School Attendance:
Quick Reference Guide

Attendance is a shared responsibility

Today's learners are tomorrow's leaders. Attendance is the first step to learning.

Students aged 6-16 years old are legally required to attend school every day. It's everyone's responsibility to make sure children and young people attend so they can engage and achieve in their learning.

Schools are expected to have their own attendance policies and procedures, and they must record and report on attendance. This includes a responsibility to take reasonable steps to make sure enrolled students attend whenever the school is open. This means if a student who is expected at school has not turned up then the school must notify a parent/caregiver in a timely manner so they can act accordingly.

ABOUT THIS QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

We recognise the efforts schools are making to keep students engaged. We want to support schools to get a more efficient, and more effective picture of student absence and to use this information to address attendance levels in their schools.

This guide provides schools with further information, key links, and resources to assess attendance patterns within their school and put in place appropriate policies and practices to improve student attendance.

Included in this guide:

› An overview of the Student Attendance Categories

› Understanding the difference between Daily Attendance and Regular Attendance

› Every Day Matters: a termly attendance report for your school

› Introduction to Attendance Data e-learning module

› Additional Attendance Indicators

› Resources for Schools

  • A guide to following up with parents and caregivers.

  • A guide to using your SMS to record the reasons for absence.

  • Intervening when absences become extended or persistent.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDENT ATTENDANCE CATEGORIES

The Ministry has consistently used four Student Attendance Categories to understand how frequently students attend. These categories give you a way to monitor the progress you are making in supporting students to attend regularly.

Student Attendance Categories aim to:

> **Help focus on students' needs.**
> **Make sure interventions are suitable for each category.**
> **Enable schools and teachers to monitor the progress of their students.**

ATTENDANCE CATEGORY	STUDENT WITH	EQUIVALENT
Regular attendance*	Over 90% attendance	Absent for fewer than 5 days across a term
Irregular absence	More than 80% and up to 90% attendance	Absent for between 5 and 9 days across a term
Moderate absence	More than 70% and up to 80% attendance	Absent for between 10 and 14 days across a term
Chronic absence	70% attendance or less	Absent for 15 days or more across a term

Note: The Government has set a target of 80% of students to be present for more than 90% per cent of the term by 2030.

How are Student Attendance Categories calculated?

Student Attendance Categories look at each individual student and what their attendance rate was for a term (the percentage of half days they were present). The student is then placed into one of the four categories.

If a student has no attendance data recorded by that school for more than 30% of half-days that the school was open for (e.g., as a result of them transferring schools), their data is removed from the dataset and, consequently, from the data shown on the report for that school.

Understanding the difference between Regular Attendance and Daily Attendance

Regular attendance describes the extent to which individual students have been absent from school during the term, whereas daily attendance describes the percentage of students attending school on any given day. Both are calculated on the basis of half-days present.

Daily attendance provides an overall picture of attendance during the term but does not provide any information about which children are present. A high daily attendance rate can therefore mask a significant number of persistently absent students.

Regular attendance provides a picture of the number of children persistently missing school (using the four categories described above) and enables schools to recognise and target these students, many of whom will require additional support to engage in and attend school.

Every Day Matters: a termly attendance report for your school

Every Day Matters is a termly report that highlights attendance patterns in your school and provides actionable insights to improve student attendance. A new refreshed version of this report, and a new daily attendance dashboard have been available since May 2024.

The report includes your school's Regular Attendance for the term, an overview of the reasons given for absence, actionable insights and next steps.

It can be used to inform conversations your staff, school board and parents about student attendance patterns and unjustified absences in your school.

Student Attendance Category breakdowns and other long-term trends provided in this report can be used to support targeted interventions and measure the effects of these activities.

How to access the report

Every Day Matters summary reports are sent to each school following the end of the term and upon successful submission of their attendance data.

If you need further assistance, please get in touch with your local Ministry office or email EveryDayMatters@education.govt.nz.

Additional attendance indicators

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

In November 2023 we published our first set of 'Additional Attendance Indicator' data.
The published data and commentary covered:

› **Learners with 5 or more full days unjustified absence in a term**
(Unjustified Student Absence Indicator)

› **Unjustified Student Absence Indicator Description**

› **Proportion of students who are absent without justification for five or more full days in a single term.**

› **School Intervention in Unjustified Student Absence Indicator Description**

› **Proportion of students who are absent without justification for five or more full days in a single term** (Unjustified Student Absence Indicator) **where the school has taken action within 5 school days.**

› **Unexplained Absence Indicator**

› **Proportion of absent time that remains unexplained at the end of each week of the term.**

Support from your Regional Ministry of Education Office

Your Regional Ministry of Education Office can provide you with further advice on how to enhance your existing processes to effectively implement the additional attendance measures. This includes advising on best practice around using attendance codes and your SMS to accurately record and identify the reasons for learner absence.

Introduction to Attendance Data e-learning module

An e-learning module has been developed for school leaders to help grow understanding and capability in using attendance data to improve student attendance. It includes an overview of key concepts such as Regular Attendance and explains how Student Attendance Categories measure student attendance.

The module takes approximately 15 minutes to complete and is suitable for school leaders, attendance officers and others interested in furthering their knowledge of attendance and engagement. No prior knowledge is required.

You can access the module on the Ministry's training site: Education LMS

Resources for schools

The following resources have been designed as a non-exhaustive, best practice approach to:

› Engaging with parents and caregivers to identify the reasons for a learner's absence.

› Putting in place processes to record the reasons in your SMS prior to the end of the school week.

› Intervening when absences become extended or persistent.

One way to use this guide is to identify your current school practice by highlighting using three colours:

Gold for Great	we currently do this well
Pink to Think	we are doing ok, we could do better
Blue to Do	this is something we should start to do – next steps

This might help you to identify actions you could take, who will be responsible for taking them, and when you will do them by.

Resource 1: Following up with parents and caregivers

STAGE	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	ACTIONS TO TAKE, WHO, AND TIMEFRAMES (complete for your school)
Plan	**Regularly update and share your attendance policy with your community**	› Communications with parents around the importance of attendance. Look for opportunities throughout the school year to do this e.g., welcome packs, newsletters, parent-teacher interviews, open days etc. › Understanding best practice guidelines for getting students back to school, such as the following ERO resources: • Guide for Primary School Teachers • Guide for Parents and Whānau › Attendance results continue to show attendance is being impacted by illness. Te Whatu Ora have refreshed their guidance to help parents and schools manage attendance: Knowing if a child is well enough to be at school — guidance for schools - Health Information and Services and Knowing if your child is well enough to go to school — guidance for parents and caregivers - Health Information and Services › Sharing your attendance policy on your website › Considering how you meet the legal responsibilities and national guidelines for schools on attendance.	Send out a bi-annually reminder through our school newsletter that talks about the importance of attendance. To share this in new entrant meetings the importance of regular attendance. School Guidelines Follow up with families in parent-teacher meets with students who are absent more than 90% of the time. The Deputy Principal in conjunction with the classroom teacher can share this with families that are having regular illnesses. Schools are required to: • enrol eligible students • take all reasonable steps to ensure students attend when the school is open • keep an attendance record for each enrolled student • have an absence notification process • use an approved electronic attendance register and Ministry approved attendance codes to record attendance.

STAGE	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	ACTIONS TO TAKE, WHO, AND TIMEFRAMES (complete for your school)
Plan	**Include clear expectations in your attendance policy about reasonable timeframes for parents to notify you of their child's absence**	> Decide at what point in the day you will follow up with parents/ caregivers if you haven't heard from them. > A reasonable time for parents to notify you of their child's absence would be before the end of the school day. > In all cases, the reason for absence needs to have been given by the end of the school week. > There may be cases where you are not able to record the reason for absence because you have been unable to contact the parents/ caregivers. > If you have made all reasonable efforts to contact the parents/ caregivers during the day and not been able to, you may wish to consider changing the question mark '?' to a 'T' (Truant) at the end of that day.	By 10am all students will have been accounted for both present and absent. A text message will be sent out to parents who have not reported an absences. Parents can either phone, email, use the absentee function on the Hero app or talk to the office staff in person to report an absent child. They need to give a reason for the absences that is recorded into hero with a code and potentially a note.
	Identify and set up tools that support notification of absences	> Setting up an EN (Early Notification) service > Depending on your SMS provider this functionality might be built into a parent app. > Plan manual workarounds for parents/caregivers who cannot be contacted via automatic methods. > Ensuring you have up to date and accessible contact information for all parents / caregivers.	Processes for unjustified absence at Maungaraki School Where parents find it more challenging to contact us we reach out using other methods. Especially coming into the school office Parents use our app to update their information online. They are also talk to office staff directly to make adjustments to contact details.

STAGE	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD	
Do	**Make use of the tools available to you**	› Use your inbuilt notification system(s) › Manual alternatives for parents / caregivers who cannot be contacted via automatic methods.	Our SMS has text functionality to ask parents to communicate unknown absences. Our app has an absentee function. Parents can phone the office to leave a message or come in directly.
	Follow up with other methods if parents are unresponsive	› Using other contact details e.g. • Email • Mobile or landline • Messenger › Organise a meeting with whānau at school or do a home visit.	These are all utilised as required.
	Manage complex contexts if you are unable to contact parents.	› You could engage with your local Ministry of Education Office if it is becoming a regular issue.	We involve the Ministry or Oranga Tamariki when we have concerns about student safety or challenges with regular absenteeism that is not being reported.
Review	**Review what worked and revise your approach for future to leverage the channels that work.**	› Identifying which channels receive prompt and useful responses › Discussing with parents the barriers they face to responding, and whether you can alter your approach to make it easier for them.	We foster connections with our parents and hope to understand their context before we make a plan to refer to outside agencies or the Ministry. The Ministry (Truancy) is our first contact if parents are unable to keep regular attendance, followed by Oranga Tamariki if we believe there is neglect. Working with our families

Resource 2: Recording reasons for absence in your SMS

STAGE	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	
Plan	**Agree roles and responsibilities for recording attendance data.**	› Identifying who will receive and record responses from parents › Having a back-up if regular person is sick or away.	The office records the responses from parents. Teachers will record medical or sickness absences and refer all other responses to the office.
	Familiarise yourself with the attendance codes, particularly the codes for absences.	› Keeping a copy of the attendance codes list or decision tree readily accessible › Reviewing the attendance codes guidance › Discussing how you will code particular situations (based on your policy) › Discussing how to have a consistent policy across your Kāhui Ako, if you are in one.	This is online and in the office. Clarify for staff and office by discussing what code should be used under what circumstance happens at the beginning of each year.
	Understand how your student attendance rates are tracking	› Reviewing your school's Every Day Matter's Report to see how your school's student attendance rates (including justified and unjustified absence reasons) are tracking.	Review the Every Day Matters report with the Senior Leadership team to see how the school can improve attendance rates.

STAGE	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	
Do	**Ensure accurate and timely recording.**	> Setting specific time to manage attendance data > Ensure all coding updates are completed by the end of the week. This includes updating any "? – unknown" code.	Update and maintain hero attendance data every day. Follow up questions for the absences on the day. Adjust codes if further information comes to light at a later date.
	Manage complex situations.	> Agree how you will code particular situations (based on your policy) > Seek further information if the reason is unclear or ambiguous.	Follow as closely to the attendance code as possible.
Review	**Review what worked.**	> Identifying barriers to recording reasons in a timely manner > Identifying opportunities to make the process easier or more efficient.	Regular meetings with Admin and DP to discuss students absences.
	Review your coding.	> Check if you have been coding consistently – particularly if you share responsibilities > Review whether your policy needs to be updated to reflect or clarify new situations.	At the beginning of each year go over these expectations with staff to ensure there is clarity around roll expectations. We can review any procedures at this point.

Resource 3 Intervening when absences become extended or persistent

STAGE	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD.	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE
Plan	**Prepare how you can intervene within the school**	• Providing catch-up tuition for learners who are struggling or have fallen behind. • Helping parents/caregivers become more involved in supporting their children's education, including meeting with parents/whānau. • Adjusting the schedule or timetabling if the data shows a pattern of persistent absence at a certain time or day (e.g., Friday) • Adjusting the student's programme to make schooling more relevant to the student's future goals. • Adapting teaching styles to meet the needs of all learners, including those who are 'at risk' of disengagement from school. • Identifying how to best make use of supports including RTLB and behaviour services, as well as any guidance staff or support staff.
	Identify any external tools and supports available to you	› Familiarising yourself with Attendance Service, Alternative Education and other alternative provisions › Strengthening awareness of other agencies that might be able to address barriers – e.g. Ministry of Social Development (Work and Income), Oranga Tamariki, Whaikaha. › Identifying any other local supports which you might need to use or facilitate access to › Working with your local Te Mahau office and adviser to identify any supports you may not be aware of.

We have a number of supports to help students engage with school.

- We have high interest learning, our waihanga programme is aimed at engaging students with maths, science, and literacy through hands on experiences.

- We work closely with families to look at the specific needs that a student has. Some students need more support with anxiety while others need more direction with avoidance.

- We look for patterns in behviour with individuals. We find looking at the overall data isn't useful when making targeted interventions for the student.

- Our teachers will always look at how they can accomodate students needs within the classroom setting.

- We involve outside agencies like RTLB through advice and guidance and then will refer if the need is seen.

- We will refer to the Ministry when we have concerns that we are unable to work through.

Where needed we do sort the support of oranga tamariki and other government gencies. This is a last resort as we like to work with the families and find that the involvement of outside agencies can damage the relationship with the school, which has lead to reduced attendance.

STAGE	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	
Plan	**Agree roles and responsibilities for responding**	> Identifying who is responsible for tracking where absences are becoming persistent > Identifying who is responsible for deciding and initiating appropriate responses > Identifying who manages the relationship with any external providers and supports > Planning continuity for when people are unwell or away.	The office is the first place to monitor attendance, twice a term we will look at our attendance data. If students attendance is lower that 90% we will look at what is causing this and decide if follow up actions need to be taken. Classroom teachers may see patterns that they would like addressed and talk with the DP's to have this looked at earlier than the twice termly check ins. The DP and Principal have relationships with outside agencies and look to utilise them when appropriate.
	Agree varied levels of intervention appropriate for different scenarios	> Identifying common reasons for persistent absences in your school > Deciding when it would be appropriate to intervene for different reasons > Matching responses available to you to common reasons, and agreeing these as a standard approach > Ensuring responses are culturally safe and appropriate > Deciding when to escalate to other interventions or supports > Identifying what you will do to assess any scenarios you have not planned responses for.	Our approach to absences needs to come from a place of understanding. Trying to work with families to increase attendance and with teachers to create engaging learning experiences. We will esculate when we are unable to support the family and the students learning is being impacted.
	Update and share your attendance policy or enrolment policy	> Sharing what learners and parents can expect from you and how you will engage with them > Identifying what you expect in return, including timeliness of responses and participation in conversations about their child's attendance.	We send out regular communication to the community about the importance of attendance. When we meet with families we talk about attendance being one of the biggest indicators for achievement.

STAGE	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	
Do	**Identify drivers/barriers of absence**	› Investigating the reasons for absence, including the learners' records in your student management system (SMS) › Analyse data to see if there are any patterns for groups of students that might help in understanding the reasons › Discuss with learner and/or parents what barriers they are facing to attendance.	Fostering connections with families enables early intervention. We do look at Hero to see if there are trends or concerning patterns relating to absences.
	Review previous actions	› Identify any actions you have taken to improve attendance for the learner in the past which have worked, and in which circumstances › Identify any concerning patterns that may be a sign of ill-treatment, abuse, or neglect.	We take note of actions that have been made on Hero. When we have more serious concerns we reach out to agencies that can support us with home visits.
	Initiate intervention(s)	› Utilising within-school tools and processes › Utilising external tools and supports[1] › Working with your local Te Mahau office and adviser to identify and facilitate access to any of these supports.	We follow the process below. - Make a connection with the parents though the classroom teacher - Send out attendance letters to remind parents - Have a meeting with the Parents - Follow up with Principal if attendance remains low - Refer to attendance services or other agencies as appropriate.
	Monitoring and recording outcomes	› Recording in your SMS when an intervention has been initiated › Monitoring and keeping a record of: • what interventions were used • for whom • if they were successful at reducing absences for the learner(s) • how long they took to reduce absences • any lessons or valuable insights.	This happens at least twice a term.

STAGE

	AT THIS STAGE YOU COULD	THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE	
Review	**Review what worked**	› Identifying which interventions result in prompt and productive responses. › Identifying any gaps in supports currently used and investigating what is available. › Discussing with learners and parents their experience of the intervention(s)	The biggest gap that we have is when we deem certain absences concerning with the need from outside agency support and they do not share the same concerns. It seems that there is an extremely high bar for neglect.
	Revise your approach for future	› Identifying opportunities for professional learning and development › Adjusting your standard responses to leverage the interventions that work. › Altering your approach to make it more supportive for learners and parents. › Communicating any changes, including through updates to your attendance policy.	Reflecting on our processes will be important. Making adjustments so that we continue to grow a culture of high attendance is paramount.