



Attendance Matters



Guidelines for implementing an effective
attendance management plan





These guidelines replace the 2007 attendance guidelines in the Ministry of Education's Student Support Handbook.

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Introduction

Student attendance, along with effective teaching, has the greatest influence on student engagement and achievement. All students must be present at school so they can participate and engage in learning. Parents and boards of trustees are legally responsible to ensure students' regular attendance at school (see Appendix 1). These guidelines aim to assist schools to manage attendance effectively, and so contribute to improving student engagement and achievement, especially for Māori and also Pasifika learners who are over represented in the statistics.

Irregular attendance may be an early indicator of problems with student motivation or teaching effectiveness. Students with high absenteeism are less likely to succeed in their learning. If a student misses five school days each term, or one day a fortnight, they will miss the equivalent of one year of school over 10 years. As the level of absenteeism grows, the difficulty of re-engaging in learning can grow exponentially.

All schools need an attendance management plan, even schools with high levels of attendance and especially schools with high absence rates. A plan will help your school monitor and manage student attendance. It will also help you measure the effectiveness of relevant policies, processes and procedures, and the effectiveness of the plan itself. Your attendance plan should form an integral part of your school's broader planning and self-review.

These guidelines for managing attendance are for boards of trustees, principals and teachers. They will help your school:

- focus on student attendance as a foundation for student engagement and achievement
- develop and implement a robust attendance management plan and effective processes
- improve student attendance.

Every school's plan will be different, so these guidelines pose questions for you to consider when developing your own. The aim is to develop a plan tailored to the needs of your school, your students and your community.

To help you implement your attendance management plan, we have produced eight school case studies. These are available online and are summarised on page 12.

Some schools may need extra support in developing an attendance management plan. Please refer to *Further information, advice and reading* on page 13.

“Everyone’s starting to see the link between achievement and attendance, and they are really starting to come on board.”

Principal

Developing a plan

The process of developing an attendance management plan will help you identify:

- any attendance and engagement problems at your school
- what you want to achieve regarding these issues
- how you are going to achieve this
- who will implement and manage your attendance management plan
- how you will know you have achieved the desired attendance outcomes.

There are several factors you need to consider and build into your attendance management plan. These are discussed in the following sections, and include:

- self-review
- establishing aims and targets
- analysing and using data
- processes for attendance management
- roles and responsibilities
- community engagement
- useful strategies
- evaluation.

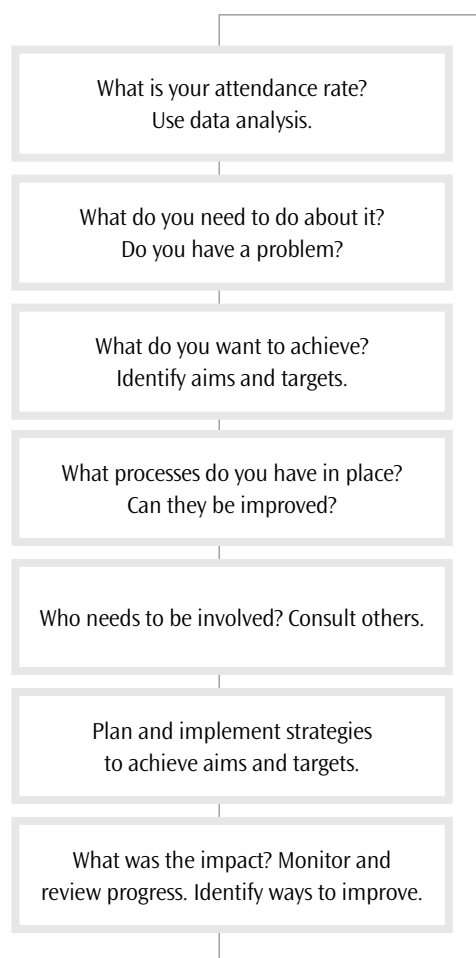
Self-review

Self-review gives you a clear picture of attendance in your school. Use the self-review checklist on pages 8–9 and the inquiry cycle on the right (adapted from the inquiry and knowledge-building cycle) to assess:

- your current position
- your school's attendance patterns
- what you need to know
- whether you have a problem
- what your next steps will be.

Work collaboratively with staff, students, parents, whānau, the community and iwi as part of your self-review process.

Inquiry cycle



“Attendance is one of our three strategic goals, alongside Attitude and Achievement.”

Principal

Establishing aims and targets

Your attendance management plan should identify your current position, your school's aims and the targets you are working towards. Link these to your data analysis.

There are several important indicators that are closely associated with excellent student attendance. These include the percentage of:

- students with 100% attendance
- students with improved attendance from the last term or last year
- student, parent and whānau satisfaction with initiatives focused on increasing attendance.

When identifying your aims and targets it is important to:

- link them to any attendance, engagement and achievement issues you have identified
- base them on prior attainment and expected progress
- relate them to students across the school or by year level, classroom, form class, subject or individual
- focus on classes, teachers or students with lower attendance levels than others
- ensure they are relevant to students and their parents, whānau, the community and iwi aspirations
- link school leaving, achievement and attendance data to inform the type of programmes you offer students and pedagogies known to engage students
- consider national averages for attendance and absence, and how your school might contribute to attaining nationally set targets.

National averages and targets

The national 2009 attendance survey estimates the national average for attendance as 88.4%. The national average for unjustified absence in 2009 was 4.2%.

Ka Hikitia: Managing for Success has targets to reduce truancy rates for years 9 and 10 Māori students who are frequent truants from 2.8% in 2009 to:

- 2.7% in 2011
- 2.6% in 2012
- 2% in 2015.

The *Pasifika Education Plan* has targets to increase the proportion of Pasifika school leavers achieving qualifications when leaving school.

The Ministry of Education's Statement of Intent 2011–2016 has set the following targets to reduce truancy rates for years 9 and 10 per day, per 100 students:

| Current performance (2009/10): Total 1.3, Māori 2.8, Pasifika 1.8 | | | |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| Target | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 |
| Total | 1.2 | 1.1 | 1.0 |
| Māori | 2.7 | 2.6 | 2.5 |
| Pasifika | 1.7 | 1.6 | 1.5 |

Analysing and using data

Quality data is crucial for effective attendance management in your school. It provides information for your board of trustees on attendance rates and is vital for an effective attendance strategy. The right data analysis also allows you to better plan to maximise attendance and engagement as a foundation for achievement in your school.

Attendance management systems

Your attendance management system allows you to analyse data in depth and identify patterns of attendance, including casual truancy and students at risk of being truant. This information is vital for early intervention.

You will use either a manual system (for example the E19/1 paper-based system) or the electronic Attendance Register (eAR).

Using eAR provides many advantages:

- Attendance data can be recorded, monitored and analysed accurately and quickly.
- Schools can do their own analysis and make their own summary reports.
- Reporting is easier and less burdensome for schools.

Other IT systems that can support attendance management include:

- An early notification (EN) system, which allows schools to alert parents and whānau by text or email of a child's unexplained absence.
- A parent portal, which allows parents on-line access to information to support their child's learning, including attendance and achievement information.

Collecting data

Good attendance data depends on careful collection, analysis, interpretation and action. Unmarked class registers or registers that are not submitted at the stipulated time compromise the integrity of your data and your ability to follow up on absences quickly.

Class teachers need to record student attendance and absence accurately while students are present. This may be period by period in secondary schools, or at least twice a day, mornings and afternoons, in primary schools. Recording accurate data means consistently applying attendance codes (defined on pages 10–11).

“Once the data had been gathered, it was compared with achievement data, and the picture was clear – students with high levels of absence were the lowest achievers.”

Principal

Monitoring and analysing data

Regularly monitoring and analysing attendance data:

- highlights patterns in absence early, on the day the absence occurs
- encourages a problem-solving approach towards attendance, engagement and absence
- helps you identify the root causes of unjustified absence
- enables you to target areas and identify groups of students and/or classes and teachers who may need extra support
- is critical to developing strategies to address the root causes and improve student attendance.

Questions to consider:

- Can you trust the attendance rates being generated by your attendance data analysis? Do staff accurately mark attendance and record and code absence?
- Where does your data come from and how current is it?
- What is your data telling you and what are the stories behind this data? What are the root causes of persistent unjustified absence in your school?
- Does attendance at your school meet your expectations, match the national average and/or meet Māori and Pasifika targets?
- How often do you analyse your data? Immediately after the attendance rolls, daily, weekly, annually?
- Does your attendance data link with school leaving data, achievement data and feedback from students, parents, whānau and/or deans' networks to inform what support you offer students and teachers?
- Are there groups of students who have lower attendance than others? Who are these groups? Examine ethnicity, age, gender.
- Are there particular teachers who have lower class attendance than others? What support do they need?
- Is there a particular subject or day that students do not attend?
- Are particular students not attending? Do you know why?
- Do you have an attendance problem?
- How could you improve your data collection, monitoring and analysis?

Processes for attendance management

To ensure the safety of all enrolled students, you must have documented attendance management processes in your plan. Think about how these integrate with other school policies and your strategic direction.

Use the definitions on pages 10–11 to ensure everyone involved has the same understanding of terms, including how to define each attendance or absence category.

Investigate whether your systems and processes are helping or hindering progress towards addressing any attendance issues.

Questions to consider:

- Are your processes clearly communicated to all staff, including teaching, administration and management, and are they consistently applied?
- What are the responses to different kinds of absence?
- Do any of these processes/responses need to change?
- How do your processes support the action needed?
- How does attendance recording fit with your ENROL processes?
- Are your attendance codes consistent with the absence definitions and codes on pages 10–11?
- What are other similar schools to yours doing, nationally or internationally? Use SchoolSmart to find out.
- How and when are problems with attendance communicated to parents and whānau?
- How do you measure the success of your processes?

“The key to the school’s approach is to listen to what the problem is and address that problem as a collective.”
Principal



Roles and responsibilities

When developing your attendance plan, it is important to decide who will lead the strategy and planning, for example the principal or board.

Schools with high attendance generally have a senior staff member or team with attendance management built into their job description responsibilities. They are very involved in the development and ongoing implementation of the school's attendance management plan.

You should also agree who the other key players are and what roles they will play, for example: the board, senior management, teachers, students, parents and whānau, the community, community agencies, iwi and attendance services. This means communicating with each party so they know what they are responsible for and they understand the link between high levels of student attendance and improved engagement in learning and achievement.

Questions to consider

- Is the board involved in developing the strategic direction of attendance at your school?
- How will the board monitor the achievement of your targets and how will they contribute?
- Who monitors and reports on student attendance and engagement at your school?
- Who manages the stages, processes and staff involved?
- Has the current person responsible for day-to-day attendance duties been allocated the time to dedicate to this critical function?
- Will you build effective student engagement strategies into staff performance and job descriptions?
- Do you and your senior managers support the staff involved in attendance management?
- Who will get the feedback and how often (for example, board reports, parent and whānau newsletters)?
- Who will be involved in the evaluation of attendance management and how will they contribute?

Community engagement

Attendance is an important issue that affects the whole community – your school, students, parents and whānau, iwi and the wider community. Therefore, everyone involved should have the opportunity to help develop, implement and review attendance management strategies.

It is important to understand the reasons for absenteeism. By involving interested parties you get to the stories behind the data, such as the reasons for absenteeism and the size of the problem. This will help you find solutions. It will also help establish clear and fair rules for attendance that are quickly and consistently applied throughout your community.

Questions to consider

- Who will you consult when developing and reviewing your attendance management plan?
- Who is the audience for your plan? With whom will you communicate?
- How will you communicate the plan to any parents, whānau, iwi and community members not involved in the process?
- How can you ensure parents, whānau, iwi and the community understand the links between achievement, engagement and attendance?
- How will you work with neighbouring schools to implement consistent attendance strategies across your cluster?
- How will your cluster work with the wider community to raise awareness of the importance of attendance and the value of education?

“The whānau-engagement model of Te Kauhua proved highly successful for Māori students. The parents suggested the school adopt a buddy system, whereby Māori students whose attendance and achievement had improved were matched with Māori students who were struggling.”

Te Kauhua Facilitator



Useful strategies

When choosing and implementing attendance management strategies, select strategies that you believe are workable for your school and community for 'at risk' groups and/or the whole school. Consider using strategies that have been tried and tested either by your own or other schools. Remember that low-cost or no-cost options can be some of the most effective solutions.

Evaluate the effectiveness of your existing attendance and engagement strategies and review them as required.

Strategies used by over 600 schools who participated in a 2010 study are summarised in Figure 1 opposite.

Questions to consider

- How effective are your attendance and engagement strategies?
- How do your strategies integrate with other policies?
- How will you get buy-in to your strategies?
- Should you consider incentives and rewards?
- Can each classroom, both teacher and students, develop a one-page document summarising the key strategies to improve attendance and engagement with targets for their class or subject?
- If unjustified absence is mainly prevalent in a small group, how does this affect the strategies you might implement?
- Do some of your teachers have 100% student attendance rates? Do you reflect on why their class attendance is high and share this with colleagues?

“It’s not enough for the school to have good structures and procedures in place and to set standards and expectations for attendance – what sits underneath all that is relationships.”

Principal

Getting involved in the Tauhara Girls’ Rugby team was a turning point for one student.

“My goal for the future is to be a PE teacher, and school is the only way to achieve that goal.

“I make the effort because I want some kind of future,” she says.

“I don’t want to break the routine otherwise I will go back to the old pattern (of truancy).”

Student, Tauhara College

Evaluation

Regularly evaluating the effectiveness of your attendance management plan will help you reflect on progress and inform your future decisions. It also gives interested parties the opportunity to give input to future plans and increase the effectiveness of attendance management at your school (see also the template provided in Appendix 2).

Questions to consider:

- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your attendance plan?
- How often will you monitor the effectiveness of your attendance systems and processes?
- What is the cost of unjustified absence to your school? Have your new practices saved you operating expenses?
- How will your evaluation process inform the continuous improvement and development of your plan?
- Have you achieved your targets and aims? If not, what action will you take? If so, have you set new ones?
- What was the impact of the plan? Is anyone better off?
- Do you know what your students, parents and whānau think about attendance? Have you asked them? Were they involved in the process of developing your attendance management plan?
- What other benefits can be attributed to your attendance management plan?

Figure 1: Actions taken by schools to address truancy¹

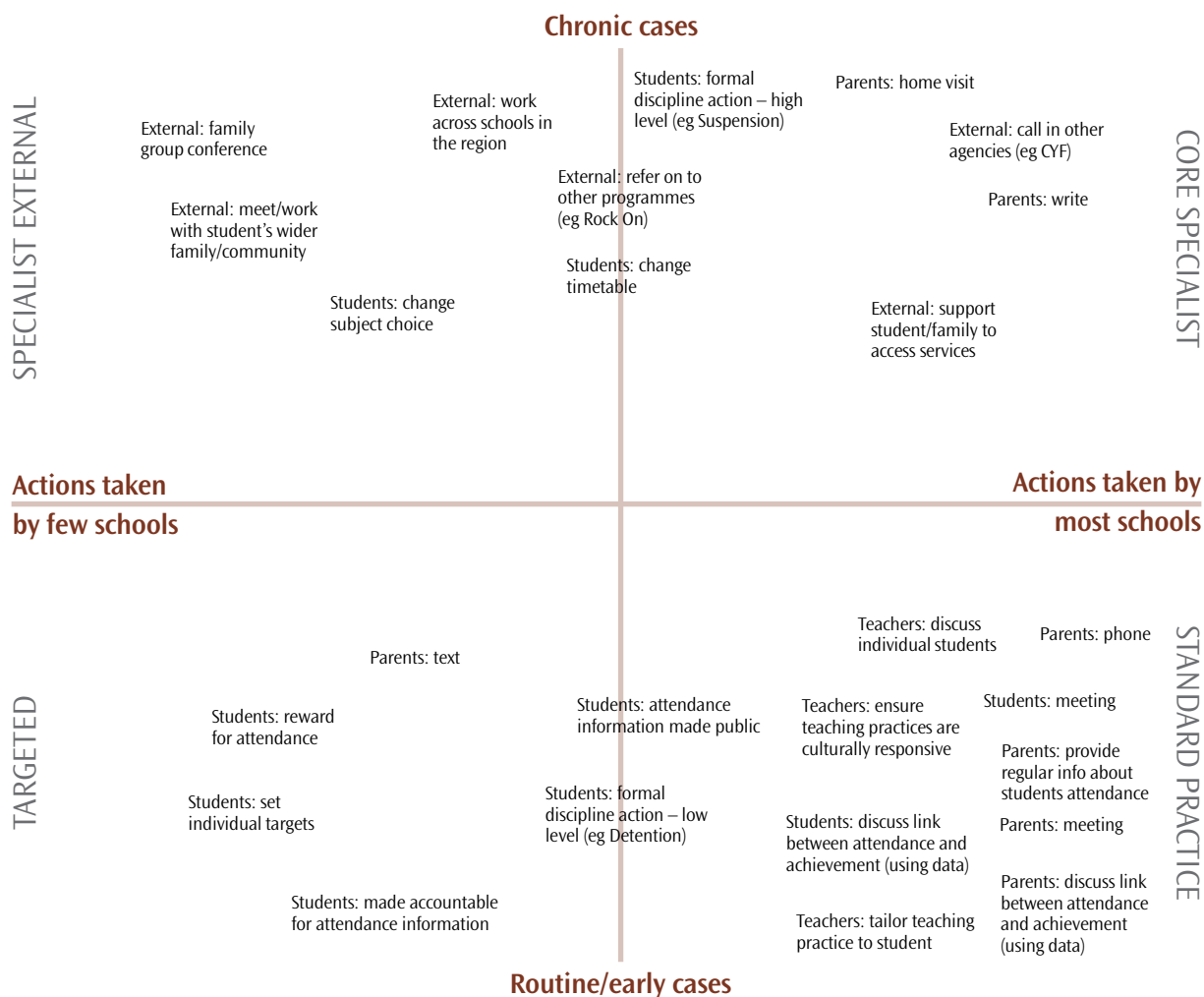


Figure 1 summarises the actions taken by over 600 schools who do not rely on the District Truancy Service (DTS) to address truancy. Their responses are plotted to show:

- the 'y' axis (up and down) – actions towards the bottom of the figure were most commonly used for routine/early cases, actions towards the top were most commonly used for chronic cases
- the 'x' axis (left to right) – actions on the left were undertaken by fewer schools, actions on the right were undertaken by most schools

Figure 1 can be interpreted in the following way:

- Lower left quadrant: routine actions, primarily targeted at students; the actions in this quadrant are only undertaken by some non-DTS schools.
- Lower right quadrant: routine actions seen by schools as standard practice for responding to issues of unjustified absence; together they form the 'first layer' of strategies used to engage students and were routinely used by most schools. It is interesting to note that the majority of actions involving parents and teachers are taken at this early

phase, before unjustified absence becomes chronic. Most actions in this quadrant represent effective teaching and learning practice and signal the growing awareness of the relationship between teaching, learning and attendance.

- Top two quadrants: actions reserved for chronic or difficult cases of unjustified absence. The actions involving external parties are used only for these chronic cases. Parents are a key link when unjustified absence is classified as chronic, with almost all schools indicating that they wrote to parents and/or undertook a home visit to follow up these cases.

“Improved engagement has also led to fewer stand-downs and suspensions for Māori students.”

Te Kauhua Facilitator

“Eighteen months on, attendance rates have improved to around 90% on average. While still below target, this statistic is a huge achievement for the school.”

Principal

¹ Martin Jenkins. (2011). *Attendance strategies used by non-DTS schools: A report on the research.*

Self-review checklist for attendance management

“The principal reports on attendance data to the board every month. Attendance is a formal part of every meeting.”

Board member

Examples of good practice

Use this checklist to review the effectiveness of your attendance management plans and processes. It may also highlight areas for improvement and the GO TO column will lead you to other sections in this document to assist you in developing your attendance management plan.

| 1. Greatest impact | 2. Some impact | 3. No impact | Self-evaluation (1, 2 or 3) | Go to for advice/action |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------|--|
| The board of trustees (BoT) is actively involved with the development of a student attendance and engagement strategic direction. | The BoT wants to be kept informed of attendance figures. | The BoT asks if the principal is focused on attendance but has no follow-up procedure. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing aims and targets (p3) Community engagement (p5) |
| The BoT has attendance on the board agenda at every meeting and requires an attendance report at each meeting. | The BoT discusses attendance at termly intervals. | The BoT asks about attendance when the roll return is due. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing and using data (p3) Evaluation (p7) |
| The principal regularly has attendance on the senior management team (SMT) or staff meeting agenda and has a report each week or fortnight. | The principal raises attendance at half-termly intervals with the SMT/staff meeting. | The principal asks about attendance when the roll return is due. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing and using data (p3) Evaluation (p7) |
| A member of the SMT has direct responsibility for attendance. | A member of the SMT has an overview of attendance. | The SMT is not involved in managing attendance. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes for attendance management (p4) Roles and responsibilities (p5) |
| A well structured policy is shared with all staff and each person, including relieving staff, understands their role. | The policy is sound overall and makes reasonably clear the respective responsibilities. | The policy lacks clarity over respective roles for improving attendance. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing aims and targets (p3) |
| All key players are aware of their roles and responsibilities for attendance and absence follow-up, and implement actions swiftly and consistently. This is monitored effectively at appropriate times. | Key players are aware of roles and responsibilities but do not fully implement actions swiftly or consistently. | Key players are not fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and do not consistently or quickly follow actions through. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing and using data (p3) Processes for attendance management (p4) Roles and responsibilities (p5) |
| The school's overall targets for improving attendance are based on a thorough audit of quality relevant data. There are explicit and realistic strategies for meeting these targets. Targets are regularly monitored by the SMT and BoT. | Targets for improving attendance have been set, but are not based on quality data. A reasonable range of strategies are used, but the range is neither comprehensive nor applied consistently or monitored. | Specific targets and/or actions to achieve these targets are not adequately reflected in school policy and practice. A limited range of strategies and initiatives is used to raise rates of attendance. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes for attendance management (p4) Roles and responsibilities (p5) Useful strategies (p6) Evaluation (p7) |
| Specific root causes of absence are identified and addressed. The school considers individual, family/whānau, school and community influences on unjustified absence (eg parent complicit in truancy, poverty, disengagement, bullying, poor teaching practice, inadequate behaviour management policies). | Specific causes of absence are identified but there is not a comprehensive strategy in place to resolve the underlying issues. | Specific causes of absence are not identified. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing and using data (p3) Useful strategies (p6) |

| 1. Greatest impact | 2. Some impact | 3. No impact | Self-evaluation (1, 2 or 3) | Go to for advice/action |
|--|---|---|-----------------------------|---|
| The school has an effective strategy for improving attendance which is understood and well integrated into all relevant key plans (eg Charter, behaviour management, teacher professional learning and development, etc). | The school strategy for improving attendance is sound and some actions are incorporated into key plans. | There is no clear strategy for improving attendance. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement (p5) Useful strategies (p6) |
| Specific consideration is given to improving attendance and engagement of certain vulnerable groups who are over-represented in your school's data (eg transient, Māori, Pasifika, migrant and refugee children) and resources are targeted. | The targeting of specific vulnerable groups is not comprehensive. | Improving the attendance of specific groups is not addressed. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing and using data (p3) Useful strategies (p6) |
| Deployment of the school's resources to deal with attendance is based on clear analysis of need and effective prioritisation, and is well targeted and monitored. | Deployment of resources is based on clear criteria but is not always well targeted, monitored or focused on school priorities. | It is unclear what criteria have been used for prioritisation and deployment of resources to attendance and there is no monitoring. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes for attendance management (p4) Roles and responsibilities (p5) Useful strategies (p6) |
| The school fosters effective liaison and co-ordination between all relevant services and maintains good working relationships with partners (eg Health nurse, Police, CYF etc). | There is liaison and co-ordination between services and partners, but it is not co-ordinated or managed by the school. | Liaison between services and partners is poor. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement (p5) |
| Data on attendance is effectively monitored on a frequent basis. The analysis is shared with all stakeholders (eg staff, BoT, parents/whānau, students). | Data is monitored regularly but insufficient attention is paid to the information this provides. Data is shared on an ad hoc basis with key stakeholders. | Procedures for monitoring and analysing data are in place, but not consistently or regularly followed up. Data is not shared with key stakeholders. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes for attendance management (p4) |
| Teachers/Form teachers work with their students to develop a class attendance policy, targets and monitoring practices built on a base of strong relationships. | Teachers set targets for classes and monitor progress but do not build relationships with students. | A policy is developed but does not reach the classrooms and teachers. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement (p5) Establishing aims and targets (p3) |
| Parents/Whānau are involved at the plan development phase and in regular newsletter progress reports. | School newsletters inform parents/whānau of progress and issues. | General reminder messages sent to parents/whānau as to the importance of attendance. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement (p5) |

Adapted from http://www.bristol-cyps.org.uk/services/word/attendance_evaluation_grid.doc

“Schools that did not know about Māori student presence patterns were unlikely to be able to respond in appropriate ways.”
ERO, Report on Māori achievement, 2010

Absence definitions and codes glossary

Quality data is crucial for effective attendance management in your school. This depends on the consistent application of codes across all classes in your school. The role of the Ministry in supporting and monitoring effective attendance management includes checking and reporting on national data. This relies on all schools submitting quality data.

These definitions, reasons, explanations and codes provide local and national consistency to strengthen the quality of attendance data used both within schools and nationally.

The explanations and examples are to help principals exercise their discretion about what constitutes a justifiable or an unjustifiable absence. Decisions should align with your attendance management plan.

The school attendance codes and are used by the Student Management System (SMS) in calculating statistical reports.

Overall absence is the sum of justified and unjustified absences.

Tuancy is the sum of unjustified absences and intermittent unjustified absences.

| | | Definitions | Reason (Business Rule) |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---|---|
| All attendance categories | Overall absence | Present Present (P) are those students who are present in class, or at another location in or outside the school and participating in a school-led and controlled activity. | Present |
| | | | Student late for class |
| | | | Sickbay |
| | | | Medical appointment – doctor or dentist |
| | | | Internal school appointment or activity – dean, deputy principal, sports administrator or coach, attendance officer etc |
| | | | Examination or unsupervised study – student is on the school-site |
| | | | On a school-based activity |
| | | | Attending a school trip/camp |
| | | | Work experience |
| | | | Removed (temporarily) from regular class (internal school student isolation) |
| | | | Attending a Teen Parent Unit |
| | | | Attending Alternative Education |
| | | | Attending an activity centre |
| | | | Attending an off-site course/class |
| | | | Attending a health camp/regional health school/residential school |
| | | | Student is attending Youth Justice Court proceedings |
| Overall absence | Overall absence | Justified absence Justified absences (J) occur when the reason for a student's absence fits within the school's policy as a justifiable reason for the student's absence. | Student absent due to short-term illness/medical reasons |
| | | | Justified explanation within the school policy |
| | | | Exam leave Unsupervised study – student is off-site |
| | | | Justified overseas – check next column for justification examples |
| | | | Student is stood down or suspended |
| Tuancy | Overall absence | Unjustified absence Unjustified absences (U) are full-day absences which are either unexplained, or the reason for the absence is not within the school's policy as a justifiable reason for the student to miss school. Intermittent unjustified absence (IUA) occurs when a student is absent for part of a morning (or afternoon) without justification. | Unknown reason (A temporary code) |
| | | | Student is absent with an explained, but unjustified reason |
| | | | No information provided – truant (or throw-away explanation) |

| Explanation and examples | School attendance code |
|---|------------------------|
| Student is in his/her regular class (includes supervised study). | P |
| School policy (or teacher policy) will determine when this codes is used. Eg School policy may recommend a student more than 10 minutes late is coded “L”. Note this code does not contribute to the school’s absence or truancy rate. | L |
| Student is known to be in the school sickbay. | S |
| Under existing legislation this type of absence is deemed to be Present when calculating ½ day summaries, provided there is documentation verifying the appointment. Note that a doctor’s appointment will be coded “M”. | D |
| This can include students who are out of class for various school appointments including: form teachers, deans, senior management, counsellor, sports administrator, coach, nurse, careers, as well as students on an administration activity such as messenger, collecting attendance etc. It does not include a student who has been removed from his/her regular class and sent to the administration area for disciplinary reasons. This student would be coded P in the class and the code would probably be changed to R by the senior staff member dealing with the student. | I |
| Students sitting examinations at school (if the SMS can provide attendance marking during exams.) Unsupervised study – school process verifies student is on the school-site. Note that supervised study is recorded as a regular timetabled class. | V |
| This code is for a school-based (on-site) activity, eg • cultural/sporting presentation/practice including swimming/athletic sports • one-to-one tuition either as tutor or tutored. | N |
| This code is for a school-based (off-site) activity (in New Zealand or overseas), eg • school trip (sporting, cultural or academic) • school camp. | Q |
| Student is working for a recognised employer as part of their course (Gateway is an example). | W |
| This code is for students who for a time period had an arrangement for alternative supervision, which may be in the administration corridor or in another teacher’s class, instead of the regularly scheduled class. | R |
| The student is not in class, is on the school roll but funded elsewhere. | K |
| The student is not in class, is on the school roll but funded elsewhere. | A |
| The student is not in class but in an approved environment for which the school is entitled to be funded. | Y |
| The student is not in class but is on a legitimate off-site school-based course. | F |
| The student is not in class but in an approved environment for which the school is entitled to be funded. | H |
| Under existing legislation this type of absence is deemed to be Present when calculating ½ day summaries. | C |
| Student is at home, with an illness or medical reason. Depending on school policy a medical certificate may be requested for prolonged illness, eg three days, or as policy requires. | M |
| • Unplanned absences such as a bus breakdown, accident, road closure, extreme weather conditions etc. • Planned non-attendance such as national/local representation in a sporting or cultural event in New Zealand or overseas. (See also Code O) • Approved absence (including overseas) can also include bereavement, visiting an ill relative, exceptional family circumstances or a Section 27. | J |
| Code X will count as a justified absence and be used in ½ day absence summaries. Note that supervised study is recorded as a regular timetabled class. | X |
| A student accompanying or visiting a family member who is on an overseas posting (the student can be held on the roll for up to 15 consecutive weeks). Eg military or diplomatic. Other approved (justified) overseas absence is coded “J”. Unapproved is coded “E”. | O |
| Student is stood down or suspended according the conditions of Section 14 of the Education Act 1989. (This code is for the period of the stand down/suspension. It does not count the day the stand down was imposed.) | U |
| This is the initial entry for a student not in class and the reason is unknown. It will be edited as relevant information becomes available about the reason for the non-attendance. The system can be configured by the school to automatically change (or not change) the “?” code to a “T” after a configurable number of school days (eg seven). | ? |
| The explanation for the absence is accepted by the school as the reason for the absence, but the reason does not fit within the school’s policy as a justifiable reason to take the student off school (even though the parents may consider the absence was justified and may have provided a written explanation). Eg “Molly had to stay home to look after her younger brother” or “We went for a two-week family holiday in the South Island.” This includes overseas absence not approved by the principal. (A parent’s note does not provide justification.) | E |
| This code is for an absence where no verifiable explanation is received, or the explanations are like the following: • I don’t like my maths teacher so I took the period off. • I had an assignment to be handed in next period so I took this period off to finish it. • I was hot so went down to the river. • We had a test and I wasn’t ready for it. • I was at the shops. | T |



Effective attendance management case studies

The following case studies highlight some diverse ways schools have implemented effective attendance management strategies. They can be read in full on the Ministry of Education website: www.minedu.govt.nz/attendance

Holistic approach to engagement and learning

Otahuhu College, Auckland

New Zealand's largest decile one college, with a predominantly Pasifika student population, uses culturally appropriate strategies to manage its unjustified absence problem. The school aims to respond to students' diverse needs and motivate them to raise achievement and improve attendance. It does this by creating a safe and engaging learning environment, and gaining an understanding of the wider health and home environment issues affecting students.

Meeting the needs of diverse students

Melville High School, Hamilton

Melville tackles attendance and behavioural issues amongst its small, ethnically diverse student population by working to improve students' engagement with learning and relationships with teachers. Teachers are now aiming to challenge students more, and have a more consistent approach to discipline. The school is also clarifying boundaries and standards, and aiming to give students subject choices that cater for their different learning needs.

Aiming high

Papatoetoe Intermediate, Auckland

One of the largest intermediate schools in the country, Papatoetoe Intermediate sets high attendance targets and has established strong systems to provide the evidence to back up its attendance strategies. The school encourages good behaviour through reward and recognition, and intervenes early if issues appear. Teachers are encouraged to develop positive relationships and good communication with their students. The ethnic mix of the staff also reflects the ethnic mix of students.

Community hub

Victory Primary School, Nelson

Rapidly growing Victory Primary School has established itself as a hub for integrated health, education, social and community services that promote family wellbeing and community development. It has a whānau-centric approach and believes that staff and parents are mutually accountable for students' educational and behavioural outcomes. By creating a positive and fun learning environment, the school has become a place where students want to be.

Positive change through positive action

Corinna School, Porirua

As a decile one primary school with a high student absence rate, Corinna School took decisive action by addressing the issue from multiple angles. The result was improved attendance rates, better communication and relationships with parents, stronger networks with nearby schools and a raised awareness of the importance of attendance among the wider community.

Community and whānau engagement key to success

Henderson Intermediate, Auckland

A zero tolerance approach to truancy, an effective attendance management procedure and a strong emphasis on community and whānau-based initiatives like Te Kauhua are helping Henderson Intermediate ensure its students are present and engaged at school. The Waitakere City Improving School Attendance Programme has also played a key role in tackling truancy in the area and runs several initiatives that involve the whole community.

Collaborative approach reaps rewards

Taupo/Turangi cluster

A cluster of 12 schools in the Taupo/Turangi region is making good headway in managing attendance. A cross-cluster Attendance Support team takes a collaborative approach to sharing procedures, ideas and resources. This is bringing huge advantages and giving the schools involved a strong direction and consistency of practice. Pastoral care also has an important role to play, as do the relationship-building skills of the local Truancy Officer and a range of wider community truancy initiatives.

Three-pronged approach works well

Turaki School, Taumarunui

Turaki School gives a high priority to monitoring attendance and following up unexplained absences. While having a transient community presents its challenges, the school is managing attendance well, thanks to its three-pronged strategy: having a rigorous attendance monitoring and reporting system; dedicating necessary time to personally assess data and act accordingly; and being part of a cluster-wide, interagency attendance management initiative called CKCBase.



Further information, advice and reading

For information and resources relating to attendance management, go to www.minedu.govt.nz/attendance

Your local Attendance Services (formerly DTS and NETS) can provide support to locate students and return them to education if your initial attempts are unsuccessful. They can also help to identify and address the underlying causes of unjustified absence. This may include helping students and/or their family/whānau to access social service support.

The Ministry of Education's regional and local office advisors can guide boards and principals on implementing robust student attendance practice in your school. They can also advise on the prosecution process.

| Region/area | Email address for enquiries | Phone number |
|--------------|--|--------------|
| Auckland | enquiries.auckland@minedu.govt.nz | 09 632 9400 |
| Whangarei | enquiries.whangarei@minedu.govt.nz | 09 436 8900 |
| Hamilton | enquiries.hamilton@minedu.govt.nz | 07 858 7130 |
| Rotorua | enquiries.rotorua@minedu.govt.nz | 07 349 7399 |
| Napier | enquiries.napier@minedu.govt.nz | 06 833 6730 |
| Whanganui | enquiries.whanganui@minedu.govt.nz | 06 349 6300 |
| Lower Hutt | enquiries.lowerhutt@minedu.govt.nz | 04 463 8699 |
| Nelson | enquiries.nelson@minedu.govt.nz | 03 546 3470 |
| Christchurch | enquiries.christchurch@minedu.govt.nz | 03 378 7300 |
| Dunedin | enquiries.dunedin@minedu.govt.nz | 03 471 5200 |
| Invercargill | enquiries.invercargill@minedu.govt.nz | 03 211 3610 |

Other useful contacts include:

- New Zealand School Trustees' Association
www.nzsta.org.nz or 0800STAHELP
- Parents Legal Information Line for School Issues (PLINFO)
0800 499488
- NZ Police (Youth Aid) www.police.govt.nz
- Family Services www.familyservices.govt.nz
- school counsellors
- social workers
- iwi authorities (such as Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Te Rangī Iwi Trust www.ngaiterangi.org.nz)
- Strengthening Families www.strengtheningfamilies.govt.nz
- Child, Youth and Family www.cyf.govt.nz
- District Health Boards
- Housing New Zealand www.hnzc.co.nz

Relevant reading

Read these guidelines in conjunction with the following:

- *Effective governance – working in partnership*
www.minedu.govt.nz
- Education Act 1989 sections 20, 25, 29, 31, 33 and 34
- Attendance Regulations 1951 clauses 3, 4, 8 and 13
- National Administration Guidelines 1, 3, 5 and 6
- *Ka Hikitia: Managing for Success* focus area 2: Young people engaged in learning – pages 32–33
- *Pasifika Education Plan* goal 6: Strengthen Pasifika students' presence and engagement in schooling through relationships focused on raising achievement
- *Improving attendance – case management of truancy and the prosecution process* www.minedu.govt.nz
- *The Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students* sections 7.2.4 and 16.



Appendix 1:

Legislation, regulations, guidelines and advice

Legislation

The Education Act 1989 (the Act)

The Act sets out requirements for students, parents, boards and principals.

Students 6–16 years old must be enrolled in and attend school

Every person who is not a foreign student is required to be enrolled at a registered school at all times during the period beginning on the person's sixth birthday and ending on the person's 16th birthday (Section 20).

Students required to enrol must attend school:

Every student of a registered school (other than a correspondence school) who is required by section 20 of this Act to be enrolled at a registered school shall attend the school whenever it is open (Section 25).

Parents are responsible for their child's regular attendance at school:

Every parent of a person who while enrolled at a registered school, does not attend... commits an offence, and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding an amount calculated at the rate of \$30 for every school day for which the offence has occurred... A fine imposed for an offence against that subsection shall not exceed \$300 for a first offence... or \$3,000 for a second or subsequent offence (Section 29).

In proceedings under this part of the Act (prosecutions), the burden of proving any of the following matters in relation to a person is on the person's parent:

- the enrolment of the person at a school*
- the person's attendance at a school*
- the person's exemption from enrolment or attendance at a school (Section 34).*

Boards of trustees must ensure attendance of students:

Any board may appoint any person to be an attendance officer for the schools or institutions it administers (Section 31(1)).

Every Board shall, by any means it thinks appropriate, take all reasonable steps to ensure the attendance of students enrolled at its school or schools (or institution or institutions). (Section 31(3)).

Principals must ensure that they have evidence of enrolment and attendance:

Principals must be able to provide proof of the matter stated:

- the enrolment of a person:.....*
- the days on which a student attended a school during any period..... (Section 33).*

Attendance Regulations 1951

The Education (School Attendance) Regulations 1951 require all schools to ensure:

- accurate keeping of an admission register and a register of daily attendance for all students attending his school (Regulation 3)*
- assistant teachers on the staff of a school shall assist in keeping the said registers and in making up summaries of attendances for each week and each term (Regulation 4)*
- the attendance of pupils in every school shall be recorded every morning and every afternoon in the register of daily attendance (Regulation 8).*

“We expect our kids to be here, and we want them to want to be here. It's as simple as that.”
Principal

The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs)

The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) outline the responsibility of each board of trustees to foster student achievement and attendance, and to comply with all general legislation concerning requirements such as attendance, and ensure the safety of all students:

NAG 1 states that each board of trustees is required to:

- (c) *on the basis of good quality assessment information, identify students and groups of students:*
 - i) *who are not achieving;*
 - ii) *who are at risk of not achieving;*
- (e) *in consultation with the school's Māori community, develop and make known to the school's community policies, plans, and targets for improving the achievement of Māori students*

Being present and engaged is fundamental to student achievement.

NAG 3 states that each board of trustees is required to:

- (a) *develop and implement personnel and industrial policies, within policy and procedural frameworks set by the Government from time to time, which promote high levels of staff performance, use educational resources effectively and recognise the needs of students*

NAG 5 states that each board of trustees is required to:

- (a) *provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students*
- (c) *comply in full with any legislation currently in force or that may be developed to ensure the safety of students and employees.*

NAG 6 states that each board of trustees is required to:

comply with all general legislation concerning requirements such as attendance, the length of the school day, and the length of the school year

When all students (regardless of age or whether they are international students) are attending school, boards, principals, parents, whānau and the community should be confident they are in a safe learning environment.

Advice

Non-attendance of students under the age of six

While a parent may enrol their child who is five years old in school, the parent is not legally required to ensure they attend until they turn six.

Attendance

- A school board still has a role to, by any means it thinks appropriate, take all reasonable steps to ensure the attendance of students enrolled at its school.
- If intermittent attendance by an enrolled five-year-old is a concern, the school can seek help from the attendance service, community agencies, CYF or the Police.

- The greatest concern for principals is not knowing if a child is at home or whether something untoward has happened on the way to school. Schools can contact Attendance Services to support them to confirm the safety of a child if they have been absent from school. Also a visit from CYF or a community constable to a parent may be enough.

Non enrolment

- A parent is free to withdraw their five-year-old at any time and not re-enrol them at another school until they turn six.
- After 20 consecutive days of unjustified absence schools may remove a five-year-old from the school's roll.

Non-attendance of students over the age of 16

Should schools follow-up for students over the age of 16, who are not legally required to be at school?

A school board still has a role to, by any means it thinks appropriate, take all reasonable steps to ensure the attendance of students enrolled at its school. Therefore some follow-up of absences in the short-term is expected. Following up absences is also in the interests of the school in relation to managing overall student behaviour.

As a 16-year-old student is not legally required to be at school, if the school is having an issue with intermittent unjustified absences the following questions may be useful:

- Has contact been made with the family?
- Are the family aware that their child is truanting?
- Does the family want the school to act on the truancy?
- Are the family aware of the impact their child's unjustified absence will have on NCEA?

Before deciding to follow up on a 16-year-old student who has not been attending school for some time the school needs to:

- formally ascertain from the family that they would like the school to continue to work with the student to keep him or her engaged in education
- document the steps they have already taken to try to locate and re-engage the student.

If the school requires additional assistance, they need to be clear what assistance they require. For example, the school may require the assistance of an attendance service to simply locate the family as the school hasn't been able to do so. Once that has happened, the school should resume discussions with the family.

After 20 consecutive school days of unjustified absence, schools may remove a student who is 16 to 19 years old from the school's roll.

“It's important to let parents know how well the school is managing attendance. They know we're going to check up and keep checking up.”

Principal

Appendix 2: Template for evaluating your attendance management plan

| Review | Who | When | Action decided |
|-------------------------------------|-----|------|----------------|
| Establishing aims and targets | | | |
| Analysing and using data | | | |
| Processes for attendance management | | | |
| Roles and responsibilities | | | |
| Community engagement | | | |
| Useful strategies | | | |



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New Zealand Principals' Federation
New Zealand School Trustees' Association
New Zealand Secondary Principals' Association
Otago Boards' Forum (District Truancy Service Provider)
Pasifika Advisory Group
Post Primary Teachers' Association
Secondary Principals' Council
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