

# CODING CULTURAL ABSENCES

Schools have an important role to play in supporting Koorie students to celebrate their culture. As well as working with the local Koorie community to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the learning program, schools should also support students to participate in important cultural events outside of school. Schools are encouraged to work with Koorie families to ensure students are properly supported when they are away from school.

To allow for a better understanding and awareness of Koorie cultural absences, a number of changes have been made to the student absence module in CASES 21 to more accurately reflect the purpose and importance of *Sorry Business* and cultural activities to the Koorie community and students.

## 1. 'Sorry Business' as an additional new code

When a death occurs in the Koorie community, it is a cultural expectation that Koorie families get together and support each other regardless of distance or for how long that support is required. This is known as *Sorry Business*. Previously, Koorie students that were absent from school due to *Sorry Business* were marked as absent due to 'Bereavement,' under code 211, which did not account for the extended absences that *Sorry Business* sometimes requires.

There is a CASES21 absence code specifically for *Sorry Business* absences. Absences under this code (coded as 212 in CASES21) are marked as approved and counted as an absence in CASES21. Using this code will allow schools to better understand their attendance data and tailor support to students and families.

Schools are advised to be particularly sensitive when a Koorie student returns to school after *Sorry Business* and are encouraged to work alongside the Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) and family to identify what supports the student needs to ensure a smooth transition back into the classroom.

## 2. Coding Koorie cultural absences as an 'Educational Activity'

Attendance every day is essential for engagement and learning at school, but sometimes there are opportunities for Koorie students to participate in external activities during school hours that are important for their cultural education. To enable Koorie students to participate in important cultural activities, without the absence being counted on their attendance record, Koorie cultural activities are included as an 'Educational Activity' under code 600. Absences marked under this code are approved by the school and not counted as an absence in CASES21.

This acknowledges the important role that culture plays in a Koorie student's education and overall well-being.

Some examples of a Koorie cultural activity include (but are not limited to):

- visiting significant cultural sites
- attending a cultural event
- cultural ceremonies including naming ceremonies, coming of age and tombstone openings
- students in out-of-home care participating in a return to Country program as part of their Cultural Support Plan
- cultural visits on Country.

To be recorded as educational, absences must be:

- planned and agreed with a school in advance; and
- included in a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), with links to the curriculum and specific learning outcomes.

For further information about Koorie cultural absences, please contact your local Koorie Engagement Support Officer.