

# Attendance, Absence, and Truancy in New Zealand Schools in 2006

Participating in education is fundamental to student achievement. The Education Act 1989 requires that parents enrol their children at school and ensure they attend school whenever it is open for instruction unless there is a good reason for them to be absent.

Every day a student is not at school is a day they are not learning. Over time, patterns of non-attendance can place students at risk of poor achievement and early drop-out, thus compromising their later outcomes in life across a range of social and economic measures.

The Ministry of Education continues to actively promote student engagement in education through a multi-year programme of work called the Student Engagement Initiative, which aims to decrease suspensions, exclusions and early-leaving rates and to increase school attendance. A survey on attendance, absence, and truancy, carried out every two years, aims to further inform the Ministry's work to improve student engagement in education.

## Research Aims and Methodology

The 2006 survey on attendance, absences, and truancy gathered data on student attendance during the week of 21-25 August 2006. The research aimed to investigate the relationship between absence and truancy, and school (e.g. region, decile) and student (e.g. gender, ethnicity, year level of the student) factors.

All state and state integrated primary, intermediate, secondary, and composite schools (a total of 2,426 schools) were invited to take part in the survey. Schools were asked to record information on individual absence events occurring during the week of the survey. The types

of absences included justified absences (JA), unjustified absences (UA), and intermittent unjustified absences (IUA) (see definitions below). Truancy is the sum of unjustified absences and intermittent unjustified absences (UA+IUA). Overall absence rate is the sum of the three absence types (JA+UA+IUA). For each student, the day and type of absence, and the year level, gender and ethnicity of the absent student were captured.

The rate for each absence type is calculated based on the total school rolls for the participating schools and relate to an average (mean) daily absence for the week per 100 students. It should be noted that this does not tell us whether it is the same students that are absent, or whether different students are involved each day.

## Response Rates

Out of the 2,426 schools surveyed, completed returns were received from 2,216 schools (91%). The responding schools had a total of 659,275 students on their rolls, representing 92 percent of the student population in all state and state integrated schools. The overall response rate has increased compared to the 2004 survey (from 87% to 91%).

## Analysis of Absences on Different Days of the Week

Table 1 shows the results of the 2006 survey by each day of the week. The overall absence rate was highest on Monday (13%), followed by Friday (12%) and Tuesday (11%). The overall pattern of 2006 truancy rates is similar to 2004 with Monday and Friday having the highest rates. The intermittent unjustified absence rate (1.8%) was constant throughout the week.

Table 1: Absence for each day of the week

Day of the week	Absence rate (%)	Justified absence rate (%)	Truancy rate (%)	Unjustified absence rate (%)	Intermittent unjustified absence rate (%)
Monday	13.2	8.8	4.4	2.7	1.8
Tuesday	11.2	7.3	3.9	2.1	1.8
Wednesday	10.5	6.7	3.8	2.0	1.8
Thursday	10.5	6.6	3.8	2.1	1.8
Friday	12.4	7.7	4.7	2.9	1.8
<b>National Average</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>1.8</b>

The overall absence rate was higher in 2006 than in 2004. This was purely a result of an increase in the truancy rate; the justified absence rate stayed relatively constant (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Comparison of absence rates for 2004 and 2006

Year	Absence rate (%)	Justified absence rate (%)	Truancy rate (%)	Unjustified absence rate (%)	Intermittent unjustified absence rate (%)
2004	10.9	7.5	3.4	2.1	1.3
2006	11.5	7.4	4.1	2.3	1.8

## Definitions of attendance, absence and truancy

**Justified absences (JA)** are absences recorded in the register, and marked as having being satisfactorily explained. A school has to make a judgement as to which explanations they will accept. The basis for such judgements is a matter of school policy, and as such, the balance of justified and unjustified may vary slightly from school to school.

**Unjustified absences (UA)** are absences, which are not explained, or not explained to the satisfaction of the school.

**Intermittent unjustified absences (IUA)** occur when a student is absent for part of a morning (or afternoon) or part of a period without justification. For example, a student who arrives 15 minutes late to school without a reason, or with a reason that is not acceptable to the principal, would be recorded as an intermittent unjustified absence.

**Overall absence** is the sum of the three absence types noted above.

**Truancy** is the sum of unjustified absences and intermittent unjustified absences.

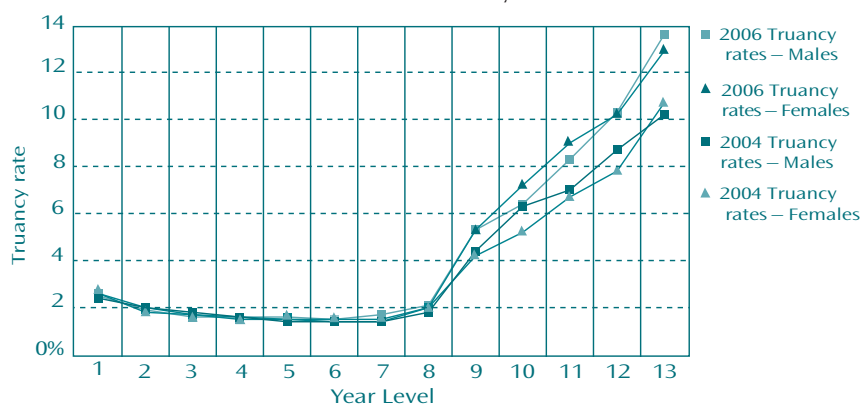
# Analysis of Student Factors

## Gender of Student, Year Level, and Absence

There was only a slight difference evident between males and females in their overall absence rates (11.2% for males and 11.5% for females) and truancy rates (4.0% for males and 4.1% for females). Figure 1 below looks at gender differences in relation to absence and at what year level they occur.

Figure 1 shows that truancy rates for males and females track each other closely at all year levels and for each absence type until students reach secondary school level. This pattern was also found in the 2004 results. In 2006, Year 10 truancy rates for females move to slightly higher levels than for males. At Years 12 and 13, males had slightly higher truancy rates than females. Noticeable is the rapid increase in the truancy rates for both males and females during the secondary school years.

Figure 1: Gender, year level and truancy rates



## Absence and Ethnicity

Table 3 shows the absence rates for each ethnic group of students in 2004 and 2006. In 2006, Māori and Pasifika students had double the truancy rate when compared with NZ European and Asian students. Unjustified absence was the main factor contributing to the high truancy rates for Māori and Pasifika students, although these students also had higher intermittent unjustified absences compared to NZ European, and Asian students.

Table 3: Absence and ethnicity

Ethnicity	Absence rate (%)		Justified absence rate (%)		Truancy rate (%)		Unjustified absence rate (%)		Intermittent unjustified absence rate (%)	
	2004	2006	2004	2006	2004	2006	2004	2006	2004	2006
NZ European	9.3	10.2	7.1	7.5	2.2	2.8	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.4
Māori	13.2	15.0	7.8	8.1	5.4	7.0	3.7	4.5	1.7	2.5
Pasifika	12.2	12.1	6.8	5.9	5.4	6.2	3.7	4.0	1.7	2.2
Asian	6.9	7.2	4.6	4.3	2.3	2.9	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.7
Other	29.0	10.5	20.7	7.3	8.2	3.2	4.7	1.7	3.5	1.5
<b>National Average</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.8</b>

In relation to truancy rates by ethnicity and gender, NZ European and Māori females had slightly higher truancy rates than males, while the situation was reversed for Asian and Pasifika students (see Table 4). Compared to 2004, the truancy rates for females and males of the four identified ethnic groups increased. Māori females had the largest increase (from 5.6% in 2004 to 7.1% in 2006).

Table 4: Absence, ethnicity, and gender

Ethnicity	Truancy rate (%)		Unjustified absence rate (%)		Intermittent unjustified absence rate (%)	
	2004	2006	2004	2006	2004	2006
NZ European – males	2.0	2.6	1.1	1.3	0.9	1.4
NZ European – females	2.4	2.9	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.5
Māori – males	5.0	6.6	3.5	4.2	1.5	2.4
Māori – females	5.6	7.1	3.8	4.6	1.8	2.5
Pasifika – males	5.5	6.4	3.8	4.0	1.8	2.4
Pasifika – females	5.1	5.7	3.5	3.8	1.6	2.0
Asian – males	2.5	3.2	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.8
Asian – females	1.9	2.5	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.5
Other – males	3.4	3.2	1.9	1.7	1.6	1.5
Other – females	3.2	3.1	1.9	1.7	1.2	1.4
<b>National Average <sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.8</b>

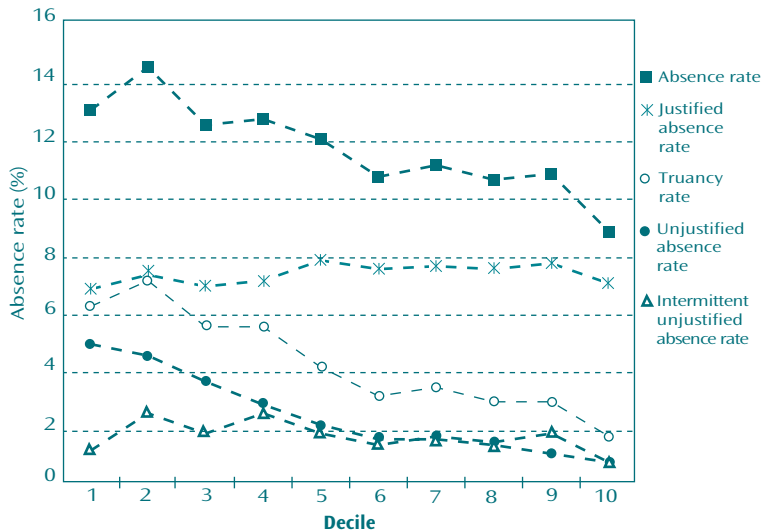
<sup>a</sup> Note that the total includes data where gender or ethnicity is missing.

# Analysis of School Factors

## Absence and School Decile

Similar to the 2004 survey, the most visible trend in the absence rates with respect to school decile is a lower overall absence rate in higher decile schools (13.1% for Decile 1 compared with 8.9% for Decile 10 schools) and in the truancy rate (6.3% for Decile 1, 1.8% for Decile 10 schools) (see Figure 2). Justified absences and intermittent unjustified absences do not show a clear pattern with decile. Decile 6 to 10 schools were more likely to have a lower overall absence rate compared with schools of lower deciles (Deciles 1 to 5), as they were more likely to have lower unjustified absence rates.

Figure 2: Absence type and decile



## Absence and Type of School

Findings from past surveys indicated that absences are more prevalent at the secondary school level rather than in primary, intermediate, or in composite schools. Figure 3 shows the variation in absence types associated with the type of school.

Figure 3: Absence and Type of School

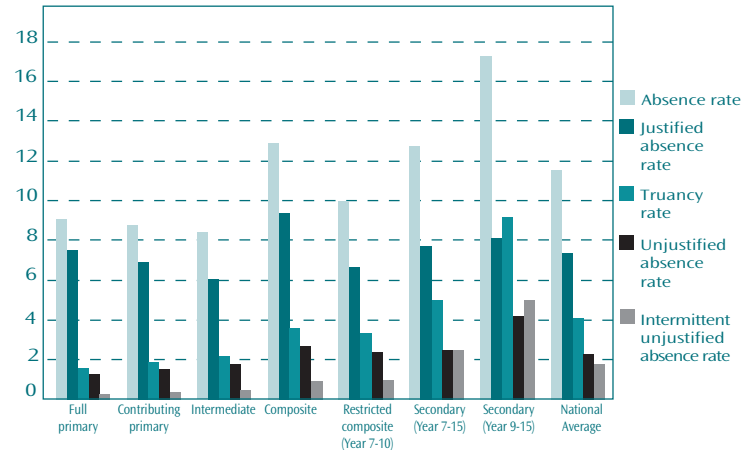


Figure 3 indicated that there is little variation in the composition of the overall absence rates for full primary, contributing, and intermediate schools. There is little difference in justified absences between school types, ranging from 6.1% in intermediate schools to 9.4% in composite schools. Similar to previous surveys, however, divergence appears at the secondary school level, particularly in Year 9-15 secondary schools, where the level of intermittent unjustified absence is highest compared to other school types. This, coupled with the high level of unjustified absences, contributes to the higher levels of truancy recorded in Year 9-15 secondary schools.

## Absence across Different Regions

Table 5 shows the absence and truancy rates by local body regions (see Appendix A for absence and truancy rates by territorial local authority districts). The absence rate varied from 10.7 percent in the Otago region to 14.5 percent in the Nelson region.

Table 5: Absence across different regions

Local Body Regions	Absence rate (%)		Truancy rate (%)	
	2004	2006	2004	2006
Northland	11.9	12.6	4.4	4.6
Auckland	10.0	10.9	3.4	4.2
Waikato	9.9	12.5	3.3	4.6
Bay Of Plenty	11.6	12.6	4.4	5.8
Gisborne	12.4	12.9	5.0	5.7
Hawke's Bay	12.1	12.1	3.5	4.4
Taranaki	9.9	11.3	3.0	3.6
Manawatu-Wanganui	11.0	10.8	3.1	3.6
Wellington	14.2	11.5	3.8	3.7
Tasman	10.6	13.2	1.0	2.2
Nelson	11.4	14.5	4.1	4.8
Marlborough	12.0	13.0	1.6	4.1
West Coast	11.1	11.9	3.5	4.2
Canterbury	11.3	11.2	3.2	3.3
Otago	9.2	10.7	2.5	2.4
Southland	11.0	13.0	2.1	3.7
National Average	10.9	11.5	3.4	4.1

In 2006, the Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, Nelson, and West Coast regions had high truancy rates

compared with the national average (4.1%). The Nelson region had the highest overall absence rate, and the Bay of Plenty and Gisborne regions experienced the highest truancy rates. Compared to 2004, most regions experienced an increase in absence rates in 2006. However, the absence rates for the Hawke's Bay and Canterbury regions remained the same, and the Wellington and Canterbury regions decreased in their absence rates. The Southland region experienced the largest increase in its truancy rate followed by the Bay of Plenty, Waikato, and Tasman regions, while the Marlborough, Wellington, and Otago regions decreased in their truancy rates.

## Analysing your School's Student Engagement Data

To inform your school's engagement policies, look for patterns or differences in your attendance data. For example:

- Do male and female students' absence rates differ?
- At what year level are absence rates at the highest?
- Which groups of students have the highest truancy rates?
- What time of year or day of the week are truancy rates at their lowest? Why?

Or you can compare your data with the national data. For example:

- How does your school compare to others of your decile and type?

Information about analysing attendance data can also be found on the TKI website <http://www.tki.org.nz>. Previous attendance reports are available on the Education Counts website <http://www.educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz>

## Appendix A: Absence and Truancy Rates by Territorial Local Authority Districts

Territorial Local Authority Districts	Absence rate (%)		Truancy rate (%)	
	2004	2006	2004	2006
Far North District	13.0	13.7	5.1	5.9
Whangarei District	11.4	12.2	4.1	4.0
Kaipara District	10.6	10.9	3.2	3.4
Rodney District	9.7	11.9	1.9	3.0
North Shore City	9.4	10.2	2.4	3.3
Waitakere City	10.1	10.7	3.4	4.1
Auckland City	10.5	9.9	3.5	3.4
Manukau City	10.0	11.8	4.0	5.6
Papakura District	8.6	12.1	3.8	5.8
Franklin District	9.1	11.1	2.5	4.6
Thames-Coromandel District	11.3	9.7	3.8	1.9
Hauraki District	9.3	12.6	2.8	4.5
Waikato District	10.1	13.5	3.1	3.8
Matamata-Piako District	7.8	10.2	1.9	4.1
Hamilton City	9.5	13.7	3.1	5.3
Waipa District	9.3	11.2	2.9	4.7
Otorohanga District	7.3	14.6	1.8	6.3
South Waikato District	13.2	13.0	7.7	6.7
Waitomo District	9.6	11.2	2.5	2.8
Taupo District	11.3	11.8	3.2	3.0
Western Bay Of Plenty District	9.6	11.0	2.6	3.9
Tauranga City	11.5	10.8	4.4	4.0
Rotorua District	12.0	14.2	5.1	7.5
Whakatane District	12.7	15.4	4.9	8.2
Kawerau District	12.2	13.7	3.0	7.9
Opotiki District	10.9	14.1	4.8	6.5
Gisborne District	12.4	12.9	5.0	5.7
Wairoa District	15.9	12.4	7.6	5.3
Hastings District	11.5	12.7	3.4	5.4
Napier City	11.9	10.9	3.3	3.2
Central Hawkes Bay District	13.2	14.8	2.6	4.4
New Plymouth District	9.8	11.9	2.8	3.8
Stratford District	8.0	8.4	1.9	2.3
South Taranaki District	10.6	10.8	4.0	3.7
Ruapehu District	13.0	15.7	6.0	9.7
Wanganui District	9.6	11.9	2.6	3.9
Rangitikei District	12.3	13.5	1.9	4.2

Territorial Local Authority Districts	Absence rate (%)		Truancy rate (%)	
	2004	2006	2004	2006
Manawatu District	8.3	8.1	0.6	1.4
Palmerston North City	11.4	7.7	3.2	1.7
Tararua District	13.7	9.6	4.4	2.4
Horowhenua District	10.5	14.4	3.1	6.2
Kapiti Coast District	9.4	11.4	2.1	3.3
Porirua City	15.9	12.5	5.5	4.7
Upper Hutt City	12.1	10.7	1.9	3.0
Lower Hutt City	16.0	11.9	5.3	4.8
Wellington City	13.5	10.9	3.2	3.1
Masterton District	16.5	13.7	3.6	4.5
Carterton District	11.2	8.9	1.4	0.5
South Wairarapa District	14.2	10.0	0.9	0.9
Tasman District	10.6	13.2	1.0	2.2
Nelson City	11.4	14.5	4.1	4.8
Marlborough District	12.0	13.0	4.6	4.1
Kaikoura District	12.3	15.2	1.4	5.2
Buller District	7.9	9.3	0.5	2.0
Grey District	12.1	10.6	4.7	3.3
Westland District	11.8	17.2	3.8	8.3
Hurunui District	10.7	9.9	2.2	2.3
Waimakariri District	11.4	11.5	2.6	3.2
Christchurch City	12.2	11.0	3.8	3.7
Banks Peninsula District	13.4	11.2	2.0	2.1
Selwyn District	9.6	12.4	2.4	2.2
Ashburton District	12.4	12.7	5.2	4.4
Timaru District	8.3	10.4	1.9	1.9
MacKenzie District	5.9	10.1	0.9	2.0
Waimate District	6.6	11.4	0.4	1.0
Waitaki District	9.2	9.0	1.2	1.5
Central Otago District	8.0	9.5	1.5	1.7
Queenstown-Lakes District	6.8	12.5	1.2	2.3
Dunedin City	9.6	11.0	3.3	2.8
Clutha District	8.9	9.9	1.6	2.2
Southland District	7.8	10.2	1.0	1.7
Gore District	8.9	9.8	1.9	0.6
Invercargill City	11.7	14.8	2.4	5.2
National Average	10.9	11.5	3.4	4.1

Caution must be taken when examining the absence and truancy rates for each of the territorial local authority districts (TLAs). The differences between TLAs make robust comparisons between them difficult. Some TLAs have small numbers of responding schools and would be sensitive to changes in absence rates in response to what was happening during the survey week for the schools in the TLA.