

Budget 2023 Attendance Turnaround package: attendance officer initiative

Information to support implementation of the role

Background

Being engaged in learning really matters, right from a child's first days in early learning, through primary and secondary schooling. Regular attendance (defined as attending at least 90 percent or nine days out of ten) for New Zealand's children has been steadily declining since 2015.

In February 2023 the Government announced the Attendance Turnaround Package, an investment over five years as part of Budget 2023 to urgently address attendance issues. The package includes:

- establishing eighty-two new attendance officer roles to support schools and kura improve the attendance of ākonga who are moderately absent.
- providing Attendance Services more capacity for intensive support to chronically disengaged ākonga and to address cost pressures.

Attendance officers key messages and considerations

Attendance Officers

- The 82 attendance officers will specifically support schools, kura and learning communities to turn around moderate and irregular absence patterns for ākonga from Years 1 to 12.
- These roles will be permanent dedicated roles, employed full or part-time and is key to identifying poor attendance early, and prevent it from continuing or becoming chronic.
- The role description outlines the way we expect most attendance officers to work. The detail of how individual attendance officers work with schools and communities will be determined locally or regionally to take account of the local context.
- Attendance officers will focus on universal and targeted responses, rather than bespoke or tailored support. This is in line with evidence that identifying ākonga 'at risk' of disengaging from school or kura and intervening early, is one of the key steps schools can take to improve attendances. However, there is some flexibility within the current contract and role description for Attendance Service providers and the communities they work with to set up the attendance officer role in a way that makes sense and works in the local context.
- The role description sets out the core purpose, focus and functions for the attendance officer role. It is not a prescription and should not create a barrier to doing what makes sense in the local context.
- Attendance officer roles will have limited capacity to work with individual ākonga and their whānau. However, case management support can occur when this is the most effective use of the resource.

Frequently asked questions

- Can the attendance officer roles have a different name?

While the name of this role is 'attendance officer', the position may be given a different name to best reflect the community the position works with and within.

- **Can the attendance officer roles be part time?**

FTE can be divided up to create part-time roles (minimum 0.5 FTE), or smaller Attendance Service areas can be joined up to create whole FTE.

- **How were the attendance officer roles allocated?**

The attendance officer roles were allocated to takiwā based several factors including the Equity Index, isolation, student population and rates of unjustified moderately absent students. Takiwā then distributed the roles across their regions.

- **When will the attendance officers be rolled out?**

Attendance officers can start from 24 April 2023. This is subject to employment agreements being in place. There is no time limit on the funding.

- **Can a current attendance service provider hire more than one attendance officer?**

Attendance Service providers can employ the attendance officer roles they are contracted to provide. In some cases, for example where smaller communities are supported by one shared FTE, this approach would best meet the needs of the community.

- **Can a current attendance service provider use current staff?**

Attendance officers will be employed through the existing 52 school-led, 12 iwi and 12 NGOs Attendance Service providers.

While current staff members can be employed in the attendance officer role if they meet the requirements for the role, the roles cannot be absorbed into 'business as usual' delivery.

- **Can a provider use a secondment from another agency?**

Yes, you can use a secondee from another agency.

- **Can a provider sub-contract?**

Subcontracting arrangements will not be permitted unless exceptional circumstances exist. If so this must be negotiated with the Ministry and agreed in writing.

- **Can the funding be used for overheads like office rent, mileage, or car costs?**

The funding provided must cover any and all expenses associated with the role(s).

- **Will attendance officers work with individual students, their whānau and families?**

Attendance officers will support schools, kura and learning communities to turn around irregular and moderate absence patterns for ākonga from Years 1 to 12.

There is some flexibility within the current contract and role description for Attendance Service providers and the communities they work with to set up the attendance officer role in a way that makes sense and works in the local context. It is not a prescription and should not create a barrier to doing what makes sense in the local context. Attendance officer roles will have limited capacity to work with individual ākonga and their whānau. However, case management support can occur when this is the most effective use of the resource.

- **Does this role have the powers of an Attendance Officer as set out in section 49 of the Education and Training Act?**

The attendance officers will not have powers as set out in section 49 of the Education and Training Act.

- **Why is the attendance officer only focusing on students who are “irregularly” or “moderately” absent? What do those terms mean?**
- The attendance officer roles are being introduced to complement what is already in place to address attendance at school. The focus will be on ākonga who are not specifically covered by existing interventions:
 - **Irregular absence:** ākonga with more than 80% and up to 90% attendance (ākonga missing 5 – 9 ½ days of a standard term)
 - **Moderate absence:** ākonga missing 10 – 14 ½ days of school in a standard term (70% - 80% attendance)

- **How does this role fit with the Attendance and Engagement Strategy?**

The Attendance and Engagement Strategy is the Government’s strategy to address declining attendance at schools and kura across the spectrum of mild to chronic absence. While most ākonga with moderate and irregular absence patterns need extra support, they do not reach the point where they are referred to the Attendance Service. The attendance officer roles will address this gap.

- **How is this role similar or different to attendance advisors and kaiāwhina employed by Attendance Services?**

The new attendance officer role is not about going out into communities to find absent ākonga and take them back to school. They will support schools and kura to understand and respond to irregular and moderate absence issues - getting in early to turn this around before absence becomes frequent, persistent, and entrenched.

Frequent and persistent students who are absent or non-enrolled will continue to be referred through to the Attendance Service where ‘attendance advisers’ and ‘kaiāwhina’ work with family and whānau to support them to reengage in education.

- **Will attendance officers make referrals to the Attendance Service? Will they need to use Attendance Service Application (ASA)?**

No. Schools and kura will continue to be the primary referrers to the Attendance Service for ākonga that are unjustifiably absent or are non-enrolled from school. The attendance officers will not need access to ASA and will work with the Attendance Service’s advisers and kaiāwhina to share valuable information and insight on good practice that will keep ākonga more engaged.

- **How is this role different to what the Ministry does?**

Attendance officer roles are a dedicated role that are placed within the sector to support schools and community to address irregular and moderate absences. The role will also help develop locally focused best practice. The Ministry provides advice and guidance on all things relating to education including attendance.

- **What will happen if a school doesn’t want to work with the attendance officer?**

There is no requirement or expectation for a school or kura to work with their area's attendance officer on irregular or moderate attendance issues. However, as attendance is an issue being faced by all schools and many ākonga, we expect the support provided by attendance officers will be valuable for all schools and kura.