



Attendance and Engagement Strategy

JUNE 2022



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Leai ni Pato

Otita Tefono

Summary

The Government has developed a strategy for tackling the decade-long decline in regular attendance and engagement in schools, 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 has three key parts: clear expectations for everyone involved, ambitious targets for attendance levels, and bold actions.

Setting expectations

To increase attendance and engagement we need to focus on ākonga being present, participating and progressing. We all have our roles to play.

Present

- » Parents, caregivers and whānau are responsible for making sure their ākonga¹ are enrolled in school and attend every day.
- » Schools need to set this expectation and communicate to parents, caregivers and whānau² when their ākonga are absent. They also need to know when they have a more serious attendance problem.
- » Te Mahau needs to prioritise attendance and engagement in its work with schools, whānau and communities.
- » Te Mahau needs to bring social services and government agencies together to work with whānau and communities that need help with the wider problems that are barriers to attendance.

¹ In the context of this strategy, ākonga refers to all school students and learners.

² Whānau refers to all parents and wider family of ākonga.

Participating

Schools need to:

- » provide a welcoming environment where ākonga feel safe.
- » provide engaging learning that reflects the identity, language and culture of their ākonga.
- » develop educationally powerful connections with ākonga and whānau and employ teachers who can connect with their ākonga.

Progressing

- » When the above factors are present, ākonga will be attending, participating and progressing in their learning. This will in turn improve their wellbeing and their engagement with school.

Targets

Measure	2024 Target	2026 Target	2015 rates	Current (2021) rates
Percentage of ākonga attending school regularly (attending more than 90%, an average of 9 days a fortnight)	70%	75%	69.5%	59.7%
Percentage of ākonga who are moderately absent (attending more than 70% up to 80%, missing two to three days a fortnight)	6%	4%	6.3%	8.5%
Percentage of ākonga who are chronically absent (attending 70% or less, missing three or more days a fortnight)	5%	3%	4.6%	7.7%
Percentage of unexplained absences where schools have notified whānau on the day of absence and initiated intervention after 5 days of unjustified absence in a term.	95%	100%	This is a draft measure and is subject to further work with the sector. There is currently no mechanism for measuring this activity.	

Actions

Present

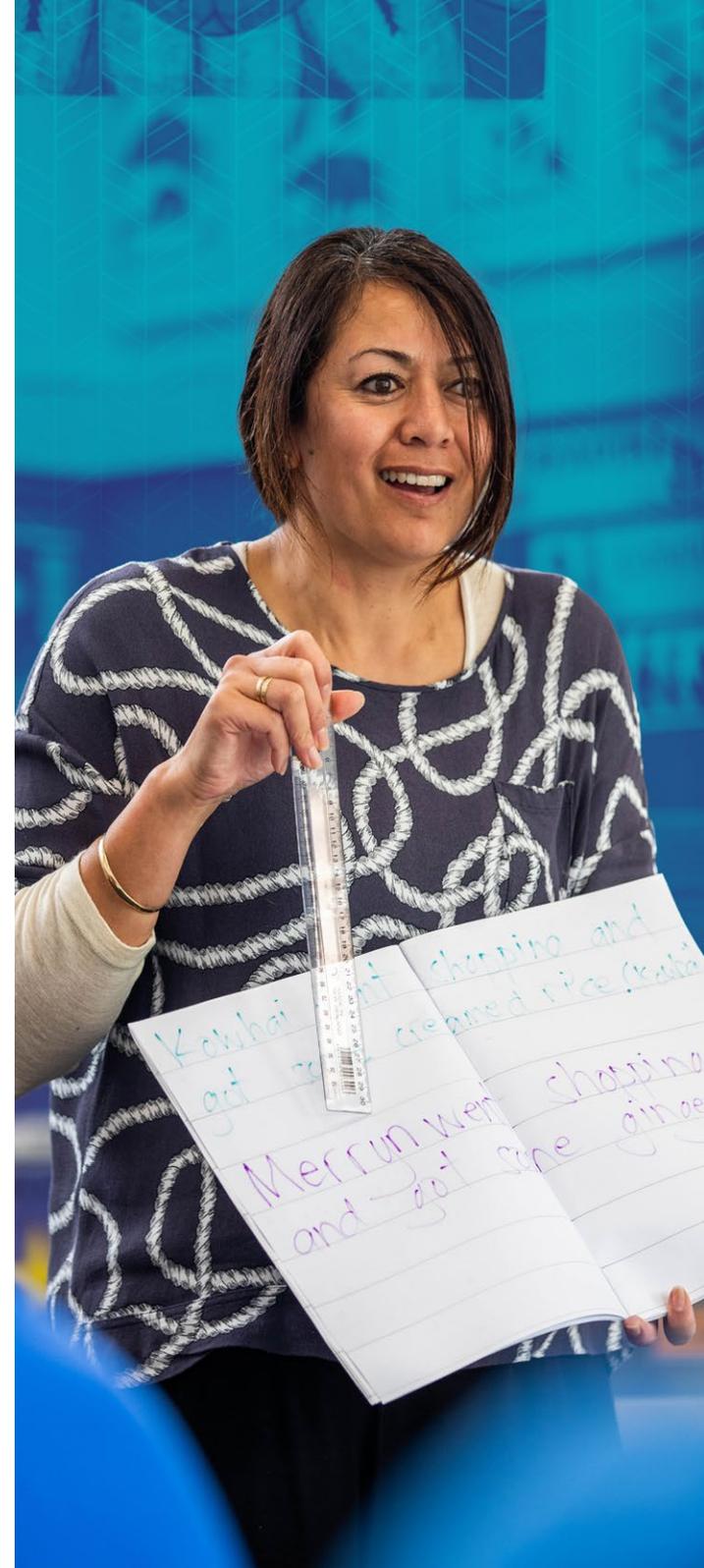
- » Highlight the **responsibility of parents, caregivers and whānau to support ākonga to attend school** and increase ākonga motivation to attend school.
- » Set **clear expectations that schools prioritise attendance**. Support schools to **use their attendance data to identify and respond** to issues.
- » **Review the regulatory settings** for responding to **chronic non-attendance**.
- » Work with **Regional Public Service Leads to take actions** to understand and **raise levels of attendance** and **support the social and economic needs** of ākonga and whānau.
- » **Investigate** options for **frontline roles** to support schools to **intervene early** to improve attendance.
- » Progressively **re-design the Attendance Service** to bring it closer to schools, iwi and whānau.
- » **Develop and share what is working** to address attendance and engagement issues using data, evidence and relationships with the sector.
- » Work to better understand and respond to the barriers to attendance and engagement for **ākonga who come into contact with Oranga Tamariki**.

Participating

- » Provide targeted **support to schools and communities** to promote **re-engagement in learning as we transition out of the COVID-19 Protection Framework**.
- » Progressively **re-design the Alternative Education** service model to **better meet individual needs**.
- » Support **schools to implement the Learning Support Delivery Model**.
- » Support schools to give effect to national policy statements by **giving them tools** to strengthen inclusive practices and connect with whānau and communities, and through frontline **Curriculum Leads** and the development of the **Curriculum Centre**.

Progressing

- » **Strengthen the national curriculum** and its **implementation at the local level** so that all ākonga belong, progress and achieve, including in the foundational skills of literacy, communication, maths, te reo matatini and pāngarau.



Attendance matters

Engaging ākonga in learning has been a long standing and complex challenge in Aotearoa. Attendance is the first step in accessing learning and is essential for educational success, achieving qualifications and attaining wider social and economic outcomes.

There is a well-established relationship between attendance and achievement.³ Research indicates each day of absence from school predicts a similar drop in attainment, however it also tells us that it is never too late to turn attendance around.

Engaging in learning is more than attendance

We know that learning is increasingly happening online or in settings outside of the classroom. We also know that being physically present in a classroom doesn't necessarily mean ākonga are participating and progressing in their learning. We therefore need to think about engagement as a process that includes developing a sense of belonging, participating and achieving that is underpinned by educationally-powerful relationships (see diagram on page 7). In most cases this will still mean some level of physical presence in a place of learning.

Our Vision is that children, young people and their whānau exercise their right to education every day, because every day of learning matters

Context for this strategy

We have been concerned about the long-term trend of low school attendance and disengagement from learning and their impact on achievement for some time. These concerns have been exacerbated by COVID-19. This led the Associate Education Minister (Hon, Jan Tinetti) to commission this strategy, and the Education and Workforce Select Committee to launch an inquiry into school attendance in 2021. This strategy represents the Government's primary response to the Committee's report and recommendations.

This strategy also contributes to the Government's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, the 30 year vision for education and the National Education and Learning Priorities (the NELP).

The NELP guides those who govern schools and kura, to focus their day-to-day work on things that will have a significant positive impact for children and young people. In particular, implementation of the Attendance and Engagement Strategy will support schools and kura to give effect to the first 4 NELP priorities:

1. Ensure places of learning are safe, inclusive and free from racism, discrimination and bullying.
2. Have high aspirations for every learner/ākonga, and support these by partnering with their whānau and communities to design and deliver education that responds to their needs, and sustains their identities, languages and cultures.
3. Reduce barriers to education for all, including for Māori and Pacific learners/ākonga, disabled learners/ākonga and those with learning support needs.
4. Ensure every learner/ākonga gains sound foundation skills, including language, literacy and numeracy.

³ <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/he-whakaaro-what-is-the-relationship-between-attendance-and-attainment>

What we are seeing in attendance rates now

Attendance has been falling

Comparisons with jurisdictions with similar attendance definitions to Aotearoa tell us that our attendance rates are low. They have also fallen significantly since 2015, a trend worsened by the impact of COVID-19.

The drop in attendance has been for everyone: every ethnicity, every decile, every year level, and every region has experienced declines. The largest declines have been seen in primary and intermediate schools (Years 1-8) which have experienced a decline in regular attendance of 14 percentage points since 2015, half of which occurred in 2019, and for Māori and Pacific ākonga, for whom there has been a decline averaging 14 percentage points since 2015.

And a growing number of ākonga are frequently absent from school

A growing number of ākonga are missing 3 or more days of school each fortnight. This is known as being chronically absent. From 2011 to 2015, chronic absence remained relatively stable at between 4 to 5 percent. In Term 2 2019, 7.3 percent of ākonga were recorded as chronically absent. Another 9.4 percent of ākonga were missing at least one day a week.⁴

The drivers of low attendance and disengagement are complex and many sit outside the education system

There is a complex range of societal and within-school factors that act as barriers to engagement and achievement.

We heard about these factors through Kōrero Mātauranga | Education Conversations where over 48,000 New Zealanders told us about their experiences in learning and through submissions to the Education and Workforce Select Committee's inquiry into school attendance. We have been in on-going conversations with the sector about the factors that influence school absences and disengagement and how we can best respond.

Some factors lie within the education system such as school culture and inclusiveness, having locally responsive curriculum, supporting wellbeing and mental health, and having strong relationships with ākonga, whānau, iwi, hapū and community.

External influences include broader societal issues such as housing affordability and security, family violence and poverty. These are not issues that the education sector can tackle alone. This requires a collective effort at a local level to connect whānau and ākonga with the supports they need to address out-of-school factors.

The engagement process (Fig. 1) will look different for each ākonga. For example, for some belonging will come first, for others it may be a sense of a lack of progress and achievement that leads to disengagement and low attendance. It is also contextual, ākonga may be achieving in one class or subject and not participating in others.

⁴ These figures include all absences including illness.

Societal and whānau factors that impact on engagement

Capability:

- Poor health (mental and/or physical)
- Foundational skills

Opportunity:

- Material deprivation
- Lack of transport
- Lack of affordable and stable housing

Motivation:

- Experiences of racism and discrimination
- Intergenerational experiences of school
- Value and priority that whānau place on education
- Peer influence

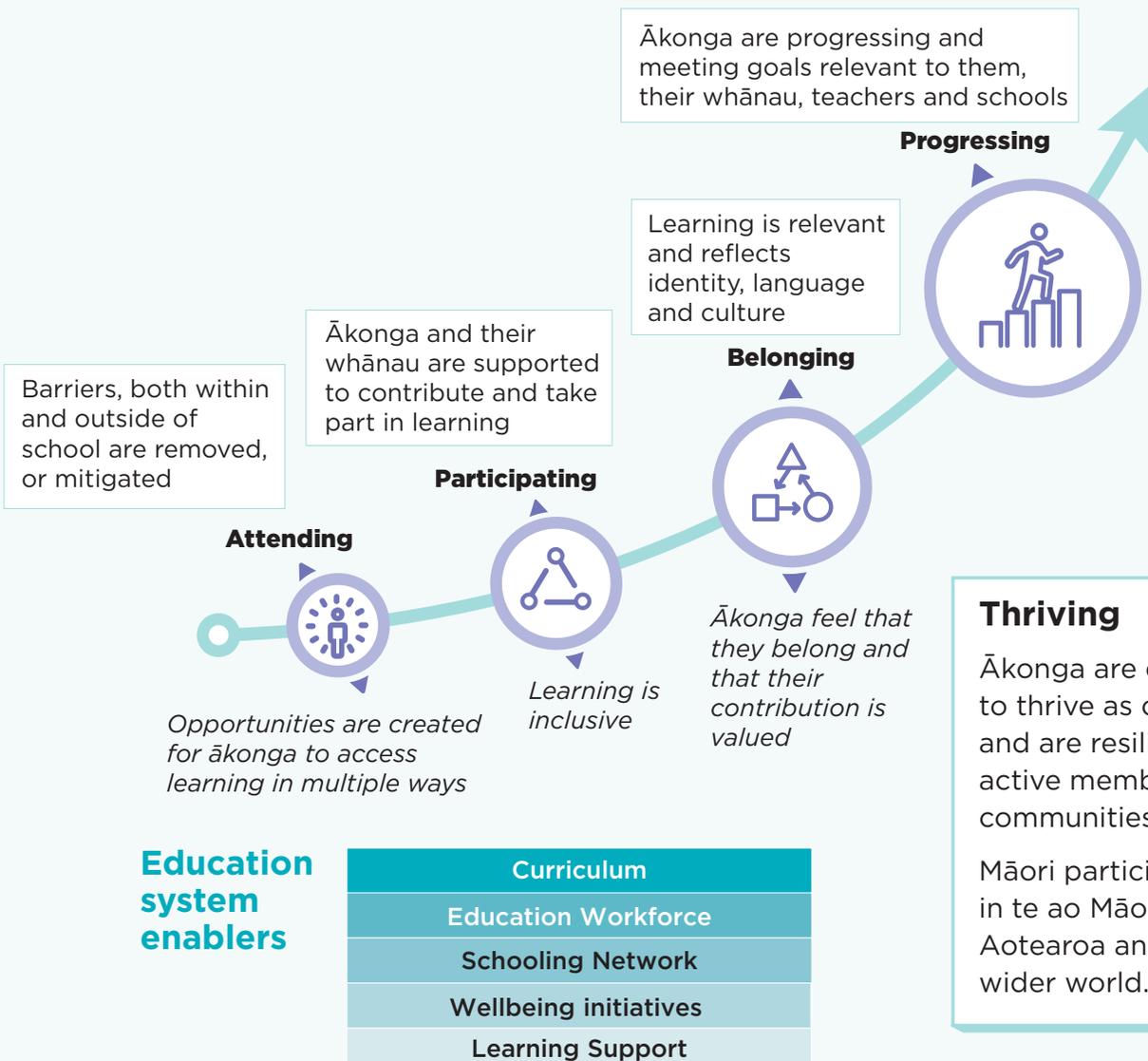


Fig 1: The engagement process

We need to set clear expectations

Learning is essential to our collective wellbeing. It sustains and grows the knowledge, skills and capabilities of ākonga, whānau and communities to look after each other, and to look after our environment, our cultures, our society, and our economy for future generations.

To increase attendance and engagement we need to focus on ākonga being present, participating and progressing. We all have our roles to play.

Present

- » Parents, caregivers and whānau are responsible for making sure their ākonga are enrolled in school and attend school every day.
- » Schools need to set this expectation and communicate to parents, caregivers and whānau when their ākonga are absent. They also need to know when they have a more serious attendance problem.
- » Te Mahau needs to prioritise attendance and engagement in its work with schools, whānau and communities.
- » Te Mahau needs to bring social services and government agencies together to work with whānau and communities that need help with the wider problems that are barriers to attendance.

Participating

Schools need to:

- » provide a welcoming environment where ākonga feel safe.
- » provide an engaging curriculum that reflects the identity, language and culture of their ākonga.
- » develop educationally powerful connections with whānau and employ teachers who can connect with their ākonga.

Progressing

- » When these factors are present, ākonga will be attending, participating and progressing in their learning. This will in turn improve their wellbeing and their engagement with school.

And support schools to deliver on these expectations

Key to this approach is the establishment of Te Mahau, a separately branded business unit within the redesigned Ministry of Education. Te Mahau will work closely with the sector, giving priority to local and regional voices and improving information and feedback loops. The role of Te Mahau is to grow capability and confidence in relation to curriculum, leadership, culture and relationships with communities.



We need to improve engagement for Māori and Pacific ākonga

We know that Māori and Pacific ākonga are disproportionately impacted by factors that disrupt engagement with learning.

Māori and Pacific ākonga are more likely to experience bullying, marginalisation and discrimination in our schools. To support engagement, they need access to learning that reflects their experiences, local context, culture, language and identity, and a culturally competent teaching workforce that reflects them.

We also know that the practice of streaming ākonga into classes based on perceived ability impacts Māori and Pacific ākonga to greater levels than for others, can affect their engagement and places limits on their achievement.

Ka Hikitia|Ka Hāpaitia and our Action Plan for Pacific Education set out the shifts we need to make to address these barriers and support Māori and Pacific ākonga to achieve excellent education outcomes. Our strategy for improving attendance and engagement requires a deliberate approach to actions at the school, community, region and national level with more reciprocity, partnering and co-design with Māori whānau, hapū, and iwi and with Pacific families and diverse Pacific communities.

And provide learning support where it is needed

Ākonga with unmet learning support needs are more likely to have low attendance and engagement in education. The Government's priorities for strengthening learning support are set out in the Learning Support Action Plan 2019-2025. These include strengthening early identification of learning support needs, providing flexible supports and services for neurodiverse ākonga, and improving education for ākonga at risk of dis-engagement.

We have identified a number of priority actions

Thirteen priority actions have been identified to give effect to the strategy. The table on page ten shows how these actions relate to the strategy goals and expectations. Further detail of each of these actions is in **Appendix One**.

Te Mahau will develop a more detailed action plan to set out how these actions will be delivered across these focus areas:

Empowering ākonga and their whānau to engage in education

Strengthening school and kura engagement practice

Strengthening system enablers and supports for engagement

Strengthening cross-government collaboration to address barriers to engagement

Te Mahau will target its support to those schools facing the greatest attendance challenges.

These priorities are intended to provide a flexible framework for national action and locally led initiatives.

They will be reviewed regularly so that we apply the lessons from actions taken, share best practice and continue to focus our efforts on what makes the most difference.

Ākongā are	Expectations	Actions
Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Parents, caregivers and whānau are responsible for making sure their ākongā are enrolled in school and attend school every day. » Schools need to set this expectation and communicate to parents, caregivers and whānau when their ākongā are absent. They also need to know when they have a more serious attendance problem. » Te Mahau needs to prioritise attendance and engagement in its work with schools, whānau and communities. » Te Mahau needs to bring social services and government agencies together to work with whānau and communities that need help with the wider problems that are barriers to attendance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Highlight the responsibility of parents, caregivers and whānau to support ākongā to attend school and increase ākongā motivation to attend school. » Set clear expectations that schools prioritise attendance. Support schools to use their attendance data to identify and respond to issues. » Review the regulatory settings for responding to chronic non-attendance. » Work with Regional Public Service Leads to take actions to understand and raise levels of attendance and support the social and economic needs of ākongā and whānau. » Investigate options for frontline roles to support schools to intervene early to improve attendance. » Progressively re-design the Attendance Service to bring it closer to schools, iwi and whānau. » Develop and share what is working to address attendance and engagement issues using data, evidence and relationships with the sector. » Work to better understand and respond to the barriers to attendance and engagement for ākongā who come into contact with Oranga Tamariki.
Participating	<p>Schools need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » provide a welcoming environment where ākongā feel safe. » provide an engaging curriculum that reflects the identity, language and culture of their ākongā. » develop educationally powerful connections with whānau and employ teachers who can connect with their ākongā. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provide targeted support to schools and communities to promote re-engagement in learning as we transition out of the COVID-19 Protection Framework. » Progressively re-design the Alternative Education service model to better meet individual needs. » Support schools to implement the Learning Support Delivery Model. » Support schools to give effect to national policy statements by giving them tools to strengthen inclusive practices, connect with whānau and communities and through frontline Curriculum Leads and the development of the Curriculum centre.
Progressing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » When these factors are present, ākongā will be attending, participating and progressing in their learning. This will in turn improve their wellbeing and their engagement with school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strengthen the national curriculum and its implementation at the local level so that all ākongā belong, progress and achieve, including in the foundational skills of literacy, communication, maths, te reo matatini and pāngarau.

We need to measure our success

We will develop a monitoring plan that will include work to identify indicators across the engagement process relating to attendance, belonging, participating and achieving as outlined below.

Attendance

To provide focus in this area, we have identified targets for regular attendance and chronic and moderate absence.

Measure	2024 Target ⁵	2026 Target	2015 rates	Current (2021) rates
Percentage of ākonga attending school regularly (attending more than 90%, an average of 9 days a fortnight)	70%	75%	69.5%	59.7%
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Percentage of unexplained absences where schools have notified whānau on the day of absence and initiated intervention after 5 days of unjustified absence in a term.	95%	100%	This is a draft measure and is subject to further work with the sector. There is currently no mechanism for measuring this activity.	

We have also developed a draft measure around the actions taken by schools. This measure will need additional work with the sector before being finalised.

These are ambitious targets that will require considerable effort from all those with a role in improving attendance (parents, caregivers and whānau, ākonga, schools, wider social services, communities, the Ministry and government social sector agencies).

Achievement of the 2024 targets would return regular attendance to just above a level last seen in 2015 (69.5 percent), while a target of 75 percent exceeds the level of regular attendance in any year since 2011 by more than 5 percentage points.

The 2024 targets for chronic and moderate absence are also based on the rates seen in 2015, a point where attendance was relatively stable. The 2026 targets are sufficiently challenging to reflect the magnitude of this longstanding problem.

In developing the approach to reporting on these targets, we will recognise that current levels of attendance vary between different school types, deciles, and regions. A target of 70 percent regular attendance may be a significant challenge for some schools and already be exceeded in others.

We will also report these targets separately for Māori and Pacific ākonga, English and Māori medium and by region so that a national target does not mask areas where we may not be performing well.

It is important that we have targets that support our expectations. That is why we are including a target for schools' first-level response to an unexplained absence. This holds schools to account for their role in setting the expectation that parents, caregivers and whānau send their ākonga to school every day and reinforces that expectation to parents, caregivers and whānau.

⁵ Attendance targets will be measured using Term 2 data.

Participation and Belonging

There are currently no measures available that are specifically designed to measure engagement in learning.

We will draw on work being done across the Ministry of Education to better understand the experience of ākonga in learning. Over time we will identify a range of indicators of participation and belonging.

We will use the Ministry of Social Development's **What about me?** survey, and the three-yearly **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)** to provide measures on participation and belonging. The Ministry of Education's work with the sector to develop a set of **wellbeing measures** will provide additional measures from 2024 and some contextual data and information on wellbeing ahead of this.

The Ministry of Education has work underway to develop Student Wellbeing Measures that are meaningful and of value to ākonga and their whānau. A digital tool that will be used to record their wellbeing information is being co-designed with ākonga. This will provide rich information that can be used to measure the impact of school and national level initiatives aimed at improving wellbeing.

These measures will provide additional insights to complement the measures of regular attendance and will support continued improvement in educational engagement across the schooling system.

Progress and Achievement

A range of information is used to understand progress and achievement across English medium pathways, including several international studies, the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA), NCEA, and insights from assessment tools such as e-asTTle. Comparable information is not available for te reo Māori education pathways beyond NCEA. 'Hei Raukura Mō Te Mokopuna' (the strategy for te reo matatini and pāngarau) provides an opportunity to develop national monitoring systems, studies and measures that are authentic for understanding progress and achievement in te reo Māori education pathways.

As our attendance and engagement indicators track upwards, we expect to see positive trends in progress and achievement, including improvements in equity, across these information sources.

Ongoing Monitoring and Improvement

The Ministry will use its data and insights to monitor the delivery of the Strategy and to identify the best use of resources at a Ministry, community and school level. These insights will help shape future action and ensure that effort is focused on the groups of ākonga that experience significant barriers to engaging in learning, and on things that make the most difference. For example, schools provide the Ministry a continuous feed of attendance information for their ākonga that can be used to understand patterns at different levels of attendance and what support may be needed to increase attendance and engagement.

Actions across the Education Workplan also support attendance and engagement

Engagement in learning is also supported by a range of initiatives across the Education Workplan, examples of these include⁶:

Making places of learning safe and inclusive

through the Positive Behaviours for Learning programme, Bullying Free work programme, Reviewing the guidelines for standdowns, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions, supporting Tokona Te Raki's work to end streaming, Talanoa Ako delivery and resources, and implementing Te Hurihanganui.

Supporting ākonga wellbeing

through Ka Ora Ka Ako | healthy lunches in schools, Ikura | Manaakitia te whare tangata - free period products in schools, Mental health education and hauora resources, counselling and guidance staff in secondary schools, Counselling in Schools programme (primary schools) and guidelines for the delivery of mental health education.

Supporting teachers

through revised standards for the teaching profession | Ngā Parewa, capability supports including Professional Learning and Development, guidance and services for supporting diverse ākonga and those with additional learning needs and Māori and Pacific ākonga.

⁶ This is not an exhaustive list.

Appendix One: Description of priority actions

Present

*Highlight the **responsibility of parents, caregivers and whānau to support ākongā to attend school** and increase ākongā motivation to attend school.*

Te Mahau will develop a public awareness campaign that highlights the responsibility of parents, caregivers and whānau to support ākongā to attend school. The campaign will be underpinned by targeted communications at local, regional and national levels.

*Set **clear expectations that schools prioritise attendance**. Support schools to use **their attendance data to identify and respond to issues**.*

Te Mahau will prioritise attendance as part of regular engagement with schools and kura and will provide support for analysing and interpreting attendance data.

*Review the **regulatory settings for responding to chronic non-attendance***

The Ministry will consider whether we have the right tools to support a graduated response to non-attendance that incentivises whānau and caregivers to meet their responsibilities as set out in the Education and Training Act 2020.

*Work with **Regional Public Service Leads to take actions to understand and raise the levels of attendance and support the social and economic needs of ākongā and whānau**.*

Regional Public Service Leads will play a key role in highlighting the importance of attendance and engagement in their communities. They will coordinate government agencies and social services to meet the social and economic needs of ākongā and whānau.

*Investigate **options for frontline roles within Te Mahau to support schools to intervene early to improve attendance**.*

This work will consider whether additional roles (for example, attendance officers) are required to support schools to focus on attendance.

*Progressively **re-design the Attendance Service to bring it closer to schools, iwi and whānau**.*

The first phase of the redesign determined how the Service is being delivered in 2022. The second phase will consider how the Service will be delivered in the longer term. It will take into consideration learning from the first phase, the recommendations from the Inquiry into School Attendance, and the evaluation of the trials in South Auckland and Kawerau. It will be completed in December 2022, and changes will commence from January 2023.

*Develop and share **what is working to address engagement issues using data, evidence and relationships with the sector**.*

Te Mahau staff in collaboration with schools, iwi, diverse Pacific communities, and other agencies will work to improve feedback and learning loops that capture actions and priorities that respond to the local and regional context and circumstances. Local planning will be supported by national structures and frameworks, including the development of an insights, monitoring, and performance framework.

*Work to better understand and respond to the barriers to attendance and engagement for **ākongā who come into contact with Oranga Tamariki**.*

The Ministry of Education will work with Oranga Tamariki to identify and provide the data and information schools need to better support this group of ākongā.

Participating

Providing targeted support to schools and communities to promote re-engagement in learning as we transition out of the COVID-19 Protection Framework.

A Regional Response Fund of \$40 million over four years is being established through Budget 2022 to meet local education needs, with a strong initial focus on ensuring ākonga are going to school and are engaged in their learning. The funding will be allocated at a local level and can be used to support whānau-led responses to break the cycle of disengagement, or brokering services with other agencies to ensure ākonga have the level of support they need to stay in school.

Progressively re-design the Alternative Education service model to better meet individual needs.

This work focuses on a transformational change in the way schools work with ākonga whose behaviour challenges others, or who face barriers to attending and participating in school. It aims to bring supports closer to the point at which ākonga first show signs of disengagement. This would be supported by a new model of intensive provision, positioned as a flexible pathway option rather than an end point, with stronger connections between schools and alternative provision. Changes will be undertaken incrementally, leveraging opportunities such as the upcoming re-contracting for Alternative Education. Policy work on provision for younger cohorts will be undertaken later this year, following receipt of the evaluation of the Te Tupu Managed Moves pilot.

Support schools to implement the Learning Support Delivery Model.

The Learning Support Delivery Model (LSDM) organises learning support around what best meets the needs of all ākonga within their local community. Te Mahau has a facilitation function helping schools and kura to access support from the Ministry, other service providers, community organisations, and other agencies.

Reviewing support for ākonga with the highest level of learning support needs will ensure that these ākonga receive the right support when they need it, for as long as they need it to achieve their full potential through positive education outcomes. Public engagement concluded in April 2022 and advice on options and solutions will be provided in October 2022.

Support schools and kura to give effect to the national education policy statements.

Te Mahau staff in the Ministry's local offices actively engage with schools and kura to incorporate the NELP, Ka Hikitia, and the Action Plan for Pacific Education (APPE) into their plans and practice over time. This will include the introduction of a new strategic planning and reporting framework in 2023 which will require school boards and kura to have particular regard to the NELP when developing their strategic plans. The actions they take will be focused and guided by Ka Hikitia|Ka Hāpaitia and the APPE.

Progressing

Strengthening the national curriculum and its local implementation so that all ākonga belong, progress and achieve, including in the foundational skills of literacy, communication, maths, te reo matatini and pāngarau.

A five-year programme to refresh The New Zealand Curriculum and redesign Te Marautanga o Aotearoa is underway, aimed at ensuring all ākonga experience rich and responsive learning. Changes to the national curriculum have begun with the introduction of Aotearoa New Zealand Histories and Te Takanga o Te Wā as part of strengthening social cohesion and collective wellbeing, and release of the Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy and Hei Raukura Mō te Mokopuna (the strategy for te reo matatini and pāngarau).

We **shape** an **education** system that delivers
equitable and **excellent outcomes**

He mea **tārai** e mātou te **mātauranga**
kia **rangatira** ai, kia **mana taurite** ai ōna **huanga**