



Briefing Note: School disengagement due to COVID

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	7 October 2020	Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1242908
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	N/A	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

- **Note** that students do not appear to be leaving school early for employment, but that COVID has created barriers for some students attending school, particularly for Māori and Pacific students in Auckland.
- **Agree** that this Briefing will be proactively released.

☒ **Agree** ☐ **Disagree**

Summary

- In the 3 September 2020 EWU, we updated you on the impacts that COVID was having on students leaving school. This briefing provides an updated view on impacts after the Auckland lockdown, and describes data on student attendance after the national and Auckland lockdowns.
- Students do not appear to be leaving secondary school in order to work full time. The rates of young people who are employed has decreased since the start of the pandemic, and there are far fewer students who have been reported as unenrolling from schools.
- While attendance has increased for most students in 2020 compared to 2019, there is a sizeable group for whom COVID appears to have created additional barriers to attendance. This group is disproportionately made up of Māori and Pacific students, and students of low decile schools in Auckland.

- Of particular concern is a group of students in Auckland who did not return to school at all in the first two weeks after the end of the recent Auckland Alert Level 3. These students are largely primary school aged, and the reasons for absence are 'explained but unjustified', which is in contrast to truancy previously being the major reason for chronic absences.
- The Caring for Communities (C4C) group of Chief Executives are meeting this week to discuss this issue and coordinate responses across the social sector.



Alex Brunt
Acting Deputy Secretary
Evidence, Data and Knowledge

7/10/2020

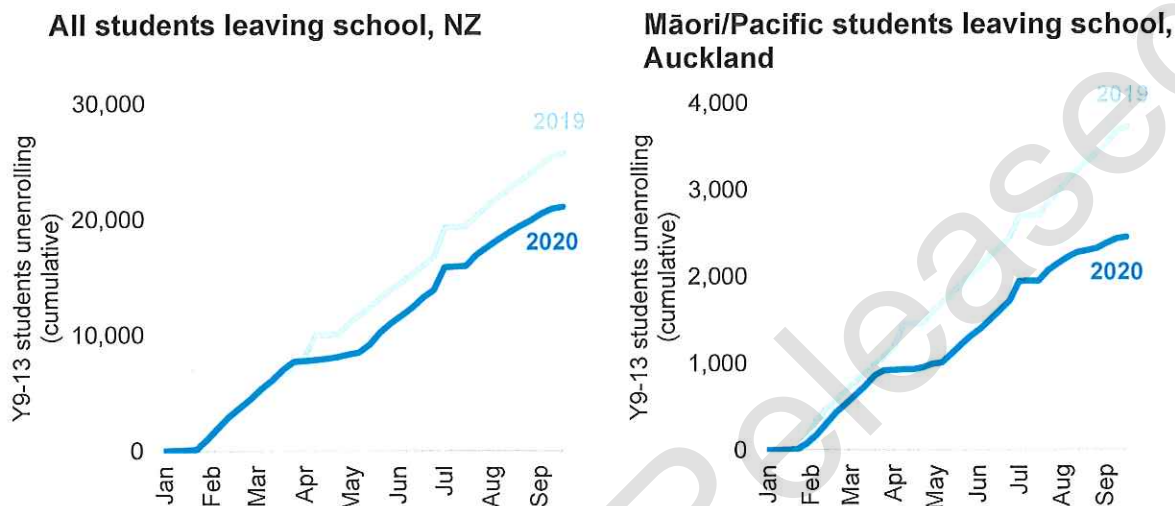


Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

15/10/20

Students are not leaving school early to work full time

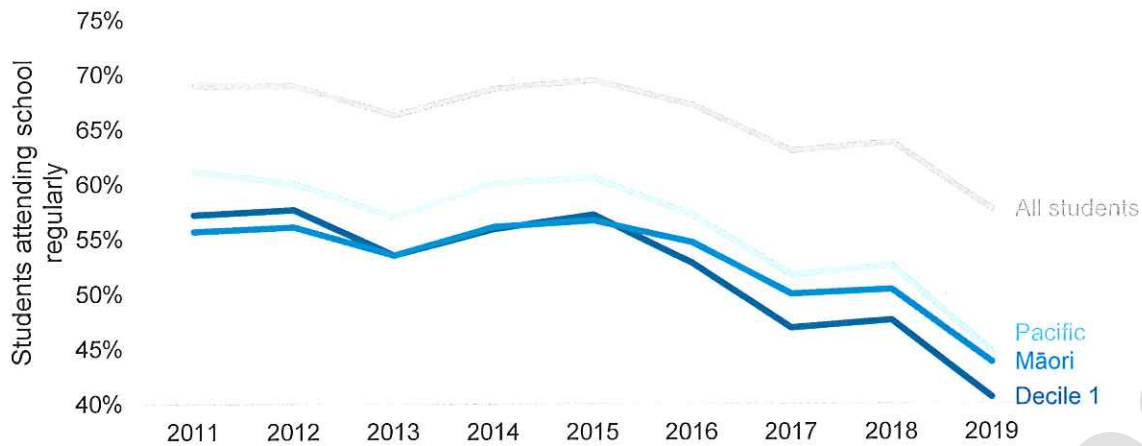
1. Students leaving school is not a widespread problem – far fewer are leaving in 2020 than ever before. According to school enrolment data, far fewer secondary students are leaving school over 2020 – an 18% decrease from the same period in 2019.
2. Māori and Pacific students in Auckland have particularly changed behaviour, with 34% fewer school leavers so far this year compared to the same period in 2019. Further, the number of 16 to 18 year olds with reported earnings has also reduced from 42% in April to June 2019, to 38% for the same period in 2020.



3. Schools can unenrol students aged 16+ at any time if they are satisfied the student has left and does not intend to return. Enrolment information entered by schools into their school management systems flows through to the data the Ministry has access to, so students will only be missing from this data if their leaving record has not yet been entered into their school's system. The most recent analysis of school enrolment data (up to 6 October 2020) captures data for the four weeks after the end of the Auckland lockdown, and for the five months after the end of the national lockdown in May.
4. We do, however, hear reports that some students have impaired engagement due to employment (e.g., working night shifts and arriving at school tired and stressed), or with a small (but important) group of students having to make difficult choices. Administrative education data cannot currently rule out changes in Auckland secondary school students being employed but remaining enrolled in school after the Auckland lockdown.

Non-attendance at school harms student achievement and reduces equity

5. Absences from school predict meaningful reductions in student learning outcomes. We know that student attendance has been a barrier to learning and wellbeing for some time. The proportion of students attending school regularly decreased from 70% in 2015 to 58% in 2019.

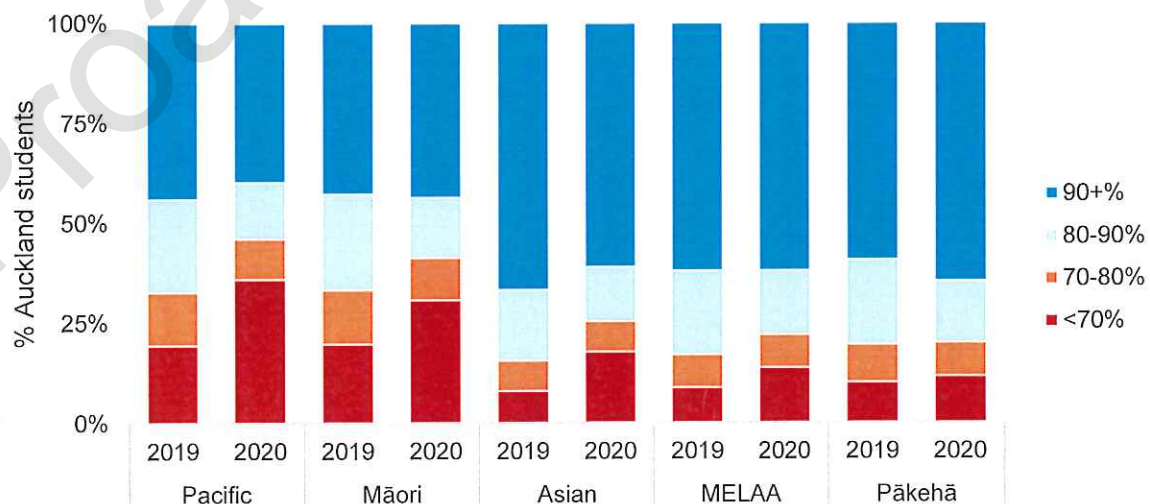


6. Previous Ministry research indicates that non-attendance has a greater impact on the achievement of students at low decile schools. Prior to the COVID pandemic, attendance rates have also been consistently lower for Māori students, Pacific students, and in low decile schools.

COVID appears to be deepening existing inequities, particularly for Māori and Pacific students

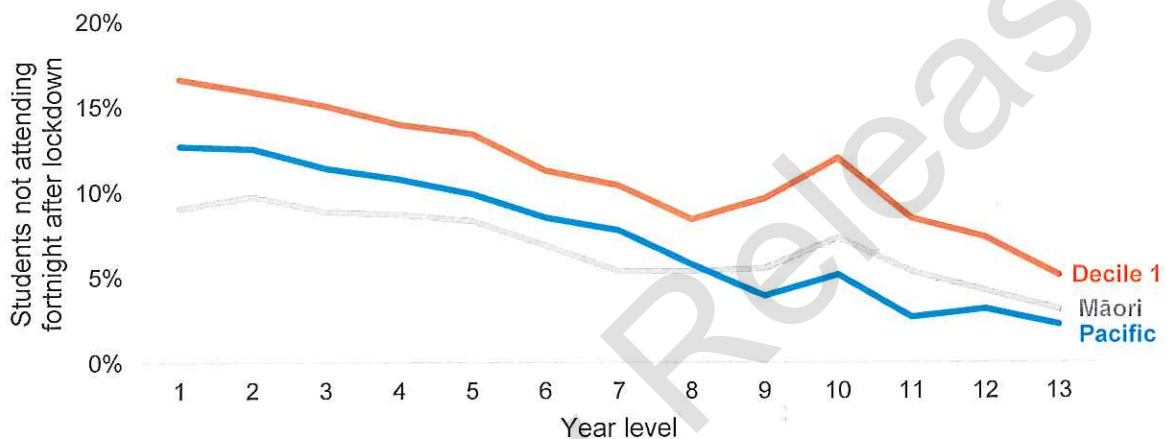
7. COVID appears to be widening these already existing gaps in student attendance. Over Term 2 in 2020, average attendance across all students has been substantially higher than any previous year since 2016. However, bucking this trend, attendance for Māori students, Pacific students, students in Māori medium education, and students in low socio-economic schools has been down compared to the already low levels in 2019.
8. Non-attendance for students in Auckland after the recent regional lockdown is a particular concern. There has been an extremely large increase in the number of students who were absent for at least three days out of the fortnight following the change from Alert Level 3. This increase represents approximately 4,000 Māori students and 10,000 Pacific students. There was a similar pattern across socio-economic background, with decile 1 and 2 schools continuing to experience much lower attendance than last year.

Student attendance over the two weeks after Auckland lockdown

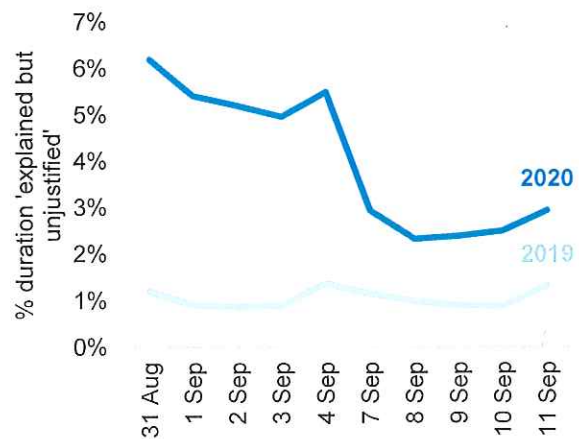
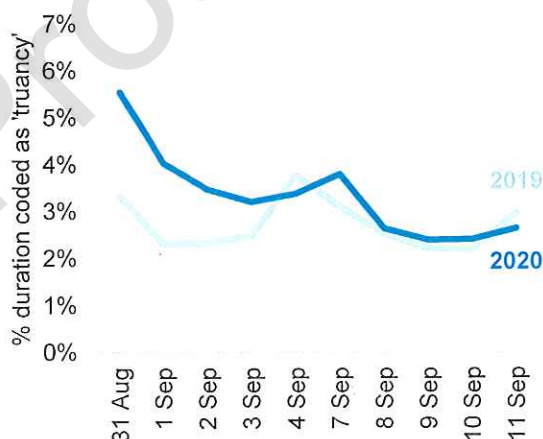


9. The rate of students with no attendance at any point over the two weeks following the Auckland lockdown was highest for primary year levels. This is a major change from previous years, where students with no or very low attendance were predominantly secondary school aged.
10. Approximately 17% of decile 1 students in Year 1 had no attendance over this period, compared to 1% of decile 10 students in Year 1. Pacific and Māori students in primary year levels similarly had high rates of students with no attendance.
11. While data has not been analysed at a sufficiently granular level to evidence conclusions in terms of Ethnic communities, it appears that some Ethnic communities are also impacted by the same attendance issues as Pacific, Māori and students.

Rates of Auckland students not attending school at all in the two weeks after Auckland lockdown



12. The reasons for absence also appear to have shifted in the two weeks following the Auckland lockdown. In previous years, the most common reasons for absence were absence due to illness (a 'justified' absence) and truancy (an 'unjustified' absence). Rates of justified absences (including for illness) for Auckland students are essentially unchanged in the first two weeks of physical learning after lockdown, compared to previous years. Increases in unjustified absences account for the majority of the difference between 2020 and 2019 attendance.
13. However, truancies do not appear to be driving this difference – rates of truancy among Auckland students returned to previous levels within four days after lockdown. The largest difference from last year is an increase in 'explained but unjustified' absences (see below graphs).



The Caring for Communities (C4C) group are discussing actions to support attendance and wellbeing

14. A version of this advice was developed for the Caring for Communities (C4C) Chief Executives' Group, to help inform cross-agency work to address long-standing issues of student attendance and disengagement from education.
15. This group are meeting this week to discuss this evidence and coordinate action across the social sector in response to these issues of disengagement.

Proactive Release

16. 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.

Proactively Released