

Briefing Note: Release of 2023 Term 2 Attendance Data

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister of Education		
Date:	31 October 2023	Priority:	High
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1318786
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	Yes	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is for you to:

- Note** that student regular attendance as measured in the Term 2 2023 attendance collection was 47.0% in 2023, which is higher than Term 2 2022 (39.8%) but lower than regular attendance for Term 1 2023 (59.5%).
- Note** that student chronic absence (attending 70% or less of available half-days) was 12.5% in Term 2 2023 (13.9% in Term 2 2022).
- Note** that justified absences (including illness) made up 8.7% of time in Term 2 2023 (10.4% in Term 2 2022), and unjustified absences made up 6.1% of time in Term 2 2023 (5.9% in Term 2 2022).
- Note** that these results can primarily be attributed to high levels of incidence of COVID-19 in the community and winter illnesses.
- Note** that this release will include a new indicator report focused on school responses to student absence.
- Note** the results of the 2023 Term 2 attendance collection are scheduled to be released via Education Counts on Thursday 09 November.
- Note** that reactive questions and answers are attached in Annex 1.
- Note** that a supporting contextual document will be released in conjunction with the Term 2 attendance report outlining examples of work aligned to the Attendance and Engagement Strategy (Annex 2).

- i. **Note** Three briefing notes regarding the development of the additional attendance measures will be proactively released on Thursday 09 November.
- j. **Note** that the regular attendance report for Term 3 2023 is scheduled for release via Education Counts 20 December 2023.

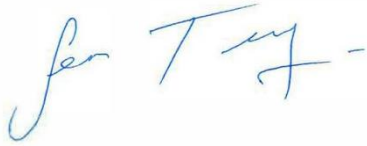
Summary

- 1 This briefing provides you with information on the attendance results for Term 2 2023.
- 2 The Term 2 attendance data and report are being released as part of the ongoing series the Ministry publishes every year in November/December.
- 3 The main driver of non-attendance in Term 2 2023 was time absent due to short-term illness/medical reasons, 6.9% of time, down from 8.6% of time in 2022 and up from 4.7% in Term 1 2023.
- 4 Across Term 2 2023, 47.0% of students met the criteria for regular attendance, an increase of 7.2 percentage points compared to Term 2 in 2022 (39.8). The regular attendance rate peaked in 2015 (69.5%).
- 5 Compared to Term 1 2023 (59.5%), regular attendance is 12.5 percentage points lower in Term 2 2023. Drops in regular attendance between Terms 1 and 2 were also seen in 2019, 2021 and 2022.
- 6 Regular attendance rates for all ethnicities have risen between 2022 and 2023, with rates for European/Pākehā students (7.6 percentage points increase) rising more than the rates for Māori, Pacific and Asian students (6.2, 5.9 and 6.8 percentage points increase respectively).
- 7 The percentage of students with chronic absence (attending 70% or less of the time) decreased to 12.5% in Term 2 2023 from 13.9% in Term 2 2022.
- 8 Justified absences (including illness) made up 8.7% of time in Term 2 2023 (10.4% in Term 2 2022), and unjustified absences made up 6.1% of time in Term 2 2023 (5.9% in Term 2 2022).
- 9 The Taranaki, Whanganui, Manawatu region experienced the largest increase in students attending regularly, up 9.3 percentage points from 2022. The Nelson, Marlborough, West Coast region experienced the smallest increase in students attending regularly, an increase of 4.3 percentage points from 2022.
- 10 The preliminary data on school response to absence shows that, on average for Term 2 2023, 17.1% of absences remained unexplained at the end of the week in which they occurred. In Term 2 2023 14.5% of students had 5 or more days of unjustified absence during the term.
- 11 A new indicator report has been developed for publication, focusing on the additional measures of school response to absence being developed as part of the Attendance and Engagement Strategy. This indicator report is included as Annex 3.

Proactive Release

Agree that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you.

☒ Agree / ☐ Disagree



Sean Teddy
Hautū
Te Pae Aronui

31 / 10 / 2023



Hon Jan Tinetti
Minister of Education

08/11/2023

Proactively released

Background

Term 2 attendance reporting

1. The annual Term 2 attendance report provides a picture of student attendance in New Zealand schools and kura to help government, schools, Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako, sector representatives and other interested parties understand patterns of attendance.
2. The Term 2 attendance data is published by the Ministry as part of an ongoing series every year in November/December. It measures student attendance over the time, in half-days¹.
3. We report on four categories of student attendance:
 - i. **Regular attendance**, where students have attended school or kura for more than 90% of available half-days in the term.
 - ii. **Irregular absence**, where students have attended more than 80% and up to 90% of available half-days.
 - iii. **Moderate absence**, where students have attended more than 70% and up to 80% of available half-days, and
 - iv. **Chronic absence**, where students have attended 70% or less of available half-days.
4. Note that both justified and unjustified absences are included in the calculation of regular attendance. Of particular relevance at present is that absences due to short-term illness affect regular attendance, for example COVID-19.
5. In Term 2 2023, 775,009 student attendance records were reported and processed from 2,335 schools (95.3% of all state and state-integrated schools and kura). This represents 97.1% of the student population in all state and state-integrated schools and kura on 1 July 2023.
6. The data is collected voluntarily from schools and kura that use electronic Student Management Systems (SMS).

Challenges due to COVID-19

7. Short-term illness/medical absences continued to be the main driver of non-attendance in Term 2 2023. The level of illness is associated with the continued incidence of COVID-19 and typical winter illnesses.
8. In Term 2 2023 students (and staff) were still required to self-isolate for 7 days if they tested positive for COVID-19. This requirement was lifted from Tuesday 15 August 2023.
9. Comparisons to previous years are impacted by the government's COVID-19 response. The COVID-19 Protection Framework (traffic light system) was in place during Term 2 2022. This framework ended in September 2022 and the Government removed several COVID restrictions however, the self-isolation requirement remained. Under the Traffic Light system, all schools were open for on-site learning.

¹ A half-day of attendance is a minimum of two hours present.

10. In 2020 and 2021, New Zealand was under the COVID-19 Alert Level system. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown that affected Term 2 2020, there were fewer than usual on-site school days in Term 2 2020 (7 weeks) and statistics for that year do not include the weeks when students were required to learn from home. Term 2 2021 was not impacted by COVID-19 Alert Levels 3 – 4.

Other attendance reporting

Terms 1, 3 and 4 attendance data and information summary

11. Since 2020, the Ministry has been collecting attendance data for every term. The attendance results and a brief summary of changes between the current term and the same term last year are made publicly available via Education Counts, usually before the end of the following term.
12. Regular attendance reporting for Term 3 2023 is scheduled for release via Education Counts 20 December 2023.

Weekly attendance reporting

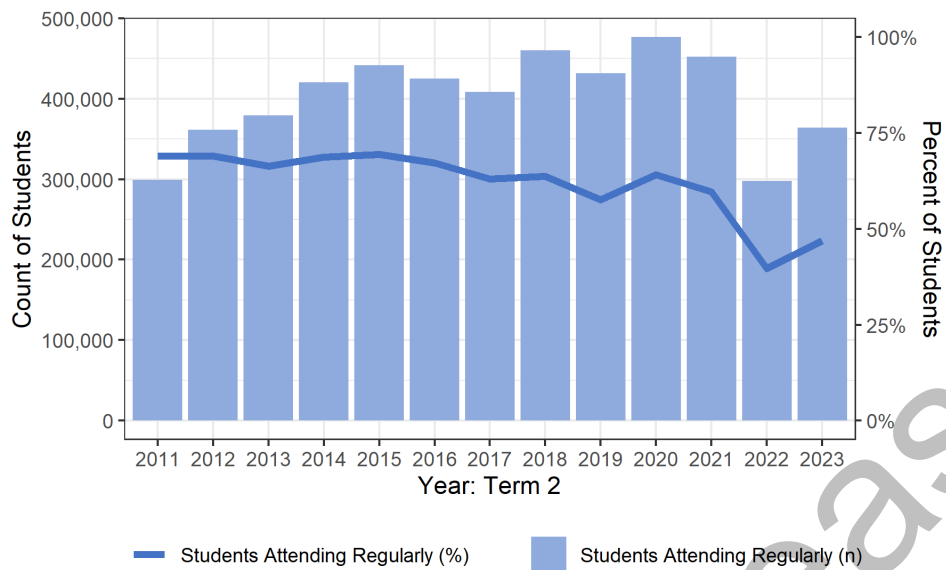
13. Weekly attendance reporting for schools and early learning services ceased at the end of Term 3 2023. The was in place during the COVID-19 pandemic to track in-person attendance at early learning centres and schools.
14. In contrast to the Term 2 attendance reporting, which combines attendance in half-days to measure regular attendance across the term, the weekly attendance reporting was a head-count measure of on-site attendance at schools, kura and early learning services.
15. In the weekly attendance reporting, any child or student who attended a school, kura or an early learning service (ELS) in person at any time on each day of the week was counted as being present for that day.

Key Findings

National Regular Attendance and Chronic Absence

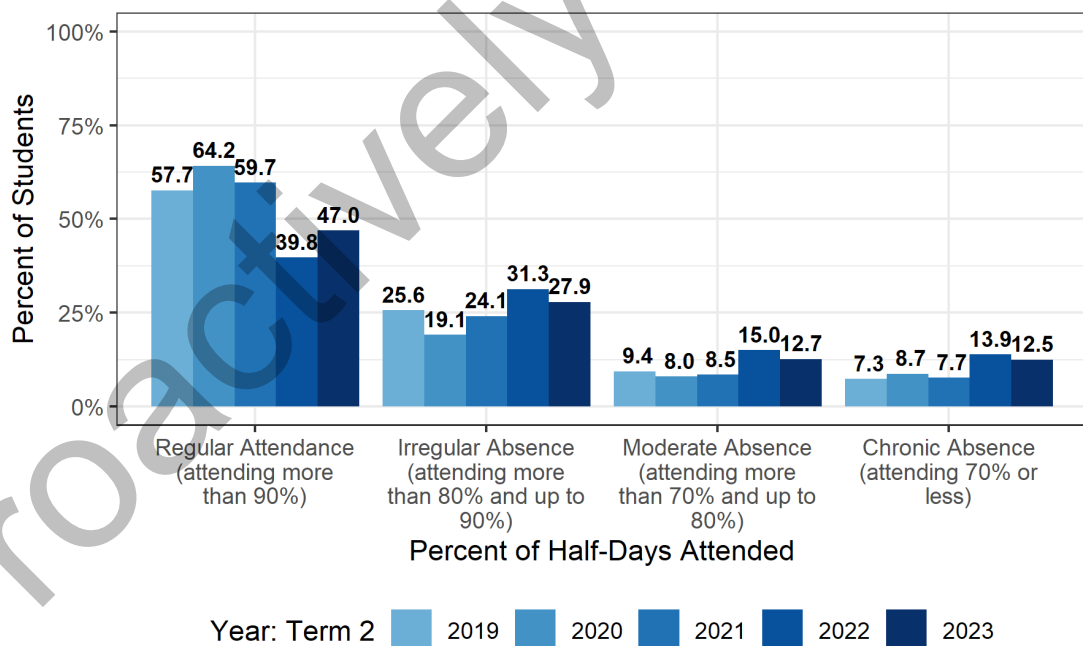
16. In Term 2 2023 47.0% of students met the criteria for regular attendance. This is an increase of 7.2 percentage points from Term 2 2022 (39.8%). This remains lower than Term 2 2019 (pre-COVID-19) when 57.7% of students were regularly attending.
17. Regular attendance in Term 2 2023 was also lower than regular attendance in Term 1 2023. Compared to Term 1 2023 (59.5%), regular attendance is 12.5 percentage points lower in Term 2 2023. Drops in regular attendance between Terms 1 and 2 were also seen in 2019 (-15.1 percentage points), 2021 (-7.1 percentage points) and 2022 (-6.3 percentage points).

Figure 1: Regular attendance has increased in Term 2 2023 compared to Term 2 2022



18. Chronic absence (attending 70% or less of the term) decreased to 12.5% in Term 2 2023 from 13.9% in Term 2 2022 (1.4 percentage points). The rates for irregular absence, moderate absence and chronic absence are higher than Term 2 2019 (before COVID-19).

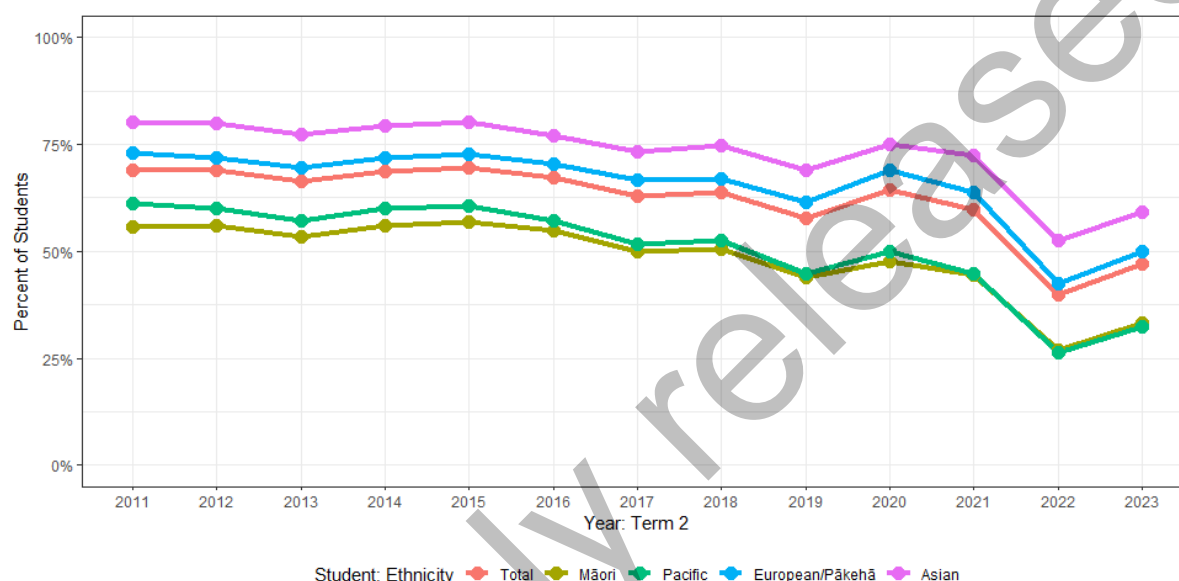
Figure 2: All attendance categories other than regular attendance have decreased in Term 2 2023 compared to Term 2 2022



Māori and Pacific Regular Attendance rates

19. Regular attendance rates for all ethnicities have risen between 2022 and 2023, with rates for European/Pākehā students (7.6 percentage points increase) rising more than the rates for Māori, Pacific and Asian students (6.2, 5.9 and 6.8 percentage points increase respectively).
20. The proportion of ākonga Māori attending regularly was 33.1% and 32.3% of Pacific students met the criteria for regular attendance. These proportions were 59.2% for Asian students and 50.1% for European/Pākehā students.

Figure 3: Regular attendance has increased across all ethnicities in Term 2 2023 compared to Term 2 2022

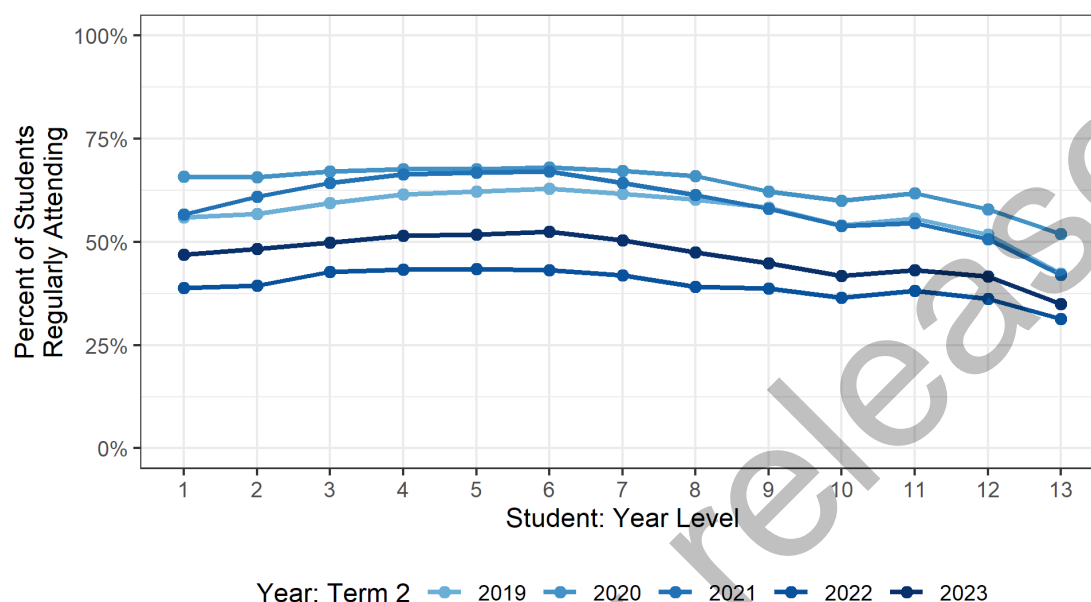


Primary and senior secondary attendance

21. Regular attendance has increased for students of all year levels in 2023. In Term 2 2023, compared with Term 2 2022, primary students had a larger increase in regular attendance rates than secondary students. The percentage of students meeting the criteria for regular attendance tends to decline through the intermediate and secondary years.
22. In 2023, 49.8% of primary students (year levels 1-8) met the criteria for regular attendance compared with 41.7% of secondary students (year levels 9-13), a difference of 8.1 percentage points. This difference is larger than in 2022, when the regular attendance rate of primary students was 41.5% while the rate of secondary students was 36.5%, a difference of 5.0 percentage points.

23. Year 6 students had the largest increase in regular attendance, from 43.2% in 2022 to 52.5% in 2023, an increase of 9.3 percentage points. Year 13 students had the smallest increase, from 31.4% in 2022 to 34.9% in 2023, an increase of 3.5 percentage points.

Figure 4: Regular attendance has increased across all year levels in Term 2 2023 compared to Term 2 2022



Attendance by region

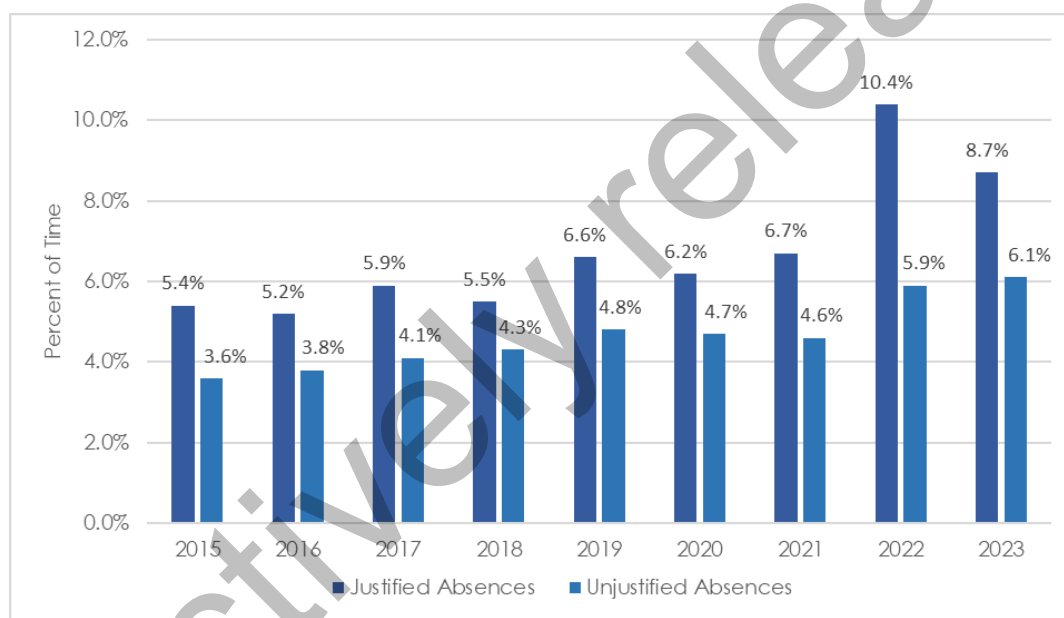
24. There was an overall increase in regular attendance across all education regions between 2022 and 2023. The Otago, Southland region achieved the highest percentage of students attending regularly in Term 2 2023 (49.8%). The Tai Tokerau region had the lowest percentage of students attending regularly (32.8%).
25. The Taranaki, Whanganui, Manawatu region experienced the largest increase in students attending regularly, up 9.3 percentage points from 2022. The Nelson, Marlborough, West Coast region experienced the smallest increase in students attending regularly, an increase of 4.3 percentage points from 2022.

Recorded reasons for absence

26. Analysis of absences is based on the percentage of time (in minutes) reported against absence codes. This allows absences to be reported on the same basis across different class lengths and school types. In the following section “time in term” refers to the total amount of time students were expected to be in class across the term.
27. Students are present for most of the time in the term, 85.1% of the time in Term 2 2023. Of the remaining time 14.8% is recorded as absent or unknown and 0.1% is off-site exam leave for secondary students. Of the time absent, 8.7% of time was for a justified reason: for example, illness or medical reasons or a reason within school policy. Unjustified reasons accounted for the remaining time absent, for example truant or no explanation given or an explained but unjustified reason.
28. Justified absences, including short term illness/medical reasons, decreased between Term 2 2022 and Term 2 2023. Justified absences made up 8.7% of time in Term 2 2023, down from 10.4% in Term 2 2022. This remains higher than Term 2 2019 when justified absences accounted for 6.6% of term time.

29. Absence due to short-term illness or medical reasons was the largest contributor to justified absence (in line with Ministry of Health advice for people to stay home if they are unwell), followed by absences for reasons within the school policy. Illness/medical absences made up 6.9% of all term time in 2023, down from 8.6% in 2022 (1.7 percentage point difference). Absences justified under school policy made up 1.6% of all term time in 2023, down from 1.7% in 2022.
30. Unjustified absences, including truancy/no reason given, explained but not justified under school policy and holidays during term time, increased slightly between Term 2 2022 and Term 2 2023. Unjustified absences made up 6.1% of time in Term 2 2023, up from 5.9% in Term 2 2022. This level is higher than pre-COVID in Term 2, 2019 when unjustified absences accounted for 4.8% of term time.
31. The largest contributor to the rise in unjustified absence is truancy/no reason given. These absences made up 2.5% of all term time in 2023, down from 3.3% in 2022 (0.8 percentage point difference).

Figure 5: Justified absence has decreased in 2023, unjustified absence is similar to 2022



School response to student absence

32. The Term 2 2023 regular attendance includes a new indicator report focused on school responses to student absence.
33. There are three indicators related to school response to student absence in production or in development:
 - i. **Unjustified Student Absence:** The proportion of students who are absent without justification for 5 or more full days in a single term.
 - ii. **School Intervention in unjustified absence:** The proportion of students who are absent without justification for five or more full days in a single term (indicator 2 above) where the school has taken action within 5 school days.
 - iii. **Unexplained Absence:** The proportion of absent time that remains unexplained at the end of the week of term.

34. Results for Unexplained Absence are preliminary while the Ministry continues to build an understanding of school practices in this area. Results for Unjustified Student Absence are final for Term 2 2023. The collection mechanism and providing guidance to schools for School Intervention in unjustified absence are still in development. No results are available for this measure for Term 2 2023.
35. Unexplained Absence: The preliminary data on school response to absence 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.
36. In this initial data, the proportion of unexplained absent time is lower at the beginning of each week (on average 12.1% for Monday) and higher at the end of the week (on average 24.3% on Friday). This is because the data on unexplained absences is extracted at the end of each week and 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.
37. Unjustified Student Absence: 14.5% of enrolled students had 5 or more full days of unjustified absence in Term 2 2023.

Communications Approach

38. These reports may attract significant media attention. A sheet of Questions and Answers accompanies this briefing (refer Annex 1) to help respond to queries should they arise.
39. A contextual document will be released in conjunction with the Term 2 attendance report outlining examples of progress on the Attendance and Engagement Strategy (Annex 2).

Next Steps

40. The Term 2 Attendance Data will be released on Thursday 09 November via the Education Counts website.

Proactive Release

41. We recommend that this Briefing 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.
42. Three briefing notes regarding the development of the additional attendance measures will be proactively released on Thursday 09 November including:
- BN 1303573 Attendance and Engagement Progress update on new measures (unexplained and unjustified absences)
- BN 1301234 AE - Progress update measuring actions response to student absence
- BN 1314679 Attendance and Engagement Strategy - Progress on the implementation of additional measures and the evaluation

Annexes

- Annex 1: Term 2 2023 Attendance Questions and Answers
- Annex 2: Term 2 2023: Lifting School Attendance in Aotearoa New Zealand
- Annex 3: School Response to Absence Indicator Report - Term 2 2023

Proactively released

Annex 1: Term 2 2023 Attendance Questions and Answers

Q: Has regular attendance improved in Term 2 2023?

A: In Term 2 2023 47.0% of students met the criteria for regular attendance. This is an increase of 7.2 percentage points from Term 2 2022. This remains lower than Term 2 2019 (prior to COVID-19) when 57.7% of students were regularly attending.

This is also lower by 12.5 percentage points compared to Term 1 2023, however it is part of the regular pattern from term to term that regular attendance is lower in Term 2 than in Term 1. Term 2 2022 was 6.3 percentage points lower than Term 1 2022.

Q: Why is regular attendance down compared with 2019?

A: The main driver of non-attendance in Term 2 2023 was absences due to short-term illness/medical reasons and the rate of these absences continued to be high compared to 2019.

The time absent due to short-term illness/medical reasons was 6.9% of all Term 2 2023 time, down from 8.6% of all Term 2 time in 2022. This absence remains higher than pre-COVID in Term 2 2019 (5.3% of term time).

The level of illness is associated with the continued incidence of COVID-19 along with the incidence of typical winter illnesses. During Term 2 2023 the government continued to require that people testing positive for COVID-19, including students, self-isolated for 7 days. Students and their parents/whānau continued to follow health advice to stay home when they were unwell.

Q: Can you explain the difference between justified and unjustified absences and how schools record these?

A: Student absences fall into two overall categories: justified absences and unjustified absences.

Reasons for absence that are justified are: short-term illness or medical reasons; absences that are justified within school policy; students who are absent due to being stood down or suspended and students who are with a family member who is on an overseas posting.

Unjustified reasons for absences include: where no information is provided or the explanation is trivial; the reason is explained but not justified within the school's policy; and holidays during term time.

Q: What proportion of the time is justified absence? How much of it is unjustified absence?

A: Justified absences decreased between Term 2 2022 and Term 2 2023. Justified absences made up 8.7% of time in Term 2 2023, down from 10.4% in Term 2 2022. This remains higher than pre-COVID in Term 2 2019 when justified absences accounted for 6.6% of term time.

Absences due to short-term illness/medical reasons were the largest contributor to justified absences.

Unjustified absences increased slightly between Term 2 2022 and Term 2 2023. Unjustified absences made up 6.1% of time in Term 2 2023, up from 5.9% in Term 2 2022. This level is higher than pre-COVID in Term 2, 2019 when unjustified absences accounted for 4.8% of term time.

The biggest contributor to this increase was absence with an explained but unjustified reason. These are absences where the student or their parents have provided a reason to the school but that reason is not within the school policy as a justified absence. For example, under some circumstances visiting relatives may be a justified absence in others it may be unjustified.

Q: Is attendance for Māori and Pacific students still being more strongly impacted by COVID-19?

A: Regular attendance rates **increased** from Term 2 2022 to Term 2 2023 for all ethnicities.

Regular attendance rates for ākonga Māori and Pacific students increased 6.2 and 5.9 percentage points respectively.

The percent of ākonga Māori attending regularly was 33.1% and 32.3% of Pacific students met the criteria for regular attendance.

Q: What is the Ministry doing to improve attendance?

A: The [Attendance and Engagement Strategy](#) describes our plan to address the issue, and it is being put into action by Ministry of Education. 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. In February 2023, the government announced additional investment to further improve attendance rates.

This investment has three main components:

- 82 new attendance officer roles have been established, to support school and kura to develop strategies focused on reducing irregular and moderate absences. A total of 88 full and part time attendance officers are already working in schools around Aotearoa.
- Additional ongoing funding has been provided to all existing Attendance Services to enable them to increase their capacity and ability to support students who are chronically absent or non-enrolled.
- Funding has also been provided to enable the Ministry to establish a Data Improvement project which will work with the sector over three years to :
 - Improve the quality, consistency, understanding and use of our current data
 - Enhancing the suite of attendance measures and reports
 - Deliver a future state for attendance data, information and evidence

Q: What are schools doing to improve attendance?

A: Schools have an increased focus on student attendance, and most are putting initiatives in place to improve this. Feedback from schools strongly suggests that small bespoke interventions, designed and delivered by people close to the students and their communities, are having a positive impact on attendance.

Initiatives such as those funded by the Regional Response Fund are becoming more established and widespread. Evaluations are underway to measure the impact at the national or regional level.

Examples of approaches and initiatives that are making a difference are outlined in the Term 2 2023: Lifting school attendance in Aotearoa New Zealand on the Education Counts websites.

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