

Student Engagement Policy Guidelines

Procedures for Suspension

Contacts for information and support

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Regional Offices.

A full list of regional office phone numbers can be found at:
www.education.vic.gov.au/schoolsonline/Regions.asp

Parents Victoria

Phone: 9380 2158 or 1800 032 023 (rural callers only)
Website: www.parentsvictoria.asn.au

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Phone: 1300 767 299
Website: www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/child/

Children's Protection Society

Phone: 9450 0900
Website: www.cps.org.au/

Australian Childhood Foundation

Phone: 9874 3922
Website: www.childhood.org.au/website/default.asp

Association of School Councils in Victoria

Phone: 9808 2499
Website: www.asciv.org.au/ASCIV/Welcome.html

Victorian Council of School Organisations

Phone: 9429 5900
Website: www.viccco.org.au/

Victorian Multicultural Commission

Phone: 9208 3184
Website: www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.

Phone: 9416 3833
Website: www.vaeai.org.au/news/newsletter/2001dec/index.htm

This brochure addresses issues around suspension from school and is for parents/carers of suspended students. It covers:

- the Student Engagement Policy
- shared expectations for student engagement, attendance and behaviour
- how schools can support students before and after a suspension.

It also lists contacts for further advice and support.

Student Engagement Policy

The Student Engagement Policy aims to ensure a safe and inclusive school environment for everyone. It also outlines the school community's expectations for student engagement, attendance and behaviour.

Your school's Student Engagement Policy should:

- create a positive, fair and respectful culture
- build a safe and supportive environment
- encourage positive and respectful relationships that value diversity
- encourage student participation and student voice
- proactively engage parents/carers.

Shared expectations

The whole school community must be involved in developing shared expectations for the participation and behaviour of staff, students and their parents/carers. Part of this is ensuring students respect themselves, their peers and their teachers and are well behaved. When this does not happen, a staged response will be used by the school to support improved behaviour.

A staged response

The student support group is an important part of prevention and early intervention strategies for students with learning and behaviour issues.

It should involve you, your child (if appropriate), the school principal (or their delegate), your child's main classroom teacher or year level coordinator and any professionals who have been supporting you or your child. You can also bring along a friend or family member, as long as they are not acting for a fee or reward.

The student support group works out what your child's learning, social, emotional, behavioural and environmental needs are to ensure they get the best support and resources available. If required, the student support group can refer you or your child to community support agencies for specialist interventions.

What has to happen before a suspension occurs?

In order to suspend a student a principal must ensure that a range of strategies have been implemented to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of your child and that these strategies have not helped your child demonstrate more positive behaviour.

A student support group is then set up to explain to you and your child that a suspension is being considered. All participants in the meeting should try and to begin a process of effective communication and identify issues that are of concern to you, your child or the school.

The student support group then develops a range of strategies to support you and your child in addressing these areas of concern.

Reasons for suspension

Students can be suspended if, while at school, travelling to or from school or during an out-of-school activity (including travel there and back), they:

- (a) threaten or constitute a danger to the health, safety or wellbeing of any person
- (b) commit an act of significant violence against a person or cause significant damage to or destruction of property; are knowingly involved in the theft of property
- (c) possess, use, or deliberately assist another person to use prohibited drugs or substances
- (d) fail to comply with any reasonable and clearly communicated instruction of a principal, teacher or other staff member
- (e) consistently interfere with the wellbeing, safety or educational opportunities of any other student
- (f) consistently vilify, defame, degrade or humiliate another person based on age; breastfeeding; gender identity; impairment; industrial activity; lawful sexual activity; marital status; parental status or status as a carer; physical features; political belief or activity; pregnancy; race; religious belief or activity; sexual orientation; personal association (whether as a relative or otherwise) with a person who is identified by reference to any of the above attributes.

How long is a suspension for?

The maximum suspension is five school days in a row and no more than 15 school days a year, unless permission is granted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's regional director for a longer period of suspension. Suspensions cannot continue over the school holiday period into the following term.

Procedures for suspension

When a principal decides on suspension, a student support group meeting is set up to:

- explain to you and your child why, when and where the suspension will happen (e.g. in-school or out of school)
- provide contact details for additional support services
- develop, in conjunction with you, your child (if appropriate) and your child's teacher/year level coordinator, a Student Absence Learning Plan outlining school work to be done during the suspension.

If your child is suspended, the school must provide you and your child with a Notice of Suspension and a copy of this brochure before the suspension begins.

If the suspension is for five consecutive days, the principal must also provide you with details of the post-suspension student support group meeting.

Immediate suspension

A student can be suspended immediately if their behaviour warrants ordinary suspension or if they are putting the health, safety and wellbeing of themselves, staff or other students at significant risk.

In the case of immediate suspension you will be told without delay and a student support group will be held within 48 hours to ensure appropriate support for your child is in place. The school must provide you and your child with a Notice of Suspension and a copy of this brochure at the student support group.

Post-suspension student support group

If the suspension is for five consecutive days you and your child must attend a post-suspension student support group on the day your child returns to school to:

- review the Student Absence Learning Plan and the school work completed during suspension
- develop a Return to School Plan
- develop strategies within and outside of the school to meet your child's educational, social and emotional needs
- discuss the ongoing responsibilities of you, your child, the school and any other professional at the meeting.

Suspension complaint process

It is best to raise any concerns you have about your child's suspension at the start of the student support group meeting. If, at the end of this meeting, you feel your complaint has not been adequately addressed then you should speak to the school principal.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website provides additional information, phone numbers and further contact details for parent complaints.

Go to <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/parentcomplaint.htm>