

Dear St Gregory's Parents, Carers and Students,

Since arriving at St Gregory's College to take up the role of College Principal (K-12) at the start of 2019, I have noticed a worrying trend that I am concerned enough about to write to you to hopefully address the matter. The matter I am referring to is student absence from the College.

Each year, students at St Gregory's are expected to attend for approximately 184 school days. Depending on the College calendar, this number may vary from year to year. In 2019, there are 39 weeks of school spread across the four school terms. Each year, our students are scheduled to receive approximately 14 weeks of holiday time, again, spread out across the four school terms.

As a College, we set a goal for all students attending the College between 95% to 100% of the scheduled term days – this year, 95% attendance is approximately 175 school days across the calendar year.

Unfortunately, already in 2019, many students are currently not meeting this attendance goal. At the mid-point of the year, many students are already well above the expected level of absences.

Adding to the problems associated with student absenteeism, the College is experiencing an increase in parent requests for their child to be absent from the College to travel for holiday purposes during the school terms. There are ongoing numerous requests for student absence for days up to many weeks of the school term. Whilst this may be convenient for travel arrangements, it is detrimental to the student's education and their continuity of learning.

It is increasingly frustrating to have students absent on the first few days of term and / or the final few days of term. Students are greatly disadvantaged by these absences and are missing critical learning and the opportunity to start and finish each term in a strong fashion.

Unnecessary absences send a message to students that regular attendance at the College isn't important. If your child says they have a problem with learning, another student, their teacher or you know they are struggling with a College or home issue, please don't hesitate to contact me at the College.

I would expect that all our St Gregory's parents and carers want their children to be successful at the College, achieving to the best of their ability, making friends, feeling safe and being safe with others. Recent research studies show that when children are regularly absent from school, valuable teaching and learning time is missed, meaning essential skills and knowledge are not learned or are forgotten. Student engagement in learning is also affected because the student is uncertain of the task they are working on.

Absence from the College can also impact friendships, which can weaken or change causing conflict and anxiety. Any anxieties about learning and relationships can also lead to behaviour change.

Missing one day a week from the College from Kindergarten to Year 10, means missing 2 years and 1 term of schooling. Missing two days, means 4 ½ years. At St Gregory's College we strive for all students to reach their potential and regular attendance supports your child to achieve this.

Being at the College regularly and engaging in learning is like building a brick wall. The foundation needs to be solid. When bricks are missing, the wall isn't as strong. Days absent are the missing bricks which create gaps in knowledge and skills.

Local and international research demonstrates a strong correlation between students' learning, longer-term life outcomes and attendance at school and appropriate participation in education

programs. Poor patterns of attendance place students at risk of not achieving their educational, social and future potential as adults.

Some quality research from the United States in recent years in relation to student absenteeism is worth considering in this matter: -

- Absenteeism in the first month of school can predict poor attendance throughout the school year. Half the students who miss 2 - 4 days at the commencement of the school year go on to miss nearly a month of school.
- Absenteeism and its ill effects start early. One in 10 kindergarten and Year 1 students are chronically absent.
- Poor attendance can influence whether children read proficiently by the end of Year 3 or be held back educationally.
- By Year 6, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will not? successfully complete secondary schooling.
- Research shows that missing 10 percent of the school, negatively affects a student's academic performance.
- When students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic prospects and chances for graduating.
- Attendance improves when schools engage students and parents in positive ways.
- Research shows that poor school attendance is associated with increased alcohol, tobacco, and substance use in adolescents.

Parents and carers of students from Kindergarten to Year 12 at St Gregory's must ensure their children attend the College every day. On occasion, students may need to be absent from the College. Justified reasons for student absences may include:

- being sick or having an infectious disease
- having an unavoidable medical appointment
- exceptional or urgent family circumstances e.g. attending a funeral

Parents and carers must provide an explanation for absences to the College within 7 days from the first day of any period of absence. Where an explanation has not been received within the 7-day timeframe, the College will record the absence as unexplained on the student's record.

In addition to student absenteeism is the issue of coming late to the College or leaving early. We know that coming late / leaving early impacts important routines and organisation for that day; learning time is missed which means that students are always trying to "catch up"; students can become embarrassed and become anxious; and, classmates learning is disrupted and put on hold while the teachers explain learning tasks over and over again to students who were not present.

Participating in school every day gives our young people the best chance of achieving their goals. A student's level of school attendance is a major influence on their achievement.

Please talk to your child about their goals and the role schooling will have in achieving them. Your child may not be aware of the impact that missing school can have in the long term. Having conversations about the importance of going to school every day will show them you value their education.

I thank you for your cooperation in the matter of attendance over the school year. Please contact me at the College to discuss any matters concerning the attendance of your child.

Lee MacMaster – College Principal (K-12)

11 July 2019