

28 July 2023

Ms Sarah Redden
A/g Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Redden

Inquiry into the national trend of school refusal and related matters

I write in response to your letter dated 27 June 2023 regarding the request for information in relation to the impact of school refusal on the educational attainment of students.

Accordingly, please find attached (Attachment A) responses from Catholic Education Tasmania to the questions on notice as requested.

Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact my Executive Assistant,

Yours in Christ

Dr Gerard Gaskin
Dip T Prim, B Ed, M Ed, Grad Cert App Sc, Ph D
Executive Director: Catholic Education Tasmania
Adjunct Professor of Catholic Education: Campion College

Questions on notice: inquiry into the national trend of school refusal and related matters

- **Please provide attendance data by year level**

The average attendance of our students in Catholic schools in Tasmania is summarised by year level, as shown in the table below:

Year Level Desc	% of Absentees	% of Partial Attendance	% of Attended
Pre-Year 1	7.6%	0.5%	91.9%
Year 1	9.9%	0.8%	89.4%
Year 2	9.7%	0.6%	89.6%
Year 3	9.7%	0.6%	89.7%
Year 4	9.7%	0.7%	89.6%
Year 5	10.1%	0.7%	89.2%
Year 6	10.1%	0.7%	89.3%
Year 7	13.0%	1.1%	85.9%
Year 8	14.1%	1.5%	84.4%
Year 9	16.1%	1.8%	82.1%
Year 10	15.5%	2.0%	82.4%
Year 11	9.6%	2.2%	88.2%

It is important to note that these figures represent the average attendance. The attendance data is collected and recorded by the respective Catholic schools in Tasmania.

- **Do you collect data on reasons for absenteeism?**

- **If so, please provide the categories you collect data against**

Yes, we collect data on reasons for absenteeism. In our diocese, we have grouped the reasons for absence into six categories as shown in the table below. Students could be absent from school due to sickness, family holidays, truancy, and other reasons.

Attendance Desc	Attendance Code	% of Absentees
Ex - Sickness	E	54.54%
Ex - Other	O	26.29%
Absent Un'd	U	18.91%
Suspension/Exclusion	S	0.12%
Unauthorised	X	0.09%
Truant	T	0.05%

- **Please provide the absenteeism data by year level and by category you collect this data under.**

Year Level	% of Absentees
Desc	
Pre-Year 1	7.60%
Year 1	9.90%
Year 2	9.70%
Year 3	9.70%
Year 4	9.70%
Year 5	10.10%
Year 6	10.10%
Year 7	13.00%
Year 8	14.10%
Year 9	16.10%
Year 10	15.50%
Year 11	9.60%

- **What is your attendance target level for students? Is this consistent across all year groups?**
 - **If this varies by year level, please provide the target for each year level.**

The attendance target for all year levels is ideally 100%. However, in our diocese, the current school attendance target is on an average of 95%.

In order to ensure that students are attending school regularly, our schools have implemented a system where parents are notified once their child's attendance falls below 90%. This notification serves as a prompt for parents and schools to initiate discussions regarding the supports and interventions that may be required to improve the student's attendance.

- **Have you done any analysis work on the linkage between student attendance and student academic performance?**

Yes, we have conducted an analysis to examine the correlation between the student attendance and student academic performance. As an input, we used the progressive achievement test (PAT) and NAPLAN results of the students and student attendance to see the linkage. We have found a strong correlation (0.6) between the student attendance and academic performance.

- **How much of a gap are we seeing between the academic outcomes of children engaged in school refusal, and other students?**

There has been no analysis work performed to see the gap between the academic outcomes of children engaged in school refusal and other students yet. However, anecdotal evidence would suggest that poor attendance leads to poor academic performance.

- **How many children are enrolled in a form of education, other than mainstream school, including:**
 - **Home School**
 - **Virtual School**
 - **Distance Education**
 - **Other (please define categories).**
 - **Please provide student data against each category.**

In our diocese, all our catholic schools are registered only for onsite learning. Therefore, we have no students currently enrolled other than the mainstream.

- **Is data collected on the reason a student is not attending mainstream school and why an exemption has been provided?**
 - **Please provide data by category of exemption for how many students are enrolled in alternative methods of schooling.**

We do not have data on this, as our schools are registered only for onsite learning.

- **Is data collected on student academic performance for students enrolled in alternative forms of schooling (as above).**

Similar to the above questions, as our schools are registered only for onsite learning, we do not have data about students enrolled in alternative forms of schooling.

- **Do schools with higher rates of school refusal also have poorer academic performance among the rest of the student body?**

There has been no analysis work performed to identify the academic performance of the schools with higher rates of school refusal compared to the rest of the student body yet. However, anecdotal evidence would suggest that higher rates of school refusal leads to poorer academic performance.

- **What is the academic performance like of schools that are specifically geared towards reaching students who engage in school refusal? (e.g. Virtual Schools Victoria is one such school the committee is aware of).**

We have a catholic school St Francis Flexible Learning Center for students who are disengaged from the mainstream. However, we do not have data on their academic performance.

- **What academic outcomes do we see among students who have previously engaged in school refusal, but have since returned to school?**

Currently, we do not have data on the academic outcomes of the students who have previously engaged in school refusal, but have since returned to school. However, our schools follow appropriate intervention and support, regular engagement with families and other stakeholders to support the students academic performance. This helps our students to achieve at grade standard and make steady academic progress, as well as positive social outcomes.

- **What data is there on the effect of school refusal on students' employment opportunities later in life?**

Currently, we do not have data on the effect of school refusal on students' employment opportunities in later life.

- **What work has been done to understand the complex factors that influence student absenteeism?**

In our diocese, college pastoral teams have attended professional development. Colleges and schools are working to build relationships with the student and their family and tackle this issue on an individual basis.

To understand the factors that influence student absenteeism, schools have implemented various strategies. One of these strategies is monitoring students' attendance through student absenteeism reports. These reports provide valuable data on the frequency and duration of student absences, allowing schools to identify patterns and trends. By analysing this information, schools can gain insight into the reasons behind student absenteeism and develop targeted interventions to address the issue.

Other important aspects our schools follow to understand students absenteeism are parent communication, the utilisation of student support team referrals and student intervention meetings. They use these strategies as part of their efforts to combat student absenteeism.

By implementing these strategies, our schools aim to address student absenteeism comprehensively and proactively. They recognise that each student's circumstances may be unique and require individualised attention. Through ongoing monitoring, effective communication with parents, and targeted interventions, our schools strive to create a supportive environment that promotes regular attendance and academic success.

- **What policies do you have that support students and their families re-engage in school when experiencing school refusal?**

Our schools and colleges have policies such as Student Attendance Policy, Attendance & Punctuality Policy, Enrolment & Attendance Policy, Truancy Policy, School Refusal Policy, and Education Act 2016 to support families and students to re-engage in school when experiencing school refusal.

- **Has any work been done to identify students who may be at risk of school refusal?**

Yes, our schools and colleges address ongoing absences and review attendance data regularly. They identify attendance concerns, as this is an important step in ensuring a student's academic success and overall well-being. They held a meeting with the concerned body such as the Director of Learning and Well-being, to identify the underlying reasons for the absences and to develop strategies to address them effectively.

In the case where school refusal is identified as the primary cause of the absences, the focus shifts to establishing goals for the student to increase their attendance. The goals could be set collaboratively, involving the student, parents or guardians, teachers, counsellors, and other relevant stakeholders. The goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound to provide clarity and guidance for the student.

The meeting also involves discussions about potential barriers to attendance and how to address them. This includes identifying any underlying issues such as anxiety, bullying, or academic difficulties that may be contributing to the student's reluctance to attend school. By addressing these concerns and developing appropriate support mechanisms, the school can create a supportive environment that encourages the student to overcome their school refusal and attend regularly.

It's important to approach attendance concerns with empathy, understanding, and a focus on the student's well-being. By working together with the student and relevant stakeholders, the school can provide the necessary support and resources to help them overcome their challenges and ensure their educational progress.

- **What intervention strategies are in place to support these students and families?**

To support students and families dealing with ongoing absences and attendance concerns, our schools implement various intervention strategies such as Individualised Support Plans, Counselling Services, Parent/Guardian face to face meetings, Peer Support Programs, Academic Support, and Collaborative Approach, with the aim to provide a holistic support system that addresses the underlying causes of attendance concerns and helps the student succeed academically and emotionally.