

Truancy

Other Names: • Truant

Details

Truancy means intentional absences from schooling. Truancy became an offence when education became compulsory (under state education laws). This meant children charged with truancy could be arrested by police or truancy officers and committed to institutions such as industrial schools and reformatories. Magistrates could also fine parents for allowing a child to truant, and order the family be supervised under the probation system, or remove children from their families and commit them to an institution. Throughout the twentieth century truancy was one of the most common reasons children came to the attention of state welfare authorities.

For example, truancy became an offence in Tasmania after the passage of the 1868 [Public Schools Act](#) which made education compulsory. In New South Wales, education was made compulsory in 1881, under the *Public Instruction Act*, and truancy became an offence. This meant children charged with truancy could be arrested by police or truancy officers and committed to industrial schools and reformatories. When Children's Courts were introduced in 1905, magistrates could fine parents for allowing a child to truant, and order the family be supervised under the probation system, or remove them from their families and commit them to an institution.

In South Australia, the *Education Act 1926* contained a provision under which a child could be charged with being a habitual truant and placed under the control of the [State Children's Council](#) and its successors. This provision was repealed in 1993. It was again included in the [Children's Protection Act 1993](#) as part of the definition of a 'child at risk'.

In Western Australia, the [Public Education Act 1899](#) allowed 'officers' to be appointed to pick school-age children who were absent from school and take them and their parents before the courts (s.9). As a penalty, the child could be sent to an industrial school until the age of 14 (s.13). The *Public Education Amendment Act 1905* further defined penalties for 'habitual truants' (s.18). The Act acknowledged the responsibility of parents to ensure their children went to school but could also punish children, who could be brought before the Children's Court and dealt with under child welfare legislation. The court could send habitual truants to an institution until they reached the school-leaving age of 14. This offence was carried through into child welfare legislation. Eventually, the offence of being an habitual truant was removed by the [Child Welfare Amendment Act \(No 2\) 1976](#).

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Related Entries

Related Organisations

- [Department of Education, State Government of New South Wales \(1915 - 1989\)](#)
- [Department of Public Instruction \(1880 - 1915\)](#)
- [Children's Court of New South Wales \(October 1905 - current\)](#)

Related Legislation

- [Public Education Act 1899, Western Australia \(1899 - 1928\)](#)
- [Public Education Amendment Act 1905, Western Australia \(1905 - 1928\)](#)

Resources

- McLean, Donald, *Children In Need: An account of the administration and functions of the Child Welfare Department, New South Wales, Australia: with an examination of the principles involved in helping deprived and wayward children*, 1955
 - Western Australia. Charities Department, *Report by the Superintendent of Public Charities and Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools*, 1899 - 1907. *Relevance*: 1903
 - [The orphanage sensation](#), Sunday Times, 18 June 1911. *Relevance*: 'The orphanage sensation' includes an account of a boy who was committed to the Swan Boys' Orphanage for truancy
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