



AIDE-MEMOIRE

To: Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education
From: Jennifer Fraser A/Group Manager Te Puna Kaupapahere
Date: 13 October 2021
Subject: Paper and speaking points for Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministers Meeting – 20 October 2021
METIS: 1274356

Purpose

1. This aide-memoire provides you with a paper and speaking points to support you at the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministers Meeting on 20 October 2021.

Background

2. You have been invited by the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministerial Group to report back on work to improve school attendance, including the Attendance Strategy.
3. We have prepared a paper to support Ministerial discussion at the meeting and speaking points to support you to present this item.

Next Steps

4. You may wish to forward the paper to Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministers in advance of the meeting.

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.

Overview of Work to Improve School Attendance

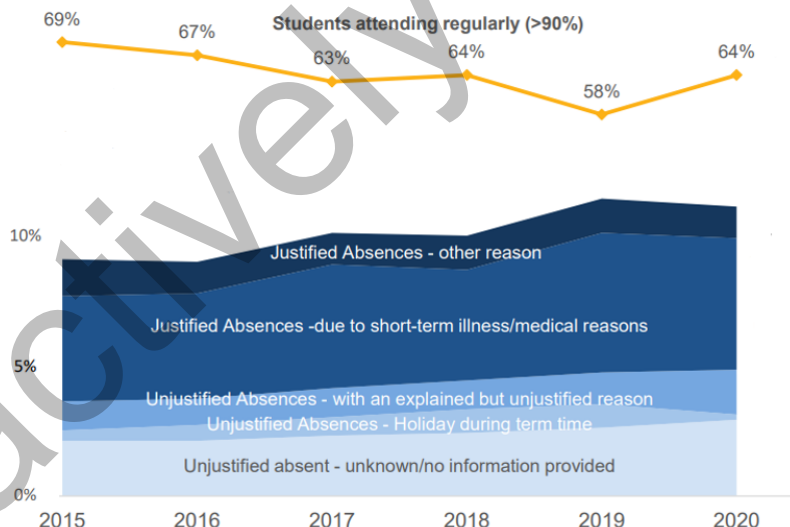
Date: 13/10/21
Meeting date: 20/10/21
To: Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministerial Group
From: Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education

Purpose

- The purpose of this paper is to provide Joint Child and Youth Wellbeing Ministers with an update on work to improve school attendance.

Problem Definition

- Regular attendance has been declining in New Zealand schools since 2015 (refer Figure 1).
- The decline has occurred across every ethnicity, year level, gender, decile, school type and region.
- 2020 saw a rebound following the national lockdown, however the trend is not expected to continue.
- Regular attendance is attending at least 90% of the time. Attending 90% of the time equates to missing more than a year of school between Years 1-13.



- Attendance is lower for ākonga Māori, Pacific learners, disabled learners, those in more socio-economically disadvantaged areas and schools, and in secondary year levels (refer Figure 2).
- Many of the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbating issues for students and whānau already disadvantaged by inequity in the education system, particularly in Auckland.
- These circumstances impact on education and wellbeing outcomes. School attendance is an important first step for students being engaged in learning.

Drivers of Non-Attendance

- Falling attendance is a complex problem with interconnected drivers existing at multiple levels:

Level of drivers	Examples
Student-level	Low sense of belonging at school, experiences of bullying
Whānau-level	Negative intergenerational experiences in education system, personal circumstances
School-level	Poor teacher-student or teacher-whānau relationships
System-level	Material poverty, inadequate housing, ongoing reality of colonisation

- These drivers manifest in different combinations of barriers for different learners. Therefore, we need bespoke responses that can be scaled up where appropriate.

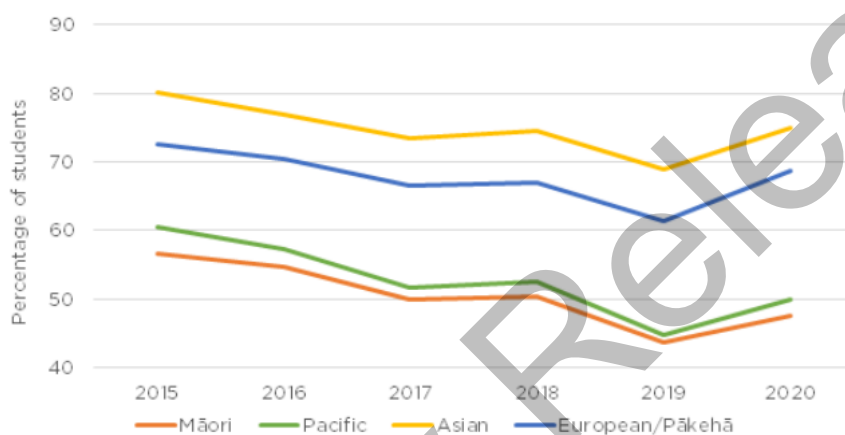


Figure 2: Regular attendance across all ethnicities in Term 2 from 2015 to 2020

Evidence about what works

- We know that the following key actions can contribute to improved attendance:
 - Building educationally-powerful relationships with parents and whānau and communicating information and encouragement around attendance;
 - Providing guidance for school leaders and Boards of Trustees to ensure they have adequate information around how best to engage students;
 - Establishing and maintaining networks of practice for continual support and improvement;
 - Working collaboratively across social sector agencies at the local and regional levels.

What we are doing

- The Ministry of Education is trialling new ways to deliver the Attendance Service in Kawerau and South Auckland. It is working with local schools to test what works best to support ākonga attendance in each community and how frequent absences can be managed and resourced closer to schools.
- As part of work to examine how we support reengagement in education in Auckland we are exploring the re-establishment of the Te Kura 400 (TK 400) programme introduced after lockdowns in Auckland in August 2020. The programme was successful in reaching at-risk students and had positive impacts on student wellbeing and re-engagement.
- The Education and Workforce Select Committee is conducting an inquiry into attendance which will inform our approach to addressing declining attendance rates.

- I am working with Te Tāhuhu o Te Mātauranga to develop an Attendance Strategy as an organising framework for this area of work. I expect to finalise this after we receive recommendations and responses from the Select Committee.
- The draft strategy reflects what we know about the drivers of absences, the groups of ākonga where there are specific concerns and opportunities to improve attendance and make a real impact, what works to support improved attendance and the existing actions underway (including the redesign of the Attendance Service).
- Built into it is a change in approach that emphasises:
 - learning from the sector;
 - regionally led and centrally supported initiatives;
 - engaging with the sector, iwi, agencies and wider community to find out what has worked and what is needed; and
 - learning from doing with fast feedback loops.
- Te Tāhuhu is working across the motu to develop the Strategy including regional plans with defined objectives, specific actions and measures.

Talking points for Associate Minister of Education for CYWS meeting

What do we know about the drivers of non-attendance?

- As many of you know, school attendance is a critical measure of student engagement and a strong predictor of educational achievement.
- Attendance has been dropping across all regions since 2015.
- This decrease is reflected in attendance rates across all ethnicities, deciles and year levels, though rates are lower for ākonga Māori, Pacific learners, disabled learners, those in socio-economically disadvantaged areas and in senior secondary school.
- Falling attendance is a complex problem –there are system barriers, as well as those individual to each ākonga and whānau.
- Some of these barriers come from outside of school, and some are linked to the school environment.
- For example, within the education system young people and their families may experience inadequate recognition of identity, language and culture and lack of access to mana-enhancing and culturally sustaining supports.
- At home and in their wider communities, young people and their families face challenges such as material poverty, the impacts and ongoing reality of colonisation and other significant barriers to their wellbeing.
- The drivers and patterns of non-attendance are often complicated and unique to individuals.
- Because barriers vary for each student and whānau context, getting boots on the ground to build personalised responses for all learners is important.
- By supporting engagement in education, actions to improve school attendance contribute directly to the 'learning and developing' outcome domain of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy including for those facing additional barriers to their learning.

The downward trend in attendance rates has been further exacerbated by COVID-19.

- In 2020, the rate at which learners returned to in-class learning post lockdown, for some, was slow and many struggled with building and maintaining wellbeing.
- The impacts of COVID-19 and lockdowns on attendance and engagement are disproportionately impacting our Māori and Pacific young people and young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The effects are also being felt by individual students who previously had good attendance patterns.
- This means that we must now rise to the challenge of tackling attendance and engagement on two fronts – dealing with the year-on-year decline in attendance in a systemic way, and re-engaging students after the inevitable disruption caused by lockdown.
- Working collaboratively across the social sector at the local and regional levels to ensure learners and whānau can access the full range of social services they need to support wellbeing is a necessary precursor to educational engagement.

- Re-engaging learners on both fronts requires collective effort by schools, the Ministry of Education and wider education and social sectors, as well as students and their whānau.
- Growing educationally-powerful relationships at the local level with whānau and school communities will prove to be a powerful way to address declining attendance rates.
- Getting learners back to school is the first hurdle, engaging them in learning and supporting their ongoing participation in their learning requires us to be confident that the actions we take are contributing to improved attendance.
- As part of work to examine how we support reengagement in education in Auckland we are exploring the re-establishment of the Te Kura 400 (TK 400) programme introduced after lockdowns in Auckland in August 2020. The programme was successful in reaching at-risk students and had positive impacts on student wellbeing and re-engagement.

Attendance Service

- The Ministry of Education is trialling new ways to deliver the Attendance Service in Kawerau and South Auckland. It is working with local schools to test what works best to support ākonga attendance in each community and how frequent absences can be managed and resourced closer to schools.

Attendance Strategy - taking a systemic approach to improving attendance.

- As many of you may also know, in recent months I have been leading work with the Ministry of Education to develop an Attendance Strategy.
- The goals of the strategy aim to create changes in the conditions that will lead to a shift in attendance rates.
- This draft strategy being developed by the Ministry of Education reflects what we know about the drivers of absences, the groups of ākonga where there are specific concerns and opportunities to improve attendance and make a real impact, what works to support improved attendance and the existing actions underway (including the redesign of the Attendance Service).
- Built into it is a change in approach that emphasises:
 - learning from the sector;
 - regionally led and centrally supported initiatives;
 - engaging with the sector, iwi, agencies and wider community to find out what has worked and what is needed; and
 - learning from doing with fast feedback loops.
- The Ministry is working across the motu to develop the strategy including regional plans with defined objectives, specific actions and measures for each goal.
- Although attendance is a critical factor for children's learning and achievement, the strategy also acknowledges that we need to keep a sharp focus on the features of effective engagement includes belonging, participation, attendance and engagement.
- The five goals of the strategy are:

1. Parents/whānau/caregivers and students understand the importance of supporting regular school attendance;
2. Schools prioritise wellbeing through their practice, and their connections with iwi, Pacific communities, regional leadership, and the wider social sector;
3. School boards and principals and sector groups critically examine the causes of attendance and non-attendance, and effectively respond;
4. Persistent or escalating patterns of non-attendance, chronic truancy and educational disengagement are identified and responded to;
5. Understand and measure the drivers of irregular attendance and intervention effectiveness to support ongoing improvement.

Here is where we are currently at with the strategy

- Officials are continuing to work to develop a regionally-led approach and identify the range of current activity to provide the foundations for future action
- In tandem, the Ministry is supporting the Workforce and Education Select Committee Inquiry into attendance.
- I have asked officials to ensure that what we hear and learn from the Inquiry is used to inform our strategy and actions.
- I expect to bring a finalised Attendance Strategy to Cabinet in the first quarter of 2022.
- The strategy is important now as we plan how to reengage our students post lockdown, particularly in Auckland and in our ever-changing Delta context.