AIDE MEMOIRE

Actions to Improve Attendance

Date: 14 May 2021
Priority: High
To: Hon Jan Tinetti
METIS No: 1259829
From: Dr Andrea Schöllmann
Security Level: In-confidence

Purpose

1. This aide-memoire provides you with a set of A3s developed by the Ministry about school attendance in Aotearoa.

Background

2. At the Ministerial Strategy Session on School and Early Learning Attendance in March, Ministers directed officials to develop additional advice on actions to improve school attendance.

3. We have undertaken further analysis to define the problem, describe our proposed approach and potential actions to pursue. We now seek your feedback on these.

Next Steps

4. Attendance is on the agenda for your next agency meeting on 17 May 2021. The attached A3s will form the basis of the discussion.

Proactive Release

It is intended that this Aide Memoire is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.
Regular attendance across Aotearoa schools is unacceptably low and has been falling since 2015

The decline is not occurring in isolation and is an indicator of broader wellbeing issues

Students attending regularly (>90%)

Unjustified Absences - other reason

Unjustified Absences - with an explained but unjustified reason

Unjustified Absences - Holiday during term time

Justified Absences - due to short-term illness/medical reasons

Justified Absences - other reason

The largest increase - justified medical absence – is inconsistent with a flat trend in GfP nurse visits. Increases in psychological distress over the same period will likely account for some, though not all, of this increase

The decline has occurred across every student and school group, including every ethnicity, year level, gender, decile, school type and region

69% 67% 63% 64% 58% 64%


2020 saw a rebound following the national lockdown; however the trend is not expected to continue

The Future of Attendance

As outlined in the following pages, by prioritising groups, leveraging collective responsibility and targeting actions and efforts to key influencers of attendance, we are aiming to see an increase in regular attendance in the next 2-3 years across Aotearoa New Zealand. This increase will be demonstrated in our administrative data, and reflected in the attitudinal shifts, practice improvements and increased capabilities across the education and social sectors, families and young people.
By Term 3 2023, we want to see increased regular attendance across Aotearoa

The size and complexity of the issue means we must prioritise our approach to support change.

We must be proactive to improve regular attendance.

Previously, Ministers and officials discussed potential priority groups. We’ve undertaken further work to make sure we target where it matters most and we can have the greatest impact overall.

Therefore, these are our recommended priority groups:

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<th>Years 1 &amp; 2</th>
<th>Years 5 &amp; 6</th>
<th>Years 8 &amp; 9</th>
<th>Year 11</th>
<th>Chronic non-attendees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is a key transition point for children from early learning or kōhanga reo (or no provision at all) to full time school. This is also a key transition point for parents and whānau – from non-compulsory provision or none at all to full-time compulsory provision. Regular attendance is worryingly low (dropping from 69% in 2015 to 56% in 2019) for this critical age group.</td>
<td>In Years 5 and 6, regular attendance is at its highest compared to other year levels. However, this group has also seen the largest decrease in regular attendance – from 77% in 2015 to 63% in 2019. We are unsure of the drivers of both the overall peak and the trending decline, and need to better understand what can be learned from this group to increase attendance.</td>
<td>Years 8 &amp; 9 have been added to the priority groups at this represents another key transition point from primary to secondary schooling. Targeting our resources at the transition process, rather than later in Year 10, should support improved outcomes as young people progress towards senior secondary.</td>
<td>Attendance in Years 12 and 13 declines sharply, negatively impacting on NCEA attainment. Rather than focus on Year 13 students, by which point regular attendance has dropped to its lowest, Year 11 students should be targeted before they commence NCEA. This gives the opportunity to establish good patterns of attendance across the senior secondary years and improve NCEA attainment rates.</td>
<td>These young people tend to face multiple complex issues affecting their wellbeing, with their chronic non-attendance or non-enrolment a symptom. The education system and social sector have failed these young people. There are multiple negative lifelong impacts on wellbeing outcomes associated with with poor attendance and attainment. Re-engaging these young people in education will improve their lifelong wellbeing, including their education outcomes.</td>
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By Term 3 2023, we want to see increased regular attendance across Aotearoa

To achieve this, collaboration between the education sector, the Ministry, the social sector and families needs to strategically target actions to the attitudes, capabilities and practices of the key influencers of attendance to:

1. Influence parent and student attitudes about the importance of regular attendance from the beginning of school
2. Support schools to promote wellbeing through their practice and by connecting with the wider social sector
3. Support school boards and principals to ask the right questions about their attendance and more effectively respond
4. Prevent persistent or escalating patterns of non-attendance and improve the response to chronic truancy and educational disengagement
5. Understand and measure the drivers of non-attendance to support intervention and support

Focussing our actions in these key areas will create the change needed to lift regular attendance. We will continue to work collaboratively to ensure our understanding of what drives poor attendance supports our practical advice to schools and informs our approach at a regional level. For example, we are able to use information gained from capturing student voice to inform drivers of educationally powerful connections. Each school term, we will review our impact on attendance and adjust our approaches as needed.
## Focus areas

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<th>1. Influence parent and student attitudes about the importance of regular attendance from the beginning of school</th>
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<td>Immediate (over the next 3 months)</td>
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<td>• Develop and deliver a communications plan – focused on immediate messages and tailored to different audiences (e.g. whānau, principals, boards, communities)</td>
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<td>• Secretary for Education to write to local councils and NGOs, through the Regional Public Service Lead, to emphasise the issue of attendance as one that needs a joined-up approach and ask them to identify collaborative actions they can take across their community</td>
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<td>• Target 3-5 schools/communities to implement interagency model/approach to improving attendance. First step is to embed strong school practices on analysing and responding to data and connecting with simple messages to parents of identified young people on attendance (supported by behavioural insights)</td>
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<td>• Continue to emphasise and engage with schools on the importance of building educationally powerful connections (a key focus for implementation of the NEFLP), and build understanding of the enablers and barriers schools face in doing this (see case studies)</td>
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<td>• Continue to promote a focus on localised curricula to support schools to be safe, inclusive and engaging</td>
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<td>Medium term (3-9 months)</td>
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<td>• Develop, test, and deliver a more sophisticated communications approach – with further tailored messages and channels for key influencers of attendance (parent, boards, school leaders, teachers)</td>
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| • Building off the Record of Learning work, develop a set of tools that schools can use to support regular school attendance. This could include tools to:  
  - provide specific, regular, feedback to families on their kids’ attendance and engagement  
  - engage families in students’ learning  
  - connect with families and whānau |
| • Work with ERO to increase engagement with schools on attendance |
| • Continue to assess successes and lessons to develop an enduring communications and engagement approach |
| • Develop a national approach to capture and hear student voice to improve school decision making, student wellbeing outcomes and support inclusive learning environments |
| • Build on what we have learned, including from the implementation of the interagency mode/approach, to identify the next actions to leverage existing school-based services and local interagency mechanisms to improve support for attendance of students who have become or are at risk of repeated irregular attendance |
| Longer term (up to 3 years) |
| • As resources become available to the Education Service Agency (ESA), use these to support schools to focus on building educationally powerful connections and delivering culturally sustaining learning - both through building school capability (e.g. curriculum advisors, leadership advisors) and by identifying those things that divert time and focus away from these areas, that could be centrally delivered (e.g. a schools buying centre for procurement of goods and services) |
| • Introduce new and redesigned attendance services & address capacity issues for the Attendance Service (funding dependent) |
| • Embed feedback loops through the ESA so that what we learn about attendance and engagement can be meaningfully translated into changes to practice, which in turn will continue to build our understanding of what works |