

ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE, MILDURA



Policy Number:	STUDENT 29
Policy Name:	School Refusal Policy
Contact Officer:	Deputy Principal – Students
Date Approved by Executive:	June 11, 2020
Date of Next Review:	June 2023
Related Policies:	Wellbeing Policy Pastoral Care Policy Child Safe Policy

PREAMBLE

God is at the centre of our College...Mercy is the heartbeat of the Gospel. We encourage every student to grow in the fullness of life and realise their potential through the bread we break at school, the bread of relationships and the bread of conversation. Let us engage the heart and bring faith to life and life to faith (Thomas Groome).

LEGISLATION

This policy takes into account relevant legislative requirements within the state of Victoria, including the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in *Ministerial Order No. 1359*. This policy applies to St Joseph's College staff, including employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

Further information relating to the Ministerial Order can be found at

<https://www.safeguardingservices.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Ministerial-Order-1359.pdf>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 As a Catholic College in the Mercy tradition, St Joseph's College aims to engage all students in the life of the College. This includes assisting students to participate in the academic program of the College and to feel comfortable within the social dimensions of the College.

1.2 St Joseph's College is a Child Safe School and as such is committed to providing assistance to students who may have difficulty accessing the educational and interpersonal opportunities available to students at the College. All students have the right to feel safe and welcome at St Joseph's College.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 School Refusal refers to severe emotional upset experienced by a child at the prospect of attending school that can result in significant school absence. School Refusal is different from truancy in that the child is staying at home with the knowledge of the family and despite their best efforts to enforce attendance. Children who refuse school do not typically engage in antisocial behaviour that is associated with truancy. School Refusal is also different from School Withdrawal, a term used to refer to circumstances in which the family keeps the child at home for various reasons (e.g.: to support a family member who is ill).

3. PURPOSE

3.1 The purpose of this policy is to assist students, families and staff in the process of assisting students to enter into College life.

3.2 It is important to acknowledge the nature of School Refusal and for the College to have a procedure in place to assist students and families in cases of School Refusal.

3.3 School Refusal must be seen as wellbeing issue with associated resources and programs designed to cater for the individual needs of students.

3.4 School Refusal is most successfully treated if addressed early. The longer the child remains away from school, the greater their anxiety can become and the more difficult it will be for them to return to school. Involvement with one or both parents, College counsellors, a psychologist or social worker and other relevant College personnel is essential for successful treatment.

3.5 For the secondary-school refuser who has a long history of staying at home, referral to a multidisciplinary mental health program or team may be required. Without treatment and support, there is increased risk of escalating mental health issues and significant problems with social skills, occupational difficulties and the skills required for independence in daily living in later adolescence and adulthood.

4. SIGNS OF SCHOOL REFUSAL

4.1 Most children are occasionally reluctant to go to school or have some anxiety about activities like school camp.

4.2 It is normal for children to miss some days of school during the year.

4.3 School refusal is a more persistent problem that might be characterised by some of the following signs:

- tearfulness before school or repeated pleas to stay at home;
- tantrums, clinginess, dawdling or running away before school;
- frequent complaints of illness before or during school, such as stomach aches, headaches, dizziness or fatigue;
- difficulty attending school after weekends, holidays, school camps or sports days;
- long, unexplained absences from school;
- periodic absences or missed classes for which no explanation is given;
- frequent lateness to school;
- long periods spent in the Sick Bay, Wellbeing, House Leaders area or Library.

5. PROCEDURES FOR ADDRESSING SCHOOL REFUSAL

5.1 Staff will be educated about School Refusal and how to appropriately raise concerns to Wellbeing and senior staff in relation to students who may be exhibiting signs of School Refusal. This will take place at staff meetings and by providing reading on Knowledge Banks.

5.2 Homeroom or Subject Teachers who notice prolonged absences from classes are to notify House Leaders and Wellbeing of such instances as soon as patterns become apparent.

5.3 Homeroom Teachers will contact home to ascertain the reasons for the student absence.

5.4 Wellbeing will be notified as to the response from home and of the need to engage with the student, if possible.

5.5 If the student is willing to engage with Wellbeing staff, this process is to continue as long as the Wellbeing staff believe that it is a productive engagement. If the Wellbeing staff believe that the student requires further assistance, such assistance is to be sought in co-operation with the student, the student's parents/guardians, the Deputy Principal - Students and the relevant mental health service provider.

5.6 Teachers of the student with the School Refusal condition are to provide academic support via Learning Areas, email and phone. Home visits are to be arranged by the Student Engagement & Pastoral Liaison Officer in conjunction with parents/guardians. The purpose of such support is to assist the student while away from school, but not to encourage a situation of 'school at home' as a long-term alternative.

5.7 It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to have the child arrive at the school gate, from there the responsibility falls to the College. This is based on the premise that attendance at school is compulsory.

6. SCOPE

6.1 This policy applies to all St Joseph's College students.