

How we measure attendance

We have pulled together this background summary for principals and school boards to help build a common understanding of the data we collect, how we use it, and how we communicate it. This summary also provides a summary of steps we are taking to increase the quality and consistency of data and expanding what it is used for.

Why attendance matters

- Being at school everyday matters. The more knowledge ākonga get at school, the more choices they will have when they leave.
- Understanding the extent to which students are attending or missing school is essential if we are to design and fund services that help to get more students to school.
- Accurate and timely attendance data can enable schools to identify patterns of behaviour, and to intervene quickly where attendance patterns change.

Individual school data reporting

- Schools who submit data each term receive a summary data report from the ministry called 'Every Day Matters'. This is to support discussions and opportunities to improve attendance within the school community.
- A supplemental report is provided to schools after national and regional summary data has been published on Education Counts.
- This provides comparisons of their data to national and similar schools and helps help school leaders and their boards to inform and maintain the school's attendance strategy.
- These reports are also available to Te Mahau staff to enable them to have conversations and support schools with their attendance.

Publicly available data

- Weekly Attendance data is published with a one-week delay on Education Counts to provide reporting around on-site attendance at schools, kura and early learning services.
- This weekly attendance data shows how many students are attending on any given day whereas regular attendance in the Term Attendance Reports shows how often the same students are attending. This includes high-level reporting of the percentage of students learning at home.
- The annual Term 2 Attendance Report provides the most detailed picture of student attendance in New Zealand schools. It focuses on how often individual students attend

school each term and is measures attendance different to the weekly attendance reports.

- This takes longer to produce and is usually released in November or December.
- Reports on attendance for Terms 1, 3 and 4, are published on Education Counts. Where possible, these are published before the end of the subsequent term.

On-site and off-site attendance

- Every week we publish a national snapshot of how many students are attending school on any given day - Weekly Attendance data.
- On-site attendance shows the number of students reported as having attended school in person each day. Off-site attendance shows the number of students reported as learning at home each day.

Regular attendance

- Those missing school more frequently are likely to have bigger gaps in their learning which is why it is important to know how often individual students miss school.
- To do this, we analyse attendance data for each term and allocate each student to one of four attendance categories:
 - **Regular attendance:** students with over 90% attendance (missing fewer than five days of school in a standard 10-week term)
 - **Irregular absence:** students with more than 80% and up to 90% attendance (students missing 5 – 9 ½ days of a standard term)
 - **Moderate absence:** students with more than 70% and up to 80% attendance (missing 10 – 14 ½ days of school in a term)
 - **Chronic absence:** students 70% attendance or less (missing 15 days or more of school in a term)
- These categories tell us how often students are attending school each term, and how many are missing school frequently, but provides no information on why they do not attend.

Reasons for absence

- There are some good reasons for missing school. For example, keeping students at home from school when they are sick is the right thing to do, especially in the context of COVID.
- Absence codes enable schools to record the main reason why a student is reported as being absent from school, and these absence codes are reported to the Ministry.
- The most used absence codes are M (sickness), J (absence justified within school policy), E (absence explained, but not justified within school policy), G (holiday during term time and T (truant - no information provided).
- The absence codes are categorised as either justified absences (for e.g., M and J) or unjustified absences (e.g. E, ?, G and T).

- For example, out of 100 students on any given day there might be 85 who attended school, 8 who were justifiably absent (e.g., because they were sick) and 7 who were unjustifiably absent (e.g. because they were truant or on holiday).
- During COVID we saw a significant increase in 'medical' absence as expected, however 'truancy' also increased.
- Data on justified and unjustified absences is publicly available on Education Counts.

Other work underway

- We know that schools engage with students and caregivers to understand reasons for absence and follow up with students who have frequent absences and refer them to other support services where appropriate.
- We know that schools are using all resources available to them (for example the Regional Response Fund) to put initiatives in place to address specific local issues.
- And we know that many schools are confident that they are turning things around and getting students into school.
- However, the headline measures we currently use to monitor attendance rates are not yet demonstrating this shift, so we need more to enable us to tell this story.

Using the data we have

- Over the last few years, we have collected a wealth of attendance data. The data used to enable monitoring of the impacts of COVID on school and early learning attendance was designed and implemented very quickly.
- The data we currently collect has been collected for varying amounts of time, and for different purposes, as administrative support to schools.
- This has created confusion. The Ministry is working to provide clarity, and to create reports that enable everyone to focus on the most important questions.
- We are also engaging with sector representatives to look at how use data at a more granular level.

New Measures

- The Attendance and Engagement Strategy included a draft measure of the actions taken by schools to respond to unexplained absences and repeated unjustified absence.
- We have developed three new draft measures to reflect this intent and will commence engagement and implementation of these shortly.
- The three new measures are being designed to show:
 - that schools quickly obtain explanations for absences
 - how many students miss more than five full days of school in a term
 - that schools intervene quickly before or when students reach this level of absence

- We will report on these first two new measures for the first time from the data we collect for Term 2 2023. The third new measure will be progressively implemented from Term 3 2023.
- We will work with schools to ensure there is a clear and consistent understanding of how we are interpreting the codes to inform these measures.
- We will also work closely with schools and SMS providers to develop the detail of the third new measure, and to design a new collection that will enable us to report against the measure.
- For example, to address the specific circumstances of the individual student, schools may apply one or more of a broad range of interventions. The timing and nature of these interventions may also vary according to the history of the student (previous levels of absence), school policies, and the resources available to the school.

Showing that bespoke interventions work

- Feedback from schools strongly suggests that small bespoke interventions, designed and delivered by people close to the students and their communities, are having a positive impact on attendance.
- However, these 'green shoots' are not yet sufficiently widespread or established for us to be able to see the impact at the national or regional level.
- Work to design processes to capture evidence on these bespoke interventions is underway to capture the positive effects. As far as possible, we will use the data we already hold to provide this evidence.
- We will also work with schools and providers to develop a deeper understanding of what is working.

Building a fit for purpose dataset

- Attendance data is core information necessary to monitor the schooling system.
- Accurate and timely attendance data can enable schools to identify patterns of behaviour, and to intervene quickly where attendance patterns change.
- Since 2011, schools have been providing attendance data digitally and data has been collected at different frequencies for different uses.
- Data has been provided for every term since 2019, most recently it has been collected on a weekly basis to support Covid reporting needs.
- We work closely with schools to support them to understand, report and use the current data as accurately and consistently as possible.
- However, we need to do more. Even with consistency of approach, there will be limits to what we can do with the data we currently collect.
- A standardised approach to collecting, maintaining and making this data available will ensure consistent, high-quality data can be made available and used for different purposes.

- We are also starting to work with the sector and parents to make our data collection more meaningful and able to support changes in attitudes and behaviours so that attendance rates increase.
- During 2023/24, as part of a broader data improvement project, we will develop and pilot a new approach to how we collect and use data, considering ways data is collected, analysed and reported on more quickly.

Reporting on attendance data

- As noted above, there is a delay between the end of a term and the publication of the data report for that term. That is due to the time required to work with schools to follow up on data gaps and errors as well as the time needed to examine and understand the data, and to create the products and reports for publication and dissemination.
- Schools are required to provide an attendance data return at the end of each term. Since 2019 (Term 2) we have consistently received termly returns from approximately 90% of schools, covering around 95% of students. Around 80% of schools currently provide weekly attendance data.
- Schools use SMS providers to record attendance data, and we collect much of our data directly from the SMS providers.
- Data can be submitted by schools once the term has ended. Schools cannot be contacted to submit, query or correct attendance data until the following term begins. Three weeks is allowed at the beginning of each term to reach acceptable response rates and for the collection to be closed off.

Quality assurance on attendance data

- Once the collection is closed off, a quality assurance analysis is started. Additional time has been required over the course of the pandemic and extreme weather events to understand and respond to these unusual situations and their impacts.
- Processes, analysis and methodology have at times needed to be adjusted and/or repeated to ensure we have accurate and meaningful data to describe what is happening for students.
- At times additional bespoke analysis and review have been necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the data.
- The data is prepared for upload to internal databases, Stats NZ's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) and for access by Te Mahau regional analysts once the data has been quality assured.
- Products including reports, data tables and spreadsheets are prepared for release on Education Counts along with Information Updates or Briefing Notes to inform Ministers
- These products are thoroughly reviewed and go through an approval process before release.