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Student Non-Attendance Procedures

PURPOSE

The *Education Act 1990* (NSW) (*Education Act*) requires all children of compulsory school age to be enrolled in and attend school.

School attendance is crucial for our mission of enabling students to achieve the fullness of life. Regular attendance helps students develop a sense of belonging and attachment to the school community and form meaningful relationships with peers, teachers, and staff, creating a supportive environment that nurtures their overall wellbeing. It allows students to fully engage in the school's educational and spiritual offerings, promoting academic growth and a deeper understanding and appreciation of their Catholic identity.

Student non-attendance at school places the student's learning, social and emotional growth at risk. Enhancing the collaboration between schools and parents is crucial for promoting regular student attendance, and while parents bear legal responsibility for ensuring their children's consistent attendance, schools play an indispensable role in fostering a culture of daily attendance. By recording and monitoring absences, and promptly addressing attendance concerns, they contribute to the overall wellbeing and academic success of the students.

Outlined in this document is a set of procedures for managing student non-attendance.

APPLICATION

These procedures apply to all employees in schools, Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools (DLCS) and any related entities under the administration of the Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools Limited (DLCSL).

These Student Non-Attendance Procedures are to be read in conjunction with Sections 2 and 3 of the Student Attendance Procedures. Section 2 relates to Responsibilities (parent(s), school staff, the Principal, DLCS). Section 3 relates to School Attendance Records Requirements.

PROCEDURES

1. DEFINITIONS

- 1.1 **Abandonment of Enrolment** means a circumstance where a student of compulsory school age has not attended school, engagement from the family has been limited to non-existent. The student has not attended school for 10 consecutive days and no explanation has been provided by the parent(s).
- 1.2 **Attendance Concern** means less than 90% total attendance was discerned by the Principal or their delegate that the student's non-attendance is putting them at educational, social or wellbeing risk.

- 1.3 **Attendance Improvement Meetings** means meetings providing the opportunity to identify, understand and explore the issues contributing to the student's non-attendance. They involve the parent(s), as well as the student where appropriate, and address school concerns, as well as allow the family the opportunity to respond and a written agreement to improve attendance (AIP) is developed.
- 1.4 **Attendance Improvement Plan (AIP)** means a plan developed by the school in collaboration with the student and family. The purpose is to develop a mutually agreed upon plan to assure regular school attendance. Where a student presents with a relevant medical diagnosis, additional outside professional support may be sought in the construction of the Attendance Improvement Plan.
- 1.5 **Breach of Enrolment Contract** means where a contracting party's reluctance or inability to fulfill the terms they originally agreed to in the enrolment contract leads to a breach of the terms of that contract.
- 1.6 **Compass** means the student information system used by schools in the Diocese of Lismore. Compass is an integrated student management system for administration, reporting, communication and managing student data within the education sector.
- 1.7 **Compulsory school age** means the compulsory school age as defined in s21B of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW) as being of or above the age of six (6) and below the age of 17 years.
- 1.8 **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 DLCS facilitator who is an appropriately trained and authorised person. A compulsory schooling conference may be authorised by DLCS 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.
- 1.9 **Mandatory Report** means a report to the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) concerning the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a child arising from suspected physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and exposure to family violence.
- 1.10 **NCCD** means the Nationally Consistent Collect of Data on School Students with Disability.
- 1.11 **Parent** means the biological mother or father, legal guardian, or other person having the legal custody or care of a child. While family is used in these procedures as an inclusive term, parent(s) are responsible for their child's schooling in line with regulatory requirements.
- 1.12 **Regular School Attendance** means greater to or equal to 95%.
- 1.13 **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

The school will have a clearly communicated system to monitor, identify and respond to absenteeism. This would include processes for communication requesting information from parent(s) about specific absences from school (initially via Compass). Additionally, a process for

communication with parent(s) where a nominated person of responsibility (most commonly classroom teachers in primary and homeroom teachers in secondary) will initiate pastoral contact with the family where a series, or pattern of absences from school puts the student at educational, wellbeing or social risk. This communication will be recorded as a Compass Chronicle.

The Principal, or delegate, will monitor all students' rates of non-attendance every two (2) to three (3) weeks during term time with the assistance of the school's pastoral care team.

DLCS staff may assist schools in processes for the monitoring of student non-attendance.

2.1 Less Than 90% Total Attendance (This refers to unexplained, explained and unjustified absences).

a) Stage 1	
i.	For any student whose total attendance falls below 90 percent, the Principal, or delegate, based on the information available, or lack thereof, makes a discernment if a student's attendance pattern is to be classified as a case of Attendance Concern (Stage 2). This decision may need to take into account as to whether, or not, the inclusion of approved leave, family holidays and other leave contributed to the total percentage warrants investigation, or just continued monitoring.
ii.	Communication A is (see Attachment One – Communication A) sent to parent(s) via Compass or other appropriate means to alert the parent(s) to their child's attendance rate.
iii.	Any student with a total attendance of 70% or less must be classified as an Attendance Concern unless exculpated by a Regional Service Leader (RSL).

2.2 Attendance Concern - Procedures for action

b) Stage 2	
i.	Communication B (see Attachment Two – Communication B) sent to parent(s) via Compass or other appropriate means.
ii.	Follow up parent communication by nominated pastoral leader, with agreed attendance improvement actions recorded on Compass.
iii.	Review date set for two (2) to four (4) weeks and ongoing attendance patterns are monitored by school staff.
iv.	Monitor the student in regards to attendance using the tools available within Compass.
v.	Review the student's support and implement pastoral care and learning strategies that address the needs of the student.
vi.	After the review date, if the Principal or delegate deems there to be little or no improvement, including if there is little or no engagement by the parent(s), then the student's case will be advanced to Stage 3.

c) Stage 3	
i.	Communication C (see Attachment Three – Communication C) sent to parent(s) via Compass or other appropriate means requesting parent(s) attendance at an attendance improvement meeting.
ii.	School based attendance improvement meetings (see definition) is held, where an AIP (Attachment Four - Attendance Improvement Plan Template) is formulated, signed by

	a representative of the school, and preferably signed by parent(s), and if appropriate, student, and added to Compass.
iii.	Review date set for two (2) to four (4) weeks and ongoing attendance patterns are monitored by school staff.
iv.	At the discretion of the Principal, or their delegate, a Mandatory Report may be appropriate.
v.	After the review date, if the Principal, or delegate, deems there to be little or no improvement, including if there is little or no engagement by the parent(s), then the student's case will be advanced to Stage 4.

d) Stage 4	
i.	Communication D (see Attachment Five – Communication D) is sent to parent(s) via Compass or appropriate means requesting an additional attendance improvement meeting in which a DLCS staff member will be present.
ii.	School based attendance improvement meetings are held, where an AIP is formulated, signed by a representative of the school, the DLCS staff member present, and preferably signed by parent(s) and if appropriate, student and added to Compass.
iii.	Review date set for two (2) to four (4) weeks and ongoing attendance patterns are monitored by school staff.
iv.	At the discretion of the Principal, a Mandatory Report is recommended.
v.	After the review date, if the Principal, or delegate, deems there to be little or no improvement, including if there is little or no engagement by the parent(s), then the student's case will be advanced to Stage 5.

e) Stage 5	
i.	Principal, or delegate, will request via the DLCS Audit and Compliance Adviser a compulsory schooling conference ensuring that there is clear evidence in Compass of actions and communications undertaken as per Stages 1 to 4. After consultation with the RSL, the appropriate school and DLCS staff, the DLCS Audit and Compliance Adviser will determine whether to proceed with a compulsory school conference, Referral to Legal or an Abandonment of Enrolment/Breach of Enrolment Contract process.
ii.	Communication to parents of the decision determined in section 2.2 (e) (i) by the Principal.
iii.	If a compulsory schooling conference is to proceed as determined in section 2.2 (e)(i) it must be conducted by trained DLCS personnel.

A summary of the steps above is attached as **Attachment Six – Non-Attendance Procedures Summary**.

2.3 Considerations applicable at each stage of attendance concern process

- a) A student who shows improvement after one of the stage's improvement processes, but then later in the year again shows deteriorating attendance, need not start the process at Stage 1 but can rejoin the attendance improvement process where deemed appropriate by the Principal or their delegate.
- b) The Indigenous Education Worker (IEW) may be notified and involved in formulating attendance improvement strategies if deemed appropriate by the Principal or their delegate.

- c) 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 Unexplained Absences in 100 Days or if the student's attendance should fall below 80%; and
- d) A student whose whereabouts is unknown and has been absent for 10 days should be reported to attendance@det.nsw.edu.au using a Form 03 from the DLCS Intranet site.

3. PROCEDURES FOR AN ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT MEETING

- 3.1 When a student's non-attendance is identified as an attendance concern, the parent(s) and student should be contacted and given the opportunity to provide a response at a formal attendance improvement meeting.
- 3.2 Attendance improvement meetings should be chaired by the appropriate school representative, either the Principal, Assistant Principal or designated staff member.
- 3.3 At Stage 4, a DLCS representative should be present to help support the school in the attendance improvement process. As a guide, the appropriate DLCS staff member would usually be but not limited to:
 - a) The Inclusion Officer if the student has been recorded on the NCCD;
 - b) The Aboriginal Education Officer if the student is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and
 - c) The Pastoral Care Officer in all other situations.
- 3.4 The outcome of the meeting should be the development of an attendance improvement plan. The AIP should include mutually identified strategies that will assist in improving attendance.
- 3.5 More than one (1) attendance improvement meeting may be held at any stage of the process, at the discretion of the Principal or their delegate.

4. PROCEDURE FOR A COMPULSORY SCHOOLING CONFERENCE

Compulsory schooling conferences require DLCS support by a trained officer acting as Convenor of the conference.

- 4.1 Compulsory schooling conferences may be held at the discretion of the appropriate RSL, in consultation with the Audit and Compliance Adviser, when a referral is made by a school, or when an issue is identified by an outside agency including the DCJ, Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW), or the when the matter is made known to DLCS through the family or a member of the community.
- 4.2 The Audit and Compliance Adviser 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, or email, and considers both the agenda, venue and the approach. A registered letter may be considered if contact cannot be achieved by other means. This approach is consistent with Department of Education models for such conferences.
- 4.4 Compulsory schooling conferences may be 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 Parent(s) are advised that they may choose to invite a support person to the meeting whose role would be to support them, remain silent and seek breaks where necessary.
- 4.7 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, for example, might be a representative from Headspace or a counsellor.
- 4.8 Following a compulsory schooling conference, a set of agreed undertakings are signed by the parent(s) 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 have to include any undertakings by the school or staff unless so agreed upon.
- 4.9 The Principal will contact the Convenor 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.
- 4.10 The Convenor will stay in contact with the school.
- 4.11 The Convenor will notify the Audit and Compliance Adviser who will notify the Assistant Director, Learning Services if the undertakings are unobserved and the matter is to be referred to legal action.
- 4.12 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. REFERRAL FOR LEGAL ACTION IF 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 parent(s) 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 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 DLCS representative, not by the Convenor.
- 6.3 There are three (3) versions of an application to the Children's Court that can be made:
 - a) Action against both parents;
 - b) Action against a single parent; or
 - c) Action against the student.

- 6.4 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 section 6.3.
- 6.5 A Court ordered compulsory schooling conference will follow the same procedure as set out in section 4. Procedure for a compulsory schooling conference.
- 6.6 If, after a Compulsory Schooling Order, a Court ordered compulsory schooling conference or court ordered School Attendance Order, there is still no improvement in attendance, the Department of Education may then prosecute the parent(s) 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 DLCS Legal Counsel.

8. RECORD KEEPING

- 8.1 Schools should document the range of strategies they have tried to address a student's poor school attendance and file as a Chronicle in Compass and/or in AIP documentation.
- 8.2 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:
 - a) Detailed records to be kept by each staff person involved in the handling of safety, welfare and wellbeing concerns;
 - b) In relation to handling of child protection and wellbeing concerns, it is important to record the reasons why actions and decisions are taken; and
 - c) A record must be kept when a report has been made to NSW DCJ or contact has been made with DLCS for advice.

ENQUIRIES

Assistant Director, Learning Services

RELATED DOCUMENTATION

The Mission of Jesus Christ Foundational Values: Catholic Education in the Diocese of Lismore

Parent and Caregiver Complaints Policy and Procedures

Student Attendance Procedures

Privacy Policy

Privacy Procedures

Education Act 1990 (NSW)

Child Safe Standards

ATTACHMENT ONE: Communication A – Less Than 90% Total Attendance (No Parental Response Required)

Compass Communication A

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

Re: <Insert Student full name>- Attendance

Regularly attending school helps students develop a sense of belonging and attachment to the school community. This connection supports the development of meaningful relationships with peers, teachers, and staff, creating a supportive environment that nurtures their overall learning and wellbeing.

Regular school attendance is classified as being above 95% and the purpose of this letter is to make you aware that <Student first name>'s current attendance profile is as of <date insert>, <%>.

Please note full day absences, frequent late arrivals and/or early departures all contribute to a student's overall attendance profile.

We recognise their attendance profile may have been influenced by leave taken due to medical reasons, appointments or family commitments, but we feel it is important to keep you informed.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can support you and your child with their attendance profile, or to discuss matters.

Yours sincerely,

ATTACHMENT TWO: Communication B – Attendance Concern

Compass Communication B

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

Re: <Insert Student full name>- Attendance

Regular school attendance is classified as being above 95% and is important for your student's growth both academically and socially.

<Student first name>'s current attendance profile is of concern and sits at <insert attendance rate>%. Please note full day absences, frequent late arrivals and/or early departures all contribute to a student's overall attendance profile.

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

Please don't hesitate to contact the school if you feel there is any important information of which we should be aware.

If your child's attendance pattern does not improve, a meeting may be required to discuss your child's attendance and how they can best be supported in their academic, social and emotional development.

Yours sincerely,

ATTACHMENT THREE: Communication C – Requesting School Based AIP

Compass Communication C

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

Re: <Insert Student Full Name>- Attendance

Regular school attendance is classified as being above 95% and your child's attendance rate is currently <attendance rate> %. This percentage includes both full day and partial attendance.

As noted in previous communications <Student First Name>'s attendance continues to be of concern, and we would like to support you by having an Attendance Improvement Plan meeting.

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

We understand there can be a variety of reasons why students don't attend school, but feel that it is important we work together to improve <Student First Name>'s attendance. The school will be in contact to arrange a time for an Attendance Improvement Plan meeting.

Yours sincerely,

ATTACHMENT FOUR: Attendance Improvement Plan Template

ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

School		Student		Grade		Date of Birth	
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Does the student have a Personalised Plan?		Is the student Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?	
Attendees at Meeting (include appropriate DLCS representative)			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	<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.		

As a result of the primary reason/s selected above for absences what is the hypothesis?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Escape from negative social and/or evaluative situations Examples: Assessments, group work, interacting with peers at lunch time or sport ☐ Attention-seeking Examples: Attention from a significant person or being anxious when separated. ☐ To pursue rewards Examples: Able to pursue enjoyable experience such as computer, TV or sleep.
Explanation of hypothesis	
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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ATTACHMENT FIVE: Communication D – Requesting DLCS attended AIP

Compass Communication D

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

Re: <Insert Student Full Name>- Attendance

As per our previous correspondence, regular school attendance is classified as being above 95% and your child's attendance rate is currently <attendance rate> %. This percentage includes both full day and partial attendance.

We understand that there can be a variety of reasons why a student's attendance is of concern, but it is important that we work together to improve <Student First Name>'s attendance.

We are obliged under the NSW Education Act (1990) to support the regular attendance of students. Therefore, I request that you attend the school for another Attendance Improvement Plan meeting.

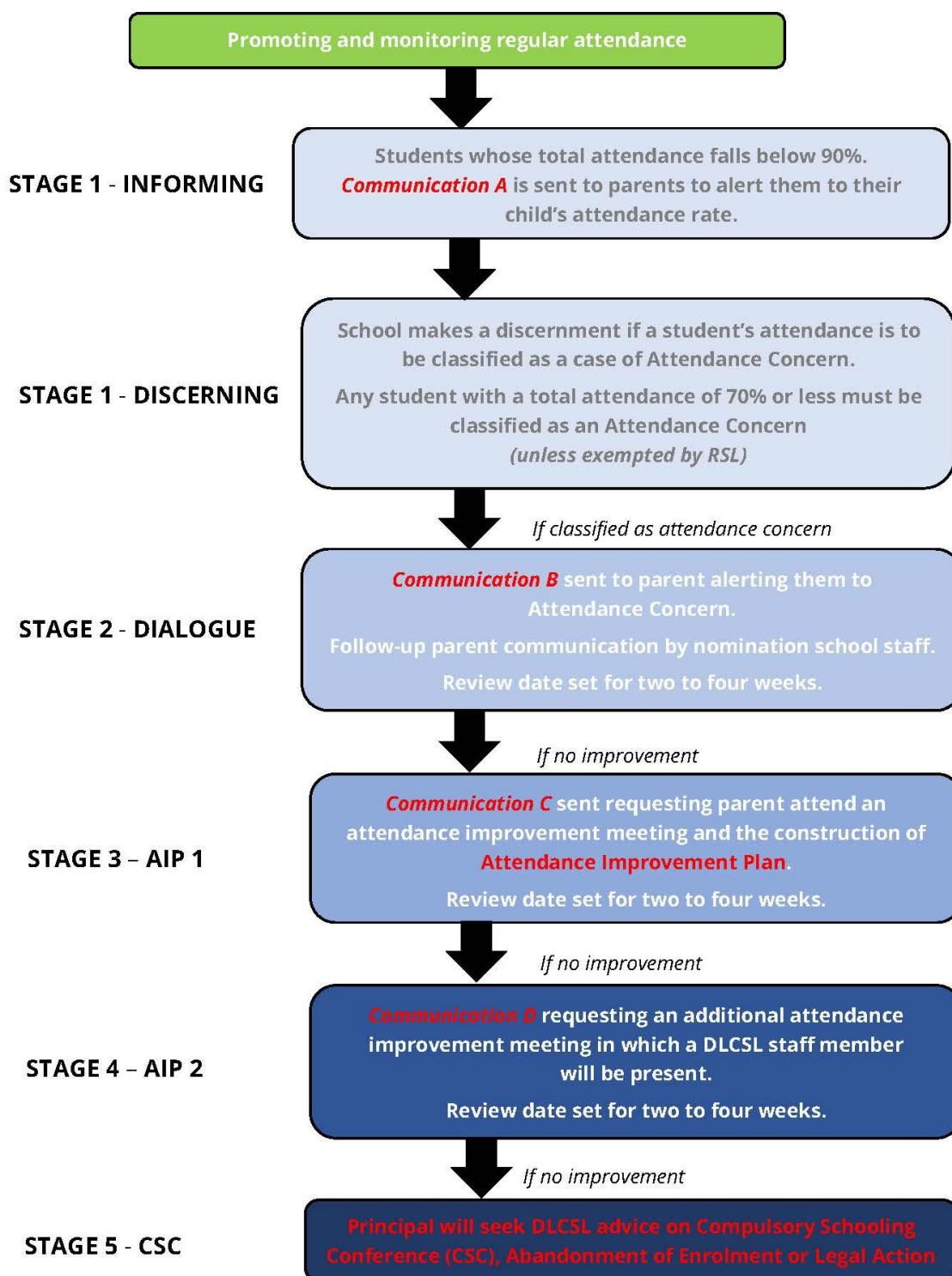
The meeting will include a review of the Attendance Improvement Plan that was developed at a previous meeting. Present at the meeting will be a Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools representative.

The school will be in contact to arrange a time for another Attendance Improvement Plan meeting.

Yours sincerely,

(Principal)

NON-ATTENDANCE FLOWCHART



Considerations applicable at each state of attendance:

- a) A student who shows improvement after one of the stage, but later in the year again shows deteriorating attendance, need not start the process at Stage 1 but can rejoin the process where deemed appropriate
- b) A Risk of Significant Harm Education Neglect Report (ROSH) for educational neglect should be submitted for any 30 Days of Unexplained Absences in 100 Days or if the student's attendance should fall below 80%
- c) Failure of parents to engage with the school will not prohibit moving to the next stage.