

Attendance Service – Detailed Service Description (Referred to as Appendix 12 in contracts)

The Ministry of Education is committed to lifting achievement for all learners, particularly Māori and Pasifika learners who are currently underserved by the education system. Learners must be present at school so they can participate and engage in learning. The vision of the Attendance Service is for every learner to be attending school every day.

The Attendance Service is a national service. The Ministry contracts providers to deliver the service throughout New Zealand. Six Social Sector Trials also deliver the Attendance Service in their trial area. The Attendance Service primarily works with students aged from six up to 16 years old. The Attendance Service may also work with any child who is enrolled but has not been attending school.

The Education Act 1989 provides that every person between the ages of 6 and 16 who is not an international student must be enrolled in, and attend, a registered school every day that the school is open, and that every school board shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that the students on their roll attend as required. Schools are responsible for working with students who are occasionally not attending school. The Attendance Service supports schools to manage attendance. The Attendance Service works with referrals from schools within its catchment region for students who are persistently not attending (unjustified absence) or not enrolled in a school. Schools need to be registered Attendance Service Application (ASA) users to make a referral to an Attendance Service.

The aim of the Attendance Service is to achieve a sustainable return to school for students who are persistently not attending. A student who is unjustifiably absent from school can be referred to the Attendance Service for a variety of reasons. For example, when they have been absent for more than three consecutive days without a justifiable reason, intermittently absent (e.g. are regularly absent on particular days of the week), or regularly absent at certain times of the day. A student who is not enrolled can be referred to the Attendance Service after they have been absent from school for more than 20 consecutive days. Schools may also submit an immediate referral (i.e. before 20 days) to the Attendance Service for students who they are withdrawing on ENROL; this is particularly important for students who are known to be 'at risk'.

Providers work with students and their families to address the root causes of non-attendance, which are often complex. Many of the students being referred to the service have already received interventions from other community and government services. They may live in rural communities where services are limited and are difficult to get to. The Attendance Service looks at all factors contributing to a student's unjustifiable absence or non-enrolment and identifies what school, family/whānau, Iwi, community and government support is required to sustain attendance or transition the student to another legal learning environment. Each Attendance Service tailors its approach based on local knowledge of what works in its community. Referrals are made to Iwi and other community and government services to address issues that have been identified for a student. Community support is critical to the success of the Attendance Service.

Attendance Service providers use ASA to receive referrals from schools and as a case management tool. Data collected through ASA enables key statistics to be drawn about the progress of individual students, provider performance, and how well the Attendance Services is working as a national service.

The following six factors need to be well-developed and operate in synergy with each other to support the operation of a successful Attendance Service:

- strong leadership and vision
- support from the Ministry of Education
- systems and processes
- skills, knowledge and capability of the Attendance Advisor/Kaiawahina
- engagement and relationships with ○ the learner ○ schools ○ family and whānau
- partnerships and networks with local community groups and government agencies.

Attendance Service Providers must collaborate with schools, community groups, Iwi and other local government agencies that have a stake in attendance and engagement to achieve a sustainable return to school for students. This will occur through active and regular participation in interagency groups such as ROCK ON, Youth Offending Teams and Strengthening Families Local Management Groups. Attendance Service Providers may also establish their own interagency group. Individual cases are often discussed at these groups and Providers should use this forum to review the plans of non-enrolled cases that have been open longer than six months. Members of these interagency groups usually include school principals (or their delegate), CYF, Police, Iwi, Pasifika community representatives, SWiS, Education Officers in the Youth Court, community groups and Ministry of Education regional advisors. Depending on their catchment region and any subcontractors they employ, each Attendance Service is likely to be a member of more than one local interagency group.

An Attendance Service Provider may also establish a strategic Advisory Group to provide strategic oversight of the service. At the least, Attendance Service Providers must ask representatives from schools, community groups, Iwi and local government agencies that have a stake in attendance and engagement, and their Ministry of Education regional relationship manager, to provide strategic oversight of the service as part of the development of their annual business plan. Providers may find it useful to review their business plan with their stakeholders on a quarterly basis.

Key focus areas for the Attendance Service are:

1. Meeting the needs of Māori and Pasifika learners and their families. Attendance Service providers must be culturally responsive in their practice.
2. Responding to referrals from schools, locating and engaging the learner back into learning, working with the student and their family and whānau to identify the root causes for their absence.
3. Proactive initiatives to address the identified underlying root causes of unjustified absence. Working in collaboration with schools, social service agencies, community stakeholders and Iwi. Using the Advisory Group to identify and undertake proactive, collaborative initiatives.
4. Early intervention. Working proactively with primary school aged children who are persistently not attending school and addressing the underlying causes of their nonattendance at school with their parents, family, whānau and community. Longer term, this should reduce the number of older students who have entrenched patterns of absence from school.