



# Guidelines for Schools around recording attendance

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# Purpose of this document

A common question we hear is how to choose which attendance code to use.

This is guidance to help you decide. This document is primarily aimed at school administrators and other staff responsible for entering Attendance Codes into the school's Student Management System (SMS).

We have compiled simple explanations of each code with examples, to clarify common situations they apply to and, in some cases, to suggest the limits of when each code should be used or not.

Applying these codes should ideally be as consistent as possible, for fairness to all students in your school and across schools. However, note that your Principal / Tumuaki retains the final discretion on which code to apply in a given situation.

If you come across any scenarios where you are unsure what code should apply and it isn't covered below, please email [everydaymatters@education.govt.nz](mailto:everydaymatters@education.govt.nz) and we'll provide some advice and add the example to this document.

Any changes to attendance code guidance will also be communicated via the Ministry's regular Bulletin for School Leaders.

## Attendance Policy

Towards the goal of fairness and consistency of applying the codes, it is recommended that your school should have a school attendance policy, which should be made accessible and clearly communicated to learners and their families.

Your Attendance Policy should clearly communicate your attendance expectations.

Students should attend school every day unless they are ill. Legally, any enrolled student must attend every day and it is the responsibility of parents alongside schools to make sure they attend. Moreover, there is a strong and significant relationship between attending school and the likelihood of leaving school with qualifications to get into further education and careers.

To ensure a fair and consistent application of the rules, your Attendance Policy should also spell out your standard limits on certain absences, such as sick leave or funerals and tangihanga, and the situations that may warrant a longer leave.

Some schools also include in their Attendance Policy disincentives to non-attendance, such as setting high levels of attendance (such as above 80% or 90%) a condition for participating in certain school events, such as sporting events or trips.

## Usage of Codes by Student Type

The following codes should not be used by Schools for year 1-8 students, schools with year 9-13 students should be using the full set of codes available.

Primary schools should not use the following codes:

Code	Description	Category
K	Attending Teen Parent Unit	Present offsite
V	Supervised Exam study	Present onsite
W	Work Experience	Present offsite
Y	Activity Centres	Present offsite
Z	Secondary Tertiary Programme	Present offsite

## Present onsite vs Present offsite

Attendance can be physical presence on the school's site or physically at another location, such as an off-site activity arranged by the school or learning from home while self-isolating with Covid-19.

NOTE: While we acknowledge that many TPUs are situated on the campus of a host school, for the sake of consistency we treat all attendance at a Teen Parent Unit (TPU) as off-site attendance.

## School closures and emergency situations

Note the difference between 'closed for instruction' (ie, no teaching and learning) vs 'distance learning' continuing to be provided

Event	Instructions
Teacher only days	Remove* these days from the student timetable. Record no attendance. (closed for instruction)
Industrial Action	Remove* these days from the student timetable. Record no attendance. (closed for instruction)
Natural Events	If a school has closed for instruction, such as for a significant weather-related event or natural disaster, any days it is closed for instruction should be removed* from the student timetable and no attendance data submitted. Any days the school is able to offer distance learning, enter attendance codes normally.
Traffic Light system (Red, Orange or Green)	Enter attendance codes normally. If students are being kept home by parents, then they should be marked as 'J', 'T' or 'E', according to school policy.
Covid Lockdown Level 3 / 4 or Distance Learning	a default code of 'F' should be used for all students undertaking distance learning. If you are aware of students who cannot engage in distance learning for whatever reason, enter attendance codes as normal for those students.  Normal codes should be used for any students on site.
Covid Alert Level 1 / 2	Enter attendance codes normally.

*\* Note - If you are not sure how to remove a date from a timetable, please refer to the instructions supplied by your SMS on how to do so or contact your SMS.*

If you find yourself affected by an emergency situation, please focus first on the safety and wellbeing of yourself and those around you. However, once able to continue to record attendance, this data can potentially help the school and your local regional Ministry office track the impact, identify additional supports needed, and monitor a return to normality.

## Bereavement leave & Tangihanga leave

A period of leave for a student to attend a funeral or Tangihanga should be coded as 'J', a justified absence.

The Principal can retain flexibility and discretion around specific circumstances, including consideration for the relationship between the learner and the deceased. Refer to [section 45](#) of the Education and training Act (2020) for additional guidance.

**Attendance Policy note:** should be included in the school attendance policy, which should be made accessible and clearly communicated to learners and their families. To ensure a fair and consistent application of the rules, your attendance policy should clearly outline the 'standard' number of days (e.g., normally 3 days) and the situations that may warrant a longer leave.

## Attendance Codes and examples

This document defines the attendance codes used throughout New Zealand schools - and built into the School Management Systems (SMSs) in New Zealand.

Each code is presented as follows:

- **School Code** – The only valid codes are all the letters of the alphabet (except 'B') and the question mark "?". Do not use any other letter, character, number or mark.
- **Classroom** – This indicates whether the student is in the classroom or not.
- **Attendance / Absence type** – A short description of the attendance / absence type.
- **Explanations** – a longer explanation of the code.
- **Reporting Category** - This indicates if a School Code is counted as Present (P), Justified Absence (J) or Unjustified Absence (U) for Ministry reporting purposes.
- **Examples / Comments** – Examples where the code could apply, with additional considerations.

## Present Codes

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
P	In class	Present in class	Student is in their regular class. (This includes supervised study)	P
<p><b>Examples / comments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes supervised study</li> <li>Could include where another teacher takes a class (e.g., Te Reo, Histories, etc)</li> </ul> <p>For any centralised/office entry of attendance:</p> <p>If a teacher is not able to mark attendance during class time with the students in front of them, a full class list marked by the class teacher that shows each student as either present or absent must be used as the source document for later data entry. This full class list must be retained until the end of the school year. Use of absence slips is not sufficient.</p>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
L	In class	Student is late to class	School policy will determine when this code is used. E.g., School policy may recommend that a student more than 10 minutes late is coded "L". Note this code does not contribute to the student's or school's absence or truancy rate.	P
<p><b>Examples / comments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is down to the individual school to decide where the thresholds lie for a student being late to a class, and when the student is late enough to be considered absent. E.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When a student turns up 5mins before the end of the class, could be classed as absent.</li> <li>When a student turns up 2 mins late to the class, could be classed as Present.</li> <li>When a student turns up halfway through the class, could be classed as late, may be classed as absent.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Attendance Policy note:</b> Whatever your school decides is the threshold, this should be clear ensure this is captured in your attendance policy and clearly and regularly communicated to learners and their families.</p>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
V	In class	Examination or Unsupervised Study – student is on the school-site	Students sitting examinations at school (if the SMS can provide attendance marking during exams).	P

**Examples / comments:**

- Unsupervised study – school process verifies student is on-site, but study is otherwise unsupervised. Note that supervised study is recorded as a regular timetabled class.

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
I	Not in class	Internal school appointment or activity	This can include students who are out of class for various school appointments including: form teacher, dean, senior management, counsellor, sports administrator, coach, nurse, careers, as well as students on an administration activity such as messenger, collecting attendance etc.	P

**Examples / comments:**

- This 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.

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
N	Not in class	On a school-based activity	A school-based (on-site) activity.	P

**Examples / comments:**

- Cultural/sporting presentation/practice including swimming/athletic sports
- One-to-one tuition either as tutor or tutored
- Music lessons or performances
- Assembly, Powhiri, etc.

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
R	Not in class	Removed (temporarily) from regular class (internal school student isolation)	This code is for students who for a period had an arrangement for alternative supervision.	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This may be in the administration corridor or in another teacher's class, instead of the student's regular scheduled class.</li> </ul>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
S	Not in class	Sickbay	Student is known to be in the school's sickbay	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b>  N/A.				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
A	Not in class	Attending Alternative Education	The student is not in class, is on the school roll but funded elsewhere	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b>  More details at <a href="#">Alternative Education website.</a>				



School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
H	Not in class	Attending a Health camp / Regional Health School (RHS) / Residential School	The student is not in class but in an approved environment for which the school is entitled to be funded	P

**Examples / comments:**

- If student is full time RHS, then the school still needs to have them timetabled in your SMS. The school still receives full funding for the student while they are with the RHS. The school needs to fill attendance in for the student for every period. This applies to both part time and full time RHS students. Code H for all time periods when student is at RHS. If parent calls the student in sick, then code M.

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
K	Not in class	Attending a Teen Parent Unit	The student is not in class, is on the school roll but funded elsewhere	P

**Examples / comments:**

- Attendance for TPU students should be included in the host schools' attendance data being sent to the Ministry.
- More details at [Alternative Education Website - Teen Parent Units](#)

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
Y	Not in class	Attending an Activity centre	The student is not in class but in an approved environment for which the school is entitled to be funded	P

**Examples / comments:**

More detail at [Alternative Education Website - Activity Centres](#)

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
Z	Not in class	Secondary Tertiary Programme (including Trades Academies)	The student is participating in a part-time (off-site) approved Secondary Tertiary programme that includes Trades Academies. The school is not entitled to be funded.	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b>  More details at <a href="#">Youth Guarantee Website - Trades Academies</a>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
C	Not in class	Involved in Justice Court proceedings	Under existing legislation this type of absence is deemed to be Present when calculating ½ day summaries	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes family courts, youth courts etc</li> </ul>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
D	Not in class	Medical Appointment – doctor or dentist	Current legislation means this type of absence is counted as present for ½ day summaries. There must be documentation verifying the appointment. This code is not to be used for a stay in hospital. Use code "M"	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes the time spent travelling to and from the appointment. If in middle of day, learner should return to school after appointment.</li> </ul>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
F	Not in class	Attending an off-site course/class, or learning from home	The student is not in class but is on a legitimate off-site school-based course.	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When a student is studying at home during Covid Alert Levels. (This definition was added in 2020)</li> <li>Students attending technology centres</li> </ul>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
Q	Not in class	Attending an off-site school organised activity such as trip/camp	A school-organised off-site activity including overseas.	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School trip (sporting, cultural or academic, includes debates, tournament week, kapa haka competition)</li> <li>School camp</li> <li>Visiting another school - a high school (if organised by the school)</li> </ul>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
W	Not in class	Work experience	Student is working for a recognised employer as part of their course	P
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g., Gateway (more details at <a href="#">Youth Guarantee Website - Gateway Funding</a>)</li> <li>Students with board authorised work experience agreements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Refer to <a href="#">section 53</a> of the Education and Training Act for further guidance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				

## Justified Absences

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
M	Not in class	Student absent due to short-term illness/medical reasons	Student is at home, or in hospital, because of illness or other medical reason.	J

### Examples / comments:

- Depending on school policy a medical certificate may be requested for prolonged illness. E.g., three days, or as policy requires.
- Mental Health Days, the schools may consider whether absence is due to a mental health reason – e.g., anxiety - or whether there are other reasons behind it. Schools should consider how they are supporting learners who have been absent for mental health reasons when they return to school.

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
J	Not in class	Justified absence – the reason is within the school policy	This code can be used for any occurrence of absence that the school considers to be Justified. The school does have discretion on how this is applied.	J

### Examples / comments:

The most important part of the use of the J code is defining in your attendance policy what your school considers Justified, including expectations of how learners or their whānau will let you know when there is a justified reason for absence. You should consider how you will update or clarify this policy as it changes, and how you communicate it with your learners and their whānau.

- 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.
- Approved exemption from mandatory attendance for up to 5 days ([Section 45](#) of the Education and Training Act), if principal is satisfied that the student will be or was absent for good and sufficient reason. Note: Is illegal to use this in place of a standdown. If a student is to be sent home as a punishment, the proper standdown or suspension process must be followed. See also Attendance Code U.
- Visiting another school to change school within area

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
U	Not in class	Student is Stood down or Suspended	Student is Stood Down or suspended according to the conditions of <a href="#">Section 80</a> of the Education and Training Act 2020.	J
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This code is for the period of the stand down/suspension. It does not include the day the stand down was imposed.</li> </ul>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
O	Not in class	Overseas Posting	Student accompanying or visiting a family member who is on an overseas posting (up to 15 weeks). Eg, military or diplomatic.	J
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students that are overseas for less than 15 weeks can still be enrolled at their school and included for resourcing, so this can be considered a justified absence, but if a student is overseas for more than 15 weeks this would be unjustified and should be using Code E.</li> </ul>				

## Unjustified Absences

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
T	Not in class	No information provided – truant (or throw-away explanation)	An absence where either no information is provided, or the explanation is trivial (throw-away):	U
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I didn't feel like Maths, so I took the period off</li> <li>• I had to finish an important assignment</li> <li>• I went down to the river</li> <li>• Tired</li> <li>• Sleeping in and may or may not be there later.</li> </ul>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
E	Not in class	Student is absent. The reason is Explained, but Unjustified	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.	U

#### Examples / comments:

- Visiting relatives - Student's education is the priority. The student can see relatives outside school hours.
- Taking day off for their birthday - Student's education is the priority. Birthday can be celebrated outside school hours.
- Visiting another school (if not organised by the school)
- Family appointments - Need to make other arrangements for someone to look after student / siblings. If they have difficulty with that, then perhaps there is some way for the school to help.
- Extra-curricular activities - These activities need to be arranged for outside school hours. Examples include:
  - a. Outside of school Sport/cultural training opportunities or exams during school hours for all or part of a period. For example: archery, dance, piano or equestrian.
  - b. Senior students Y12 & 13 attending self-organised job interviews before signing out of school during school hours.
  - c. Students attending exams / training for external clubs / extracurricular activities during school hours.
  - d. Spirit of adventure, and Outward-bound absences (and other similar student experience opportunities with other recognised institutions) not organised through school. - The student and their family/whānau can choose to do this, however the school still must mark the absence as E. The only exception would be if it was school organised - as part of the planned PE curriculum for example.
  - e. Tutoring - not school instigated
- Extended absences that exceed school policy for justified length. E.g. Absent for an excessive number of days following attending a funeral.
- Absences due to parental concerns that attendance at school is unsafe because of the risk of contracting COVID-19 should generally be considered unjustified.

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
G	Not in class	Holiday during term time	When a student is on a New Zealand or overseas holiday during the school term, the absence is unjustified. A parent's note does not provide justification.	U
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family weddings (overseas usually for an extended period) - Student's education is the priority. Parent can choose to take children to this event, but school must mark it as G. This is important as it provides the school and the Ministry with a record of how much the student has had (or missed out on) the opportunity to learn at school. In exceptional family circumstance, depending on school policy, it could possibly be marked J.</li> <li>This would include learners returning from holiday and in managed isolation during term time who are unable to participate in distance learning</li> </ul>				

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
?	Not in class	Unknown reason (A temporary code)	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 absence.	U



## Exam Leave

School Code	Classroom	Attendance /absence type	Explanations – The following explanations are provided as common reasons why a student may be absent from school.	Reporting category
X	Not in class	Exam leave	Unsupervised study – student is off-site	J
<b>Examples / comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Code X is not considered an attendance or an absence and is ignored in the Ministry's attendance calculations. A student coded entirely as code X for a half-day will not be counted at all for that half-day. Note that supervised study is recorded as a regular timetabled class, and unsupervised study on school site is considered present.</li> <li>This code is predominantly intended for senior secondary students during exam periods, including studying for mock exams.</li> </ul>				



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He mea **tārai** e mātou te **mātauranga**  
kia **rangatira** ai, kia **mana taurite** ai ōna **huanga**