

Term 2 2023: Lifting school attendance in Aotearoa New Zealand

This document's purpose is to offer context about the current attendance situation in New Zealand schools and kura. You can access the official attendance data for Term 2, 2023, on Te Tāhuhu o Te Mātaranga | Ministry of Education's website at this link: [Attendance | Education Counts](#). This includes reporting on Regular Attendance, Reasons for Absence and School Response to Absence.

It should also be noted that schools do not rely on these public reports for attendance data. They receive a personalised data summary when they submit their data and staff in the Ministry of Education's regional offices | Te Mahau have access to both termly and weekly data to support their work with schools to improve attendance. A short overview of how we measure attendance is at the end of this report.

Introduction

All students should be at school or kura unless they are absent for a reason that is accepted by their school for example, they are sick, but this isn't the picture in Aotearoa New Zealand right now. Fewer ākonga | students are going to school regularly in New Zealand, regardless of their ethnicity, where they live, or how old they are. Research by [The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership \(AITSL\) | Spotlight: Attendance Matters](#) shows that there is a relationship between regular attendance at school, attainment and what students do when they leave school.

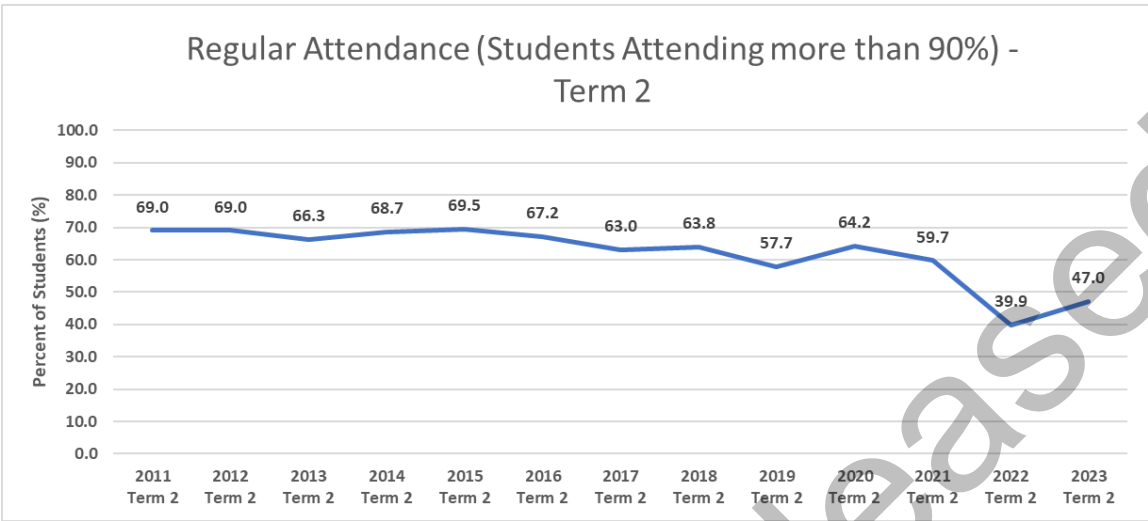
The [Attendance and Engagement Strategy](#) describes our plan for the Ministry to work with schools to address the issue. The Strategy, launched in 2022, lays out a clear plan to provide schools and kura, whānau, and communities with resources and tools needed to get more students back to school. It's important to highlight that every student, school, and community is unique, so there's no one-size-fits-all solution, which is why there is funding and support for attendance initiatives across the continuum of absence.

The Strategy also introduced a target of 70% regular attendance by 2024, which was chosen because it matched the attendance rate in 2015 when attendance began to drop. A further target of 75% by 2026 was also introduced. Regular attendance is defined as more than 90% attendance, which usually means missing less than five days of school in a term. When interpreting reported attendance rates over the last few years it is essential to highlight that these targets were established before the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were well understood. It is now clear that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on attendance rates, and that this remains ongoing.

Term 2 2023 results in context

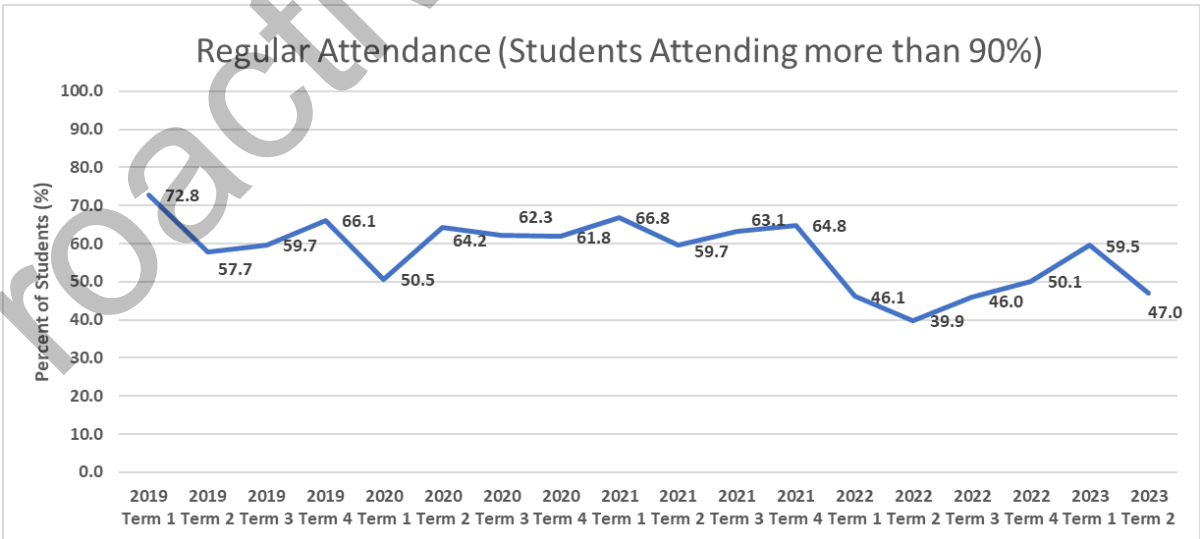
The percentage of students who regularly went to school has increased from 39.9% in the second term of 2022, to 47% in the second term of 2023. This suggests that Term 2 2022 was the bottom

of the curve caused by COVID-19, and that attendance is now recovering. Nevertheless, rapid gains will be required if we are to hit the 2024 target.



As you can see in the above graph, which shows regular attendance in each Term 2 from 2011 to 2023, while there continues to be an overall downward trend the last four years' data covers the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and we cannot yet be confident that we have reversed this. However, the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic are clear.

Prior to 2019, only Term 2 data was reported. However, regular attendance rates have been available for each term since 2019 (see graph below). Although each term during this period has been differently impacted by COVID-19, preliminary analysis of this information suggests that Term 2 and Term 3 regular attendance rates are the lowest in almost every school year. It would seem reasonable to assume that this is linked to the higher rates of winter illnesses, and associated justified absence, during these terms.



What is being done to improve attendance rates

All students must attend school unless they are sick. Parents, whānau, and communities all play a critical role in helping our students to prioritise and regularly attend school. Attendance Services throughout the country provide support to schools and individual students who are, or are at risk of, persistently missing school. The Regional Response Fund is used to enable schools to implement bespoke interventions to address low attendance rates, designed and delivered by people close to the students and their communities. More detail about these two initiatives is provided below.

The refreshed The New Zealand Curriculum is being designed to make attending school more engaging for all ākonga (students). Many other specific programmes (e.g. Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches, Ikura | Manaakitia te whare tangata Period Products) are designed to address one or more of the key barriers to attendance.

Many students who are persistently absent from school are facing complex challenges that cannot be addressed solely by the education sector. The establishment of Te Mahau within a redesigned Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga | Ministry of Education provides services and support for teachers and education leaders, ākonga and whānau. Te Mahau teams are building relationships with a range of government agencies, including Health, Justice, Police, MSD, Oranga Tamariki, and Ministry of Disabled People to identify and work to support these students.

We have an evidence-based approach to decision making so that support and funding is directed to those most in need. The Ministry is building an evidence base which includes research, evaluation and analysis undertaken by the Ministry (or on behalf of), as well as what is undertaken by other agencies and other jurisdictions internationally. Investment in the Attendance Data Improvement Project will maximise the quality of the data we collect and improve the access to, understanding and use of the data to help the Ministry, schools, whānau and education sector make better decisions to improve attendance.

Attendance Services

The Attendance Service works with schools to develop and implement strategies to improve attendance rates for students at risk of becoming persistently absent. The service also works directly with individual students and whānau who are persistently absent to encourage the students to attend school more regularly and help them overcome barriers to attendance.

There are 79 Attendance Service providers (schools, iwi organisations and NGOs) with over 350 staff, providing services throughout the country. Approximately 275 Attendance Advisors work directly with students who are chronically absent or are non-enrolled from school. Over 80 attendance officers work with schools to support them to develop strategies to address issues contributing to moderate and irregular attendance.

Regional Response Fund

One of the key elements of the Attendance and Engagement Strategy is a commitment to small bespoke interventions, designed and delivered by people close to the students and their communities. This has been underpinned by the Regional Response Fund, which was announced

in 2022 and provides \$10m per annum for such interventions. Formal evaluation of the Regional Response Fund is currently underway.

Feedback from schools strongly suggests that individual initiatives are having a positive impact on attendance. Some examples of these individual initiatives are provided below.

Auckland mentoring project for disengaged students

Te Kaiārahi is a mentoring project included as a part of the Youth Offending Project. It supported 21 students who were completely disengaged in schooling and were involved in ramraids. Students were supported through a mentoring programme focussing on Te Ao Māori principles. By the end of the intervention all tamariki and rangatahi who completed the intervention were enrolled in an education pathway. Attendance improved to an average of 77.7%. There was also a reduction in youth offending.

Auckland whānau engagement project

A school utilised Regional Response Funding to employ two Whānau Engagement Liaisons on a part-time basis – both have children attending the school. The school's senior leadership team use their attendance data to identify which whānau may benefit from support through the Whānau Engagement Liaison. The principal was very pleased with the positive impact this was having in building relationships with the school and whānau including an improvement in attendance. Moderate absences decreased from 24.48% in term two 2022 to 13.27% in term 2 2023.

Multi-agency response to dangerous escalating behaviours

We contributed Regional Response funding to a multi-agency collaborative approach supporting rangatahi who have been involved in dangerous escalating behaviours at school and/or in the community. It emphasises a rapid, unified agency response and a whānau focused approach to provide resources and support. The approach has supported 163 tamariki along with 426 siblings and their whānau. 79% of the cohort of rangatahi supported did not reoffend during their involvement. 58% of rangatahi who were not enrolled in school upon entry to this support are now re-enrolled back into school.

South Island Kāhui Ako project

Regional Response Funding was used to support a Kāhui Ako to address the attendance concerns of students who were at risk and students who were developing patterns of poor attendance, with the aim to break the cycle. This initiative involved school contacting whānau of students who were absent and has identified some of the barriers such as lack of food, transport issues, lack of awareness of day off, late bedtimes to name a few. Across five primary schools and one intermediate school, moderate and irregular absence rates decreased from an average of 24% for Term 1 2023 to 17% at the end of Week 5 Term 2 2023.

How we measure attendance

We measure school attendance by categorising student attendance by the proportion of each term that students have attended. Our key indicator is the regular attendance rate - how many students attend school for more than 90% (nine weeks) of a standard 10-week school term.

We also monitor three other groups with lower attendance rates:

- Students who attend between 81% and 90% of the time (called irregular absence).
- Those who attend between 71% and 80% of the time (moderate absence).
- And students who attend 70% or less of the term (chronic absence).

We have created a new indicator report focused on the reasons why students are absent from school, and particularly where the reason for absence is unjustified. Additional attendance measures are also being developed and implemented to identify actions taken by schools to respond to absence. You can find the [Reasons for Absence and School Response to Absence reports here](#).

Over time this expanded suite of attendance indicators will help schools to focus on sub-groups of learners not regularly attending school, or those who may be at risk of slipping into patterns of persistent absence. This work is all underpinned the Ministry's focus on working with schools and communities to make attendance data better. We want to make sure the data is accurate, clear, and useful, so everyone can understand it and use it to help more students attend school more regularly.