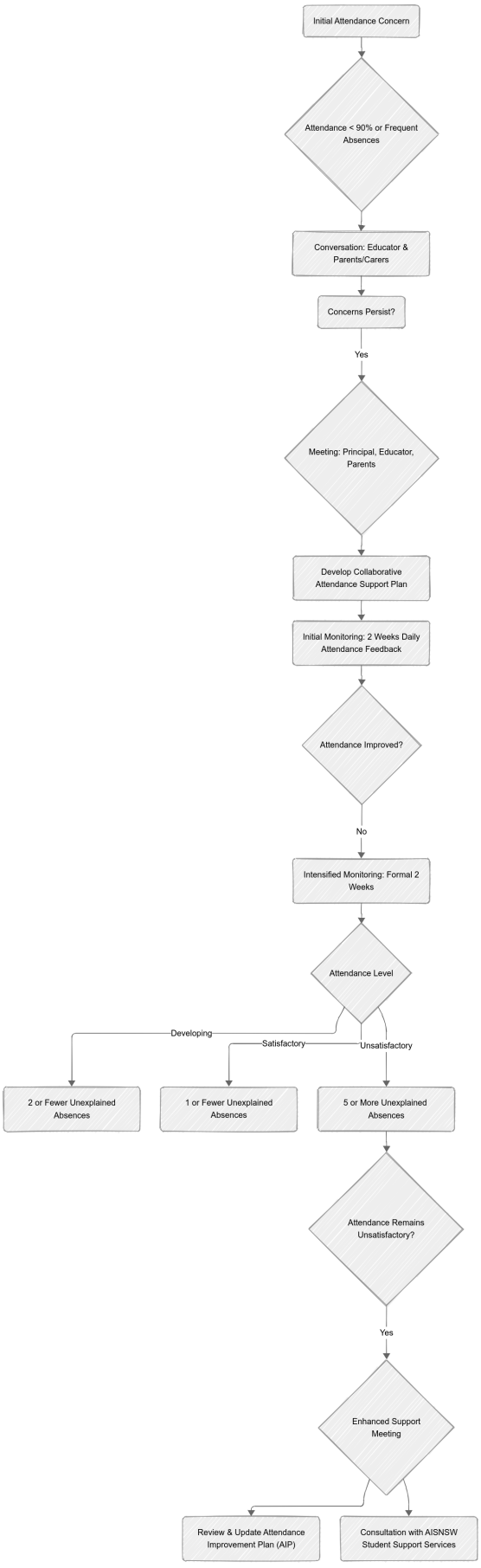
Whole-school Strategies

- Ensure school attendance policy and procedures are readily available, ensuring parents are well-informed about expectations and processes.
- Promote high expectations for attendance through e-Newsletters (published in Week 9 each term).
- Foster positive relationships with parents/carers through a welcoming and collaborative school environment: Southside Montessori School emphasises building relationships based on trust, respect, and transparency. We adopt a problem-solving approach, working alongside parents to address individual attendance concerns. This involves open dialogue, active listening, and a shared commitment to finding solutions that support the child's best interests.
- Provide regular, structured opportunities for communication regarding attendance. Towards the end of Term 2 and Term 4, parents/carers receive an attendance report attached to the Student Progress Report. If necessary, student attendance is further discussed at parent-teacher meetings, held throughout the year, wherein parents/carers are expected to justify any unexplained absences flagged on the report.

Responsive Individual Strategies

- *Initial Attendance Concern:* When a student's attendance falls below a predetermined threshold (90% in a given period, or frequent partial absences), an initial conversation is held between the classroom educator and the parents/carers. This is an opportunity for early intervention and information gathering.
- *Collaborative Plan Development:* If concerns persist, a meeting is scheduled with the Principal/Leadership Team, classroom educator, and parents/carers to develop a collaborative attendance support plan. This plan will include specific strategies, goals, and timelines, tailored to the student's individual needs.
- *Initial Monitoring***:** For the first two weeks, the classroom educator monitors attendance daily and provides regular feedback to the Principal/Leadership Team.
- *Intensified Monitoring:* If attendance does not improve, the Principal/Leadership Team initiates a more formal monitoring period for two weeks, using the following benchmarks:
- **Satisfactory:** 1 or fewer unexplained/unjustified absences or partial absences.
- **Developing:** 2 or fewer unexplained/unjustified absences or partial absences.
- **Unsatisfactory:** 5 or more unexplained/unjustified absences or partial absences.
- *Enhanced Support:* If attendance remains unsatisfactory, a follow-up meeting is scheduled with the Principal/Leadership Team and parents/carers. This meeting will focus on reviewing the existing attendance support plan, developing an Attendance Improvement Plan (AIP) meeting to identify and address barriers to attendance, and/or consultation with the AISNSW Student Support Services team.

Responsive Individual Strategies (Flowchart)



Legal Proceedings

If the attendance of a student at risk does not improve despite undertaking responsive individual strategies, then the Principal contacts AISNSW Student Services Team to initiate a Secretary's Compulsory Schooling Conference convened by a trained person authorised by the NSW Department of Education.

Child Wellbeing and Child Protection Concerns

School attendance issues can occur in the context of child wellbeing and child protection concerns. Subsequently, if there is a concern that a student may be at risk of significant harm, Southside Montessori School follows its mandatory reporting procedures regardless of how many days the student has been absent.

The Child Safety and Mandatory Reporting Guide (MRG) identifies indicators of Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH). An educational concern is triggered when there is a case of habitual absence described as 30 days absence within the past 100 school days. Other factors may warrant action to report earlier than the 30 days mark.

Southside Montessori School refers to its Child Protection Policy and Procedures when there are concerns of a student being at risk of significant harm and refers to the Child Safety and Mandatory Reporting Guide (MRG) and/or contact AISNSW Child Protection Team for further advice.

Refer to SSM Child Protection Policy and Procedures.