

# Education Indicator

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT / PARTICIPATION

### School Response to Absence

Indicators of school response to student absence highlight the contribution schools make to improving regular attendance. These new indicators are described and some early insights are presented.

This indicator report covers three new indicators of school response to absence:

- **Unjustified student absence:** The proportion of students who are absent without justification for five or more full days in a single term.
- **School intervention in unjustified absence:** The proportion of students who are absent without justification for five or more full days in a single term (Unjustified student absence indicator) where the school has taken action within 5 school days.
- **Unexplained absence indicator:** The proportion of absent time that remains unexplained at the end of each week of the term.

The 'Unexplained Absence' and 'School intervention' Indicators are not yet final, as the Ministry continues to accumulate and understand the data being collected and the practices that inform the findings.

The regular attendance at school indicator is a different measure based on the percentage of half days the students were marked as present during the term. For more information on regular attendance indicator, please see [Term 2 2023 Regular Attendance indicator report](#).

### Why This Is Important

In order to achieve in education, students must be engaged and interested in learning. All schools and kura face the challenge of creating an environment that students | ākonga feel they belong to and are encouraged to participate.

Every day, schools keep a record of which students are present or absent. For those students who are absent schools record a reason for the absence. Schools talk to students and contact their parents/whānau to find out why students are absent from school. They work together to understand why students are not coming to school and to reduce or remove obstacles that might be getting in the way of students attending regularly.

Together, the intent of these new indicators is to show that schools take timely action to follow up on student absence, connect with parents/whānau and help to get their students attending school regularly. This information will also help the Ministry to understand the bigger picture of school response to student absence. It will also help to identify good practice in schools, and areas where the Ministry may be able to provide support.

## The Attendance and Engagement Strategy

The Attendance and Engagement Strategy is Aotearoa/New Zealand's plan to address the decline in regular attendance and engagement in schools. It is being put into action by Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga/the Ministry of Education. The Strategy sets out expectations of ākonga and parents/whānau, schools, communities and government agencies in addressing this complex problem. It is based on what we have heard from the sector through Kōrero Mātauranga and the Education and Workforce Select Committee Inquiry into school attendance. The Strategy builds on work that Government has already been doing alongside schools and communities to address attendance and engagement challenges.

As part of changes proposed by the Strategy, additional attendance indicators are being introduced to highlight the contribution schools make in response to student absence.

### Definitions

To understand these indicators, we can consider the different ways that student presence or absence during class can be classified. The diagram to the right shows us how all class time is classified.

In the outer ring we can see that most class time (around 85% in Term 2, 2023) is coded as **present** with around 15% of class time in Term 2, 2023 recorded as **absent**, either with or without a reason being given.

The middle ring illustrates that **absent time** can be broken down into either **justified** absences or **unjustified** absences. Absences are **justified** when the reason for absence is acceptable within the school's policy, for example short-term illness. An absence is **unjustified** where an acceptable reason is not provided or a reason is provided that is not justified within the school's policy for example holidays during term time.

The inner ring illustrates that **unjustified** absences can be broken down into **explained** absences, where a reason is provided, and **unexplained** absences, where the school has not obtained any reason for the student's absence.



### Unjustified Student Absence Indicator

#### Indicator Description

Proportion of students who are absent without justification for five or more full days in a single term.

#### Why this is important

Presence or absence is recorded for each student at least twice during a school day, depending on the type of school and the timetable. For example, most primary schools record student presence or absence only twice a day. A secondary school is likely to record student presence or absence for each class and therefore multiple times per day.

This indicator focuses on students who accrue five or more full days of unjustified absence during a school term. The Ministry is also developing an indicator of school intervention for this group of learners (indicator 3 below).

A full day of unjustified absence will be counted for a student when every period/class during a given day is recorded as an unjustified absence. The indicator is focused on unjustified absence and therefore does not include students who are absent for 5 or more days for justified reasons, for example short-term illness.

#### How are we going?

In Term 2, 2023 114,324 students accrued 5 or more full days of unjustified absence, this represents 14.5% of all students who were enrolled in school during Term 2.

Further detail on this indicator will be provided as the data accumulates.



## School Intervention in Unjustified Absence Indicator

### Indicator Description

Proportion of students who are absent without justification for five or more full days in a single term (Unjustified Student Absence Indicator) where the school has taken action within 5 school days.

### Why this is important

We know that schools are intervening when they observe recurring unexplained absence from school. We also want to learn more about where schools are doing this really well and where schools might be experiencing barriers to doing this.

This indicator will demonstrate the degree to which schools have taken action in response to a student accumulating 5 full days of unjustified absence within a single term (as per the first indicator in this report).

This indicator is currently under development and the results will be included in future reporting. While the Ministry expects that all schools will have processes in place to respond to frequent absences, the specified threshold and recording this process in SMSs (Student Management Systems) are new. The Ministry has worked with the providers of SMSs to implement the new reporting mechanism. For some schools these expectations may require changes to when they initiate the response. For all schools indicating that an action has been initiated will be an addition to current reporting practices.

## Unexplained Absence Indicator

### Indicator Description

Proportion of absent time that remains unexplained at the end of each week of the term.

### Why this is important

This indicator focuses on unexplained absences and reports on the proportion of absent time for which schools do not have an explanation by the end of the school week in which the absence occurred. The total unexplained absent time across the whole term is also provided as a percentage of all class time.

Unexplained absences are not about student behaviours. Here 'unexplained' refers to the school not yet having information about where a student was and what they were doing. This is a placeholder absence code used until either an explanation is provided or the school has attempted to obtain an explanation without success.

The intent of this indicator is to demonstrate the extent to which schools quickly obtain and record the reasons for all absences. Presently this indicator is exploratory, with early, high-level results presented here. The Ministry will use these early insights to learn more about what is happening in schools and to refine this indicator over time.

Underpinning the design of this indicator is an assumption that by measuring the timeliness with which schools find out why students are absent, we can build a picture of situations where schools are able to quickly find out this information about their students, and where schools might be experiencing barriers to finding out this information. However, the Ministry is not yet confident that the indicator is accurately reflecting this intent.

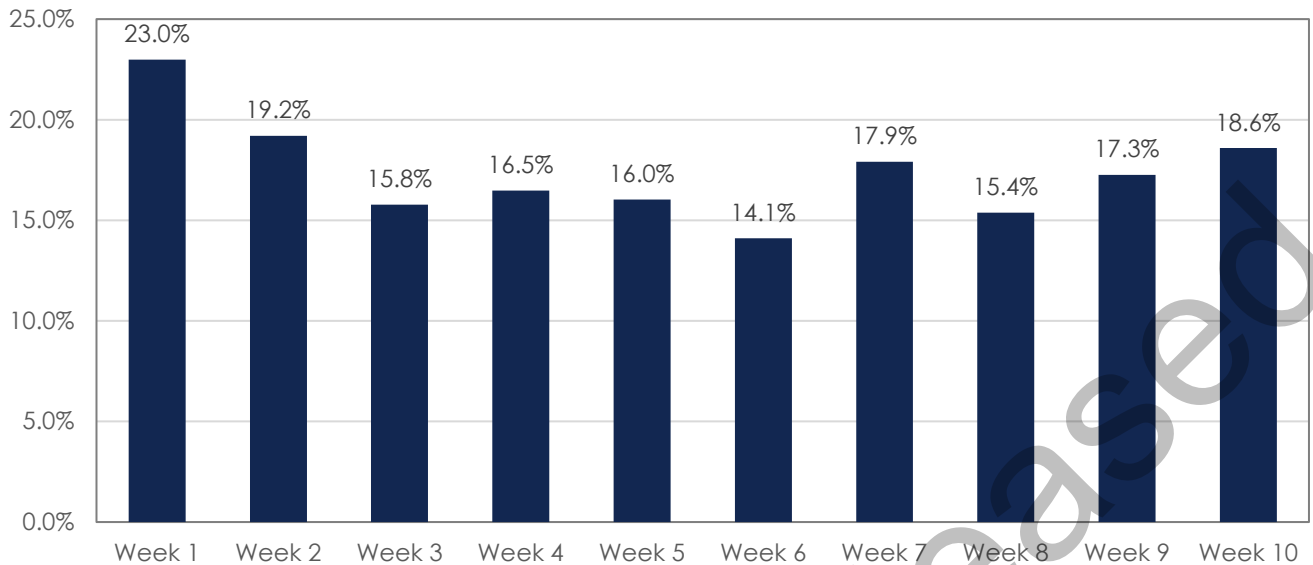
### How are we going?

This preliminary data shows that on average for Term 2, 2023, 17.1% of absent time remained unexplained at the end of the week in which they occurred. This made up 2.6% of all time students were expected to be in class.

How well schools are able to explain student absences varies with each week of the term. In Term 2 2023, the highest rate of unexplained absent time was in Week 1 (23.0%) and the lowest was in Week 6 (14.1%). Week 1 results may have been impacted by higher than usual absence on the first day of term due to the ANZAC day public holiday falling on the second day of term.



Term 2 2023: Percentage of Absent time remaining unexplained at the end of the week in term in which they occurred



There are large differences in the levels of unexplained absences between students in primary year levels (Years 1 – 8) and those in secondary year levels (Years 9 – 13). On average, 5.1% of time absent was unexplained by the end of the week for primary learners, and 34.1% of time absent was unexplained for secondary learners.

In this initial data, the proportion of unexplained absent time is lower at the beginning of each week. Because the data on unexplained absences is extracted at the end of each week schools have had longer to obtain an explanation from students or whānau for absences at the beginning of the week than for absences at the end of each week. For example, for absences that occur on a Friday, schools must obtain an explanation and code the reason for absence on that same day. On average 3.9% of Monday/Tuesday absent time for primary learners and 26% for secondary learners remained unexplained at the end of the week.

**Table 1: Proportion of absent time remaining unexplained at the end of each week, by day of the week**

Day of absence	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Percentage of absent time unexplained by the end of the week	12.1%	13.1%	15.7%	17.8%	24.3%
Days available to obtain and code explanation, after day of absence	4	3	2	1	0

#### Do these results accurately reflect the extent to which schools obtain reasons for absence?

There are many situations in which schools do not code the reasons for absences on the day of absence. Factors may include school policies for advising reasons for absence, the availability of school administrative staff to update the attendance data and ways in which the SMS systems, in which schools record attendance and absence, are set up.

Some SMSs included automatic coding of unexplained absences to truant (T) after a specified number of days. The Ministry requested that SMS providers removed this facility during Term 2. As expected, there has been an increase in the overall number of absences coded as unexplained and a corresponding decrease in the number of absences coded as truant. This shift is expected to be reversed as schools adjust to actively deciding to code an absence as T after taking reasonable steps to obtain an explanation.



On average 12.6% of absent time that occurred on a Monday or Tuesday remain unexplained at the end of the week. This is less than the average of 17.1% reported across the whole term and the Ministry's preliminary view is that this is a more accurate reflection of the timeframe in which the reasons for absences are understood and coded.

To report the percentage of absent time that remain unexplained after a specified number of days (for example, three days after the day of absence) would require a significant change to our data collection processes and is not being considered at this time.

As data accumulates, patterns in the data will become clearer and we will be able to make recommendations about whether the definitions and reporting of this measure should be amended.

### Where to Find Out More

For information on the Government's strategy to lift school attendance and engagement:

- [Attendance and Engagement Strategy](#)

To obtain more information about student attendance, consider publications:

- [Attendance in New Zealand Schools](#)
- [He Whakaaro: School Attendance and Student Wellbeing, Ministry of Education, February 2020](#)
- [He Whakaaro: What is the relationship between attendance and attainment? Ministry of Education, February 2020](#)

To obtain information about other forms of student disengagement consider indicators:

- [Stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions from school](#)
- [Early leaving exemptions](#)
- [Transient students](#)
- [Retention of students in senior secondary school](#)

