Rationale:
The *Education Act* requires that children of school age (six to seventeen years) residing in Victoria are to be in full-time attendance at a government or registered non-government school unless they are receiving approved home tuition, correspondence education, or have been granted an exemption by the Regional Director.

It is acknowledged that for some children and young people mainstream school environments may not always be the most appropriate settings. Participation in an approved re-engagement program is considered attendance at school.

Daily school attendance is important for all children and young people to succeed in education and to ensure they don’t fall behind both socially and developmentally. Children and young people who regularly attend school and complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification have better health outcomes, better employment outcomes, and higher incomes across their lives. It is important that children develop habits of regular attendance at an early age.

Education is a sequential process. Absences often mean students miss important stages in the development of topics, causing them to find ‘catching up’ difficult. It also impacts negatively on the learning of other students and the teaching program.

Absenteeism contributes significantly to student failure at school.

**Aims:**

To maximise student learning opportunities and performance by ensuring that children required to attend school do so regularly, and without unnecessary or frivolous absences.

**School Attendance Management Procedures:**

**Promoting School Attendance:**
This College will:
- Regularly communicate with parents about expectations for attendance.
- Promote awareness that absence results in quantifiable lost learning time and opportunities.
- Model punctuality across the whole school.
- Create safe, supportive learning environments where all students experience success through active participation and engagement in purposeful learning.
- Adopt consistent, rigorous procedures to monitor and record student absence.
- Implement data-driven attendance improvement strategies.
- Student attendance and absence figures will appear on student half year and end of year reports.
- Provide early identification of and supportive intervention for students at risk of poor attendance.
- Refer individual students with identified behavioural, health, or social issues to the Wellbeing Coordinator, community agency or specialist SSS support.
- Provide a staged response to non-attendance.
- Support students to return to school after absences.

**Attendance Expectations and Responsibilities**

Students are expected to attend the school in which they are enrolled, during normal school hours every day of each term, unless:

- There is an approved exemption from school attendance for the student and the school has been notified by the parent / carer of the reason for the absence, or
- The student is registered for home schooling and has only a partial enrolment in a school for particular activities. (See Appendix 6)
- The student is registered for Distance Education and has only a partial enrolment in a school for particular activities.

**Parent Responsibilities**

- Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly, and are only absent if ill or if absolutely necessary.
- All enrolled students are required to attend school unless reasonable and valid grounds exist for them to be absent.
- Illness is reasonable grounds for an absence - shopping excursions or birthday parties are not.
- Parents have a further responsibility to provide a written note or return a completed absence form to the school explaining why an absence has occurred.
- Where a child is absent for 3 days or more due to illness, this written note needs to be accompanied by a medical certificate.

**Principal Responsibilities**

- The Principal has a responsibility to ensure that attendance records are maintained and monitored at school.
- Principals can consider the excuse given for an absence and use their discretion to decide if the parent has a reasonable excuse for not meeting their legal obligations ('excused absence') or does not have a reasonable excuse ('unexcused absence').
- The Principal has a further responsibility to ensure that unexplained absences are investigated, and that high levels of absenteeism are adequately explained.

**Teacher Responsibilities**

Student attendance must be recorded in every class in secondary schools and record, in writing, the reason given for each absence. This is necessary to:

- Meet legislative requirements.
• Discharge schools’ duty of care for all students.
• Meet Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) requirements (for VCE and VCAL students).

Recording and Monitoring Student Attendance
• All student absences recorded by teachers, are aggregated for morning and afternoons each day on our CASES21 database and communicated to the Department of Education.
• DET and enrolment auditors may seek student attendance records.
• A student is present for half a day when the student has attended at least two hours of instruction.
• The school has an ES staff member who looks after attendance and will text parents of students who are absent initially. A daily absence report is produced each day. This is emailed to the Year level Coordinator (YLC), Sub School Manager, Wellbeing Coordinator, Flexible Learning Coordinator and Principal class daily. This sheet is used to track students whose attendance or lack of lack attendance is causing concern.
• Generally the YLC has initial responsibility for contacting parents of students with unexplained or unapproved absences with the view to obtaining reasons and developing and implementing strategies to minimise absences. (Appendix 1)
• The YLC will refer on to the Sub School Manager and if needed the wellbeing team any student they believe needs more intensive or targeted support to increase attendance. Any student with an attendance rate below 85% will be referred to the Sub School Manager for a plan to be developed to increase attendance.

Excusing and Not Excusing Absences
An approved absence may fit within the category of ‘unavoidable cause’ or ‘unforeseen event’ and should record the reason for this.

The following may be regarded as a reasonable excuse:
• Medical and dental appointments, where out of hours appointments are not possible or not appropriate.
• Bereavement or attendance at the funeral of a relative or friend of the student, including a student required to attend Sorry Business.
• School refusal, if a plan is in place with the parent to address causes.
• Cultural observance, if the parent notifies the school in advance.
• Family holidays, where the parent notifies the school in advance and the student completes any Student Absence Learning Plan agreed by the school, student and parent.

In general, principals would not be expected to excuse absences, where:
• Approval had not been sought in advance or in accordance with school policy.
• The student was absent due to participating in leisure or social activities without approval.
• The conditions of approval have not been met (e.g. Student Absence Learning Plan for a family holiday not completed).
• The parent has provided no explanation for the absences.

Other explanations require confirmation from the Principal to ensure the parent has a reasonable excuse.
Truancy
Truancy is often a warning sign of disengagement and is best addressed early in partnership with the family and school. For more information, see: Attendance Improvement Strategies

Truancy (defined in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 as absences due to the child’s disobedience and not due to any fault of the parent) is a reasonable excuse for a parent. In deciding to accept this explanation a principal must consider:

- The age of the student
- The previous attendance of the student and
- The parent’s capacity to influence and control the student’s behaviour.

If, after considering these factors, the Principal is not satisfied with the parent’s explanation that it was solely the student’s decision to be truant, then the absence should be regarded as an unexcused absence and the Principal will follow the processes for managing chronic absenteeism.

Student Absence Learning Plans
Student Absence Learning Plans in the form of an Individual Student Engagement Plan (Appendix 2) should be implemented to support the education of students who are absent from school for an extended period. They should be developed collaboratively by teachers, students and their parents.

An Individual Student Engagement Plan (ISEP) must be developed for students:

- Who are planning extended absences from school, for example for a family holiday.
- Suspended for more than three days (see Student Engagement Guidance).
- Subject to an expulsion appeal process (see Student Engagement Guidance).

Managing Chronic Absenteeism
1. Attendance Meeting
The Sub School Manager is responsible for arranging attendance meetings with families whose child has high levels of absenteeism with a view to developing and implementing strategies to minimise absences and to seek appropriate support for the family. (see Appendix 3). This may include:

- Establishing a shared understanding of accountability and strategies for improving attendance.
- Ensuring parents are aware of the absences and fully appreciate the educational implications for the student.
- Identifying the reasons for the absences.
- Exploring any factors preventing attendance or participation.
- Requesting parents engage with alternative strategies to improve attendance.
- Identifying appropriate attendance improvement strategies.
- Documenting which improvement strategy has been selected, with clear discussion about the ways in which it will be monitored and when it will be reviewed.
- Explaining the possible consequences of repeated non-attendance, including referral to the wellbeing team, SSS team or community service / agency.
2. Attendance Student Support Group
Ongoing unexplained absences, or lack of cooperation regarding student attendance will result in a formal Attendance Student’s Support Group being organised with a view to developing a Student Attendance Improvement Plan, and/or an Individual Student Engagement Plan (Appendix 4).
Attendance Improvements Plans and Return to School Plans in the form of an ISEP may be appropriate for students who are:
- Involved in the youth justice system.
- Experiencing, or who have experienced a period of homelessness.
- Experiencing mental or physical illnesses (An ISEP is vital for this cohort if they have experienced prolonged absence from school).

Both these plans should be developed with the student and the parent and any support workers, and include information such as:
- The work the student has missed and needs to complete.
- The student’s class timetable, including bell times.
- School term dates, student free days and non-school periods.
- Goals to improve the student’s attendance, including a target for attendance.
- Nominated staff that can support the student if they need assistance, and their locations.
- The process to be followed if the student is absent.
- Contact details for the student’s parent.

Referring Unresolved Chronic Attendance Issues
If the school has identified behavioural, health or social issues such as anxiety, depression or bullying for an individual student then they may be reported by the Principal or Principal’s delegate to:- SSS, a community based wellbeing professional, Child First or Child Protection or the Department of Health and Human Services.

If all available steps have been exhausted, and it is identified in the student’s best interest, the Principal may refer the student to a re-engagement program at FLO Connect which operates outside the mainstream school setting to provide tailored education and support for young people who are disengaged, or have been identified as at risk of disengaging, from mainstream school.

If the intervention strategies have been unable to secure parent engagement and improvement in attendance, and there is sufficient evidence regarding this, the Principal may refer the student attendance matter to a School Attendance Officer (see appendix 5). This may result in an Infringement Notice under the Education Act being sent to the parent.

Evaluation
This policy will be reviewed as part of the school’s four year review cycle. This policy will be ratified by College Council at the start of each year.
Appendix 1  Student Absence Reason: Request Letter to Parent

Date........................................

Dear Parent / Guardian,

It has been brought to my attention that your child ........................................ has been absent from school recently and has not yet provided a written note explaining the reason for the absence.

The date/s of the absence/s are:

Students are expected to attend the school in which they are enrolled, during normal school hours every day of each term, unless:
- there is an approved exemption from school attendance for the student, or
- the student is registered for home schooling and has only a partial enrolment in a school for particular activities

It is a Department of Education and Early Childhood Development requirement that students provide a note from parents explaining all absences.

Therefore, you are required to provide a note covering the above absence/s from school as soon as possible.

Should you require some support from the College regarding your child’s absence from school please contact your child’s year level coordinator in the first instance to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Xxxxxxxx
Sub School Manager

Miss Sara Broster
Assistant Principal
Appendix 2  
Student Absence Learning Plan Template

Student Absence Learning Plan must be developed for students:
- who are planning extended absences from school, for example for a family holiday.
- suspended for more than three days (see Student Engagement Guidance).
- subject to an expulsion appeal process (see Student Engagement Guidance).

It may also be useful to develop a Return to School Plan for students who have been absent for an extended period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name</th>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for absence:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of last day of school:</th>
<th>Date of return to school:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of the educational program:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/year-level coordinators should include elements of the learning program 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities for the student to undertake while away from school:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For example, if a student is travelling, what research can they undertake, or what presentations can be prepared?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes for the student to achieve:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources that the student may find useful:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreed role of parents/carers in supporting the absence learning program:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact details for the student to stay in touch:</th>
<th>School phone number: 50 241522</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School contact person:</td>
<td>Mail  PO Box 285, Red Cliffs 3496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature of parent/carer:</td>
<td>Signature of principal or delegate:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Three  Attendance Meeting Letter of Request

Date...........................................

Dear Parent / Guardian,

It has been brought to my attention that your child .................................................. has continued to be absent from school without sufficient reason provided for approval by the principal. Further to this, the school holds concerns regarding your child making satisfactory progress.

The date/s of the absence/s are:

It is a Department of Education and Early Childhood Development requirement that students provide a note from parents explaining all absences.

You are requested to make an appointment within five days for a Student Attendance Meeting with the Sub School Manager __________ for you and your child.

If your child is currently receiving support from a service, you are welcome to include the case worker in the meeting.

The purpose of this meeting will be to identify the reasons your child’s absences and any factors preventing attendance. We will also explore what can be done to help improve your child’s attendance and develop a Student Attendance Improvement Plan.

I look forward to meeting with you and your child.

Yours sincerely,

Assistant Principal          Sub School Manager
Appendix four

Student Attendance Improvement Plan, and/or an Individual Education Plan

**ISEP (Individual Student Engagement Plan)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name:</th>
<th>Date of Birth:</th>
<th>Form:</th>
<th>School contact person/s:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student summary / profile:**

**Literacy data:** (level and date assessed)             **Numeracy data:** (level and date assessed)

**SMART goals:**
- Simple, measurable, realistic and timely.
- Identify what the child is currently doing and what their strengths in this area are.
- May include:
  - Current targeted behaviors that need to be replaced
  - Strengths the child has in this area
  - Current data results specific to each area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current strengths or ability being observed</th>
<th>Goals / desired outcomes</th>
<th>School and classroom strategies</th>
<th>Supports, actions and timelines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Identify what the child is currently doing and what their strengths in this area are)</td>
<td>(Priority areas for improvement and relevant learning outcomes)</td>
<td>(Taking into account how this student learns best)</td>
<td>(Who and when)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May include:</td>
<td>Relates to student’s capacity to engage and the desired replacement behaviors student is working towards.</td>
<td>May include:</td>
<td>May include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Current targeted behaviors that need to be replaced</td>
<td>- What teachers can do to support the child</td>
<td>- Who the support people are, in and outside the school</td>
<td>- What action/s these people will take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Strengths the child has in this area</td>
<td>- Consequences for inappropriate behavior</td>
<td>- When this action will be carried out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Current data results specific to each area</td>
<td>- Strategies to de-escalate problem behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Include current % of attendance)</td>
<td>(Include desired % of attendance being aimed for)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Behaviour**

**Personal Safety / Wellbeing**

**Parent / carers – expectations/support:** (Expectations of parent/carer, and how the school can support parent/carer)

**Student’s comments:**

**Parent / carer’s comments:**

**Teacher’s comments:**

**Review data:**
Appendix 5

School Letterhead

Date

Referral to School Attendance Officer

As Principal of Red Cliffs Secondary College I have determined that I have sufficient evidence to demonstrate the parent _____________ of student _____________ has not been meeting their responsibilities under the Act, and that the College’s intervention strategies have been unable to secure parental engagement and improvement in school attendance (or engagement in another educational program); Requiring the parent to respond to the notice will convey the seriousness of the matter and is likely to elicit an improvement in attendance.

The student’s record of absences is attached and are either unexplained and or the parent excuses are unreasonable.
The parent responsible is ____________ and resides at ____________ and may be contacted on ____________.

As a Principal, I am satisfied that the reasons for the failure to comply with attendance requirements have been explored, including any social, cultural, linguistic, economic, geographic or learning difficulties
A Student Support Group was established for the student on__________ and has met thereafter on ____________.

I have considered the particular circumstances of the student and family in deciding to make a referral, including likely consequences if the parent does not respond adequately to a School Attendance Notice.

I have attempted to contact the parent in question by telephone to advise of the situation and confirm their awareness of the seriousness of the issue with this result.

I am satisfied the student is of compulsory school age, is not an overseas student, and resides in ____________;

Yours sincerely,

David Browne
Principal
Appendix 6 Attendance Expectations – Red Cliffs Secondary College

Attendance Expectations

Students are to:

- Attend all their individualised timetable classes
- Undertake to do the activities that are not part of normal timetabled classes but a part of school life such as participation in house sports, wellbeing days, etc.

Absences

The parent/carer must provide a reason for any student absences within 5 days.

The following may be regarded as a reasonable excuse:-

- Medical and dental appointments, where out of hours appointments are not possible or not appropriate.
- Bereavement or attendance at the funeral of a relative or friend of the student, including a student required to attend Sorry Business.
- School refusal, if a plan is in place with the parent to address causes.
- Cultural observance, if the parent notifies the school in advance.
- Family holidays, where the parent notifies the school in advance and the student completes any Student Absence Learning Plan agreed by the school, student and parent.

In general, principals would not be expected to excuse absences, where:

- Approval had not been sought in advance or in accordance with school policy.
- The student was absent due to participating in leisure or social activities without approval.
- The conditions of approval have not been met (e.g. Student Absence Learning Plan for a family holiday not completed).
- The parent has provided no explanation for the absences.

Managing Unexplained Absences

The Year level Coordinator will contact the family to identify the reasons for non attendance. If this matter is not resolved it will be referred to the Sub School Manager to call an attendance meeting.

Managing Chronic Absenteeism

The Sub School Manager will convene an attendance meeting with the student and parent, and/or establish an attendance support group.

Where the Sub School Managers view that all reasonable attempts to improve student attendance have been exhausted and cannot engage the parent and student, the matter will be referred to the Principal class.