



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.

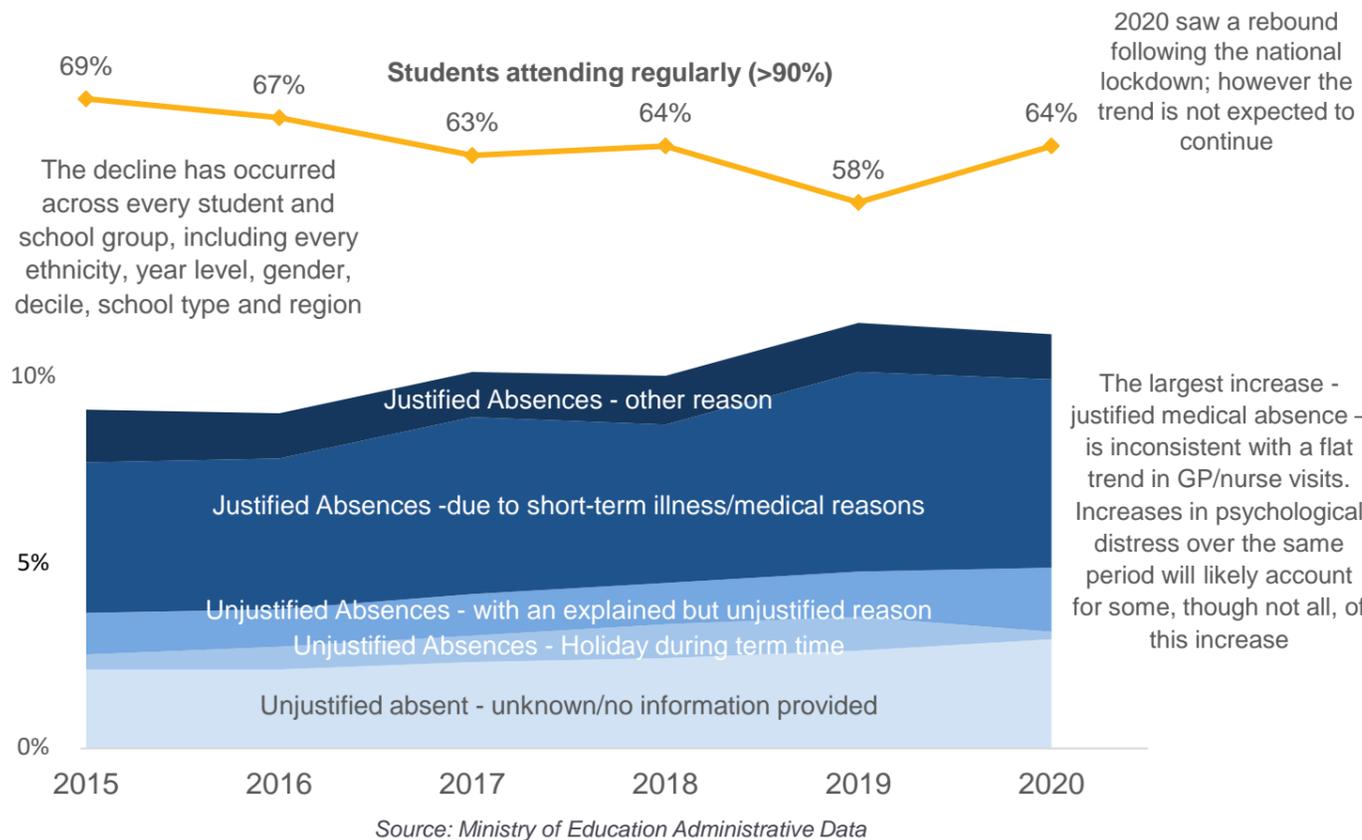
Next Steps

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



Problem Definition: What the Data Tells Us

We know the importance of attendance to progress and achievement – higher attendance is associated with higher educational attainment; lower attendance is associated with lower educational attainment.

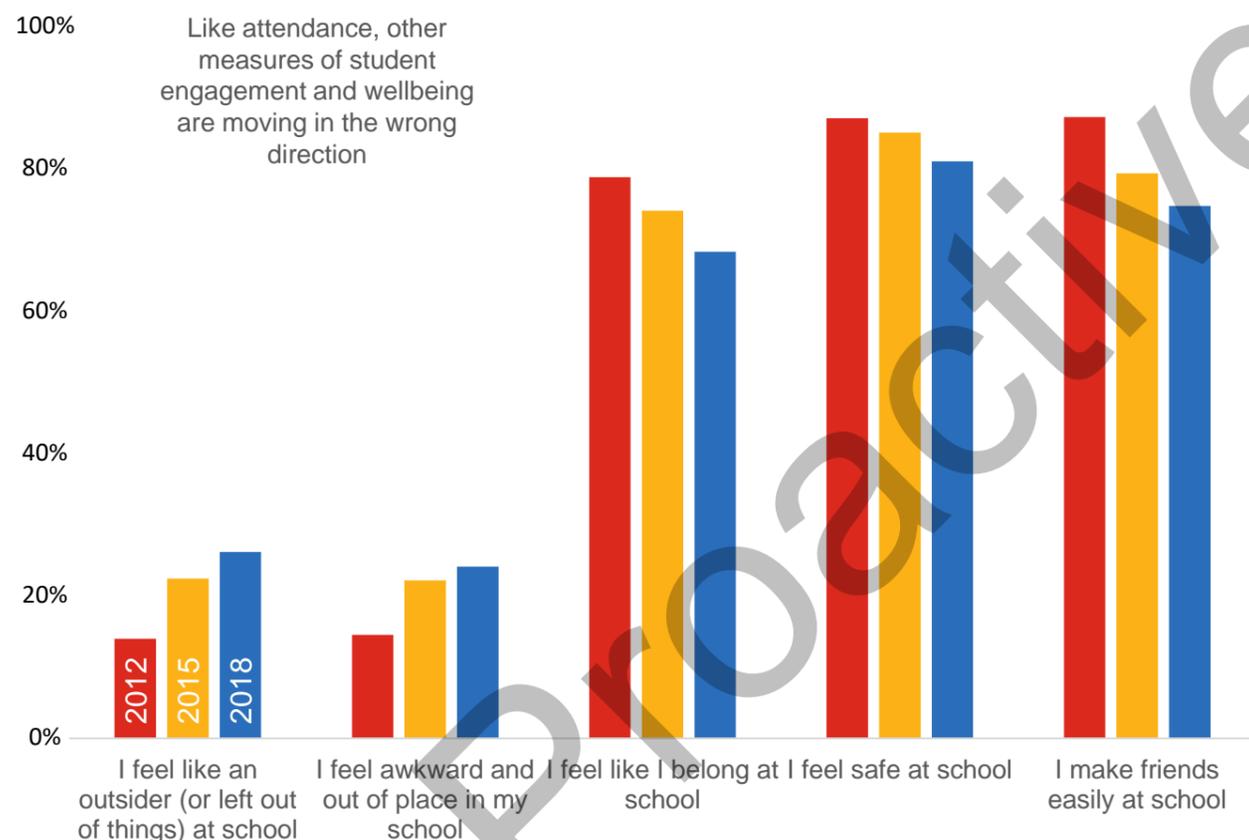
While the overall trend of a decline in regular attendance is consistent across the population, there are large inequities in attendance, consistent with most other education indicators. Attendance is lower for ākonga Māori, Pacific learners, disabled learners, those in more socio-economically disadvantaged areas and schools, and in secondary year levels (esp. senior secondary). Administrative data is blunt and masks the complexity of individual circumstances.

Non-attendance has disproportionately harmful impacts on the outcomes of those groups we know are already underserved by the education system – ākonga Māori, Pacific learners, disabled learners and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbating issues for those already disadvantaged by inequity in the education system, particularly in Auckland.

We are now seeing the medium-term impacts of COVID-19, with Term 4 2020 attendance data (not represented left, as until 2019 annual attendance data was only taken in Term 2) showing a decrease in regular attendance between Term 4 2019 and Term 4 2020 from 66% to 62%. The change appears to be largely driven by increases in justified medical absences, in line with public health messaging. So, while the pandemic is having mixed impacts on a wide-range of our indicators (and the real-life experiences underpinning these), we are confident that many of these are mostly temporary and will be mitigated by our response package and the resumption of 'normal'.

Prior to the national lockdown in 2020, Aotearoa was on track to continue its downward trend in regular attendance. While responding to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is an immediate priority, we also need to respond to the pre-existing, and continuing, downward trend in regular attendance.

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



Attendance and Wellbeing

Regular attendance is a proxy for good wellbeing and engagement, and all three are central to learning and development. Poor attendance is reflective of other underlying problems, within and outside the education system. We know from evidence that children and young people's sense of belonging at school and experiences of bullying have been moving in the wrong direction over time.

Within the education system, young people and their families' experiences of discrimination, weak or no home-school relationships, bullying, inadequate recognition of identity, language and culture and lack of access to mana-enhancing and culturally sustaining supports all contribute to the issue. At home and in their wider communities, young people and their families face challenges such as material poverty, mental health and addiction issues, the impacts and ongoing legacy and of colonisation, inadequate housing and other significant barriers to their wellbeing.

While we need to address the immediate impacts of COVID-19, especially in Auckland, our approach to this attendance action plan is focussed on the medium-longer term response to conditions and inequities that existed prior to COVID-19. This includes increasing the access to and dosage of a number of existing responses and interventions in place and working more collaboratively for results. This will require a collective effort across social sector agencies, schools, boards, communities, families and young people, with approaches and interventions at each level.

We know that the strongest incentive to attending school is feeling welcome. The local curriculum and positive behaviour practices will need to play a role in the work we do to improve attendance, as outlined in the attached actions page

We have learnt from the Regional Directors' national plan on attendance, which was developed to support the return to school following lockdowns, and this work builds on those actions. Coordinated actions across the education system and social sector to address wellbeing will establish the foundations required to support regular attendance by all students.

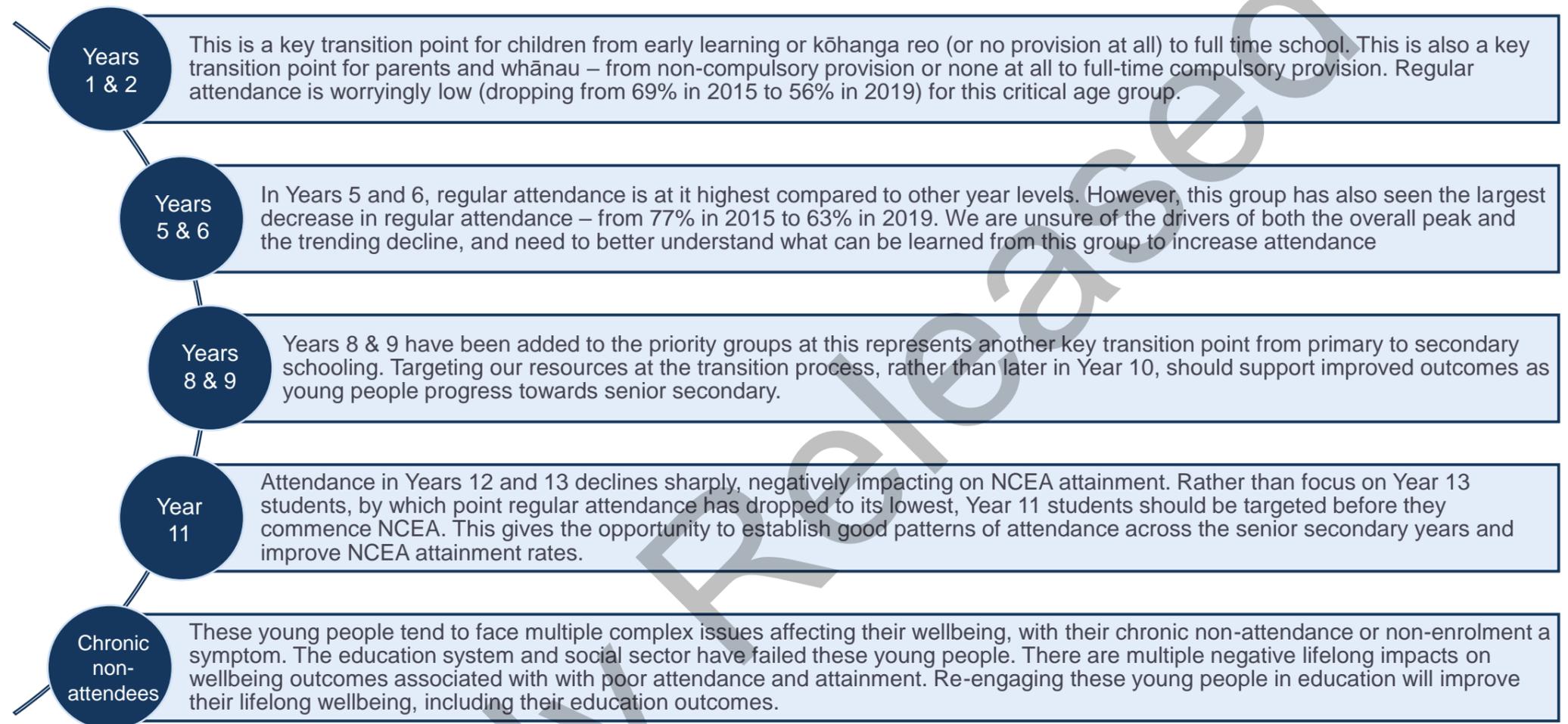
The Future of Attendance

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.

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:



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				
		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
Timeframe	Immediate (over the next 3 months)	<p>Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and deliver a communications plan – focused on immediate messages and tailored to different audiences (e.g. whānau, principals, boards, communities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secretary for Education to write to local councils and NGOs, through the Regional Public Service leads, 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give NZSTA the right 2-3 questions for Board of Trustees to ask of their school leaders to understand patterns of attendance and why children aren't attending and what they could do to address it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly publish stories that represent key successes through a range of channels and networks, including the NZSTA newsletters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop greater understanding of the specific drivers of non-attendance including by engaging with students and whānau, to inform future actions
	Medium term (3-9months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 behavioral insights) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out the Attendance Dashboard of Te Rito and continue working with schools and boards to understand their needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine what we can learn/apply from the new models of the Attendance Service in South Auckland and Kawerau Widen uptake of Huakina Mai to support school-wide approaches to developing educationally powerful connections and positive, culturally enhancing sustaining cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use existing Ministry, ERO and NZCER data, to complete research and analysis to understand casual absenteeism, the increase in justified absences and the opportunities for early intervention to inform responses
	Longer term (up to 3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to assess successes and lessons to develop an enduring communications and engagement approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to emphasise and engage with schools on the importance of building educationally powerful connections (a key focus for implementation of the NELP), and build understanding of the enablers and barriers schools face in doing this (see case studies) Continue to promote a focus on localised curricula to support schools to be safe, inclusive and engaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building off the Record of Learning work, develop a kete of tools that schools can use to support regular school attendance. This could include tools to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise low-level regulatory interventions for 'low-performing' schools, such as requiring a school to develop an action plan to improve regular attendance Support the increased use of restorative, mana-enhancing processes and practices in schools Build on clustering of schools and early learning services, including Kāhui Ako, to support smoother transitions for young people Complete the testing of a redesigned Attendance Service and implement learnings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with ERO to undertake evaluation and research on drivers of the decline in attendance and effective tools used by schools to inform future responses Work with the Proceeds of Crime Board to develop new funding criteria to enable more preventative work to be funded in communities impacted by crime