Attendance in New Zealand Schools

2016
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Executive Summary

The Ministry of Education is increasing the number of tools available to schools, to help them increase their understanding of absence and its impact on achievement. We all have a responsibility for ensuring kids are attending school and this report is designed to support school leaders, parents, whanau and communities understand the attendance challenges we face in New Zealand so we can develop the right strategies to address these.

In the 2015 attendance survey we adopted a new measure that focuses on individual student attendance rather than the average daily attendance across the school, which can mask individual student attendance challenges.

We also began measuring students’ school attendance in half-days, rather than full days, which is more consistent with how schools record attendance. This report continues to analyse attendance for all of Term 2. We can use this to provide a picture of the impact attendance has on achievement for different groups of students.

As well as the whole-term analysis, we have also provided the traditional week-long snapshot for continuity purposes.

Summary of 2016 Findings

- For Year 11 students in 2015, there is a positive relationship between attending school and the probability of achieving NCEA level 1.

- The percentage of students attending school regularly (defined in this report as more than 90 percent of half-days) decreased in Term 2, 2016 compared to Term 2, 2015.

- Year 6 students had the highest level of regular school attendance, while Year 13 students had the lowest.

- Māori students had the lowest levels of regular school attendance. Asian students had the highest levels of regular school attendance.

- A higher proportion of primary and intermediate school students attend regularly than students at secondary schools.

- The proportion of students attending regularly increases as school decile increases.

- School attendance slowly declined over the course of Term 2, from 92.9% half-days attended in the first week of Term 2, to 87.3% in the last week.

- Unjustified absences increased in the middle and more noticeably at the end of Term 2.

- Of the 2,414 schools invited to submit Term 2 attendance data, completed returns were received from 1,843 schools, a response rate of 76%.
Introduction

This report is designed to provide a picture of attendance in New Zealand schools that will help schools, Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako and other sector representatives to understand patterns of attendance and how these can affect achievement.

It is based on student attendance data collected from state and state integrated schools for Term 2 in 2016. The survey achieved a 76% response rate. In total this represents approximately 630,000 students or 84% of the student population in all state and state integrated schools on 1 July 2016.

For a number of years, the annual Attendance Survey has been based on data collected in Term 2 and used to provide a week-long, national snapshot of attendance measured in full days. Thanks to the growing research and evidence base being produced, in particular in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, we can better observe student attendance patterns as well as the relationship between this and other student outcomes, such as achievement.

Our new student-centred approach gives school leaders, the Ministry of Education and readers a more comprehensive understanding of student attendance. This has been used to develop the new measure “Students Attending Regularly”, where a student who has attended school regularly is defined as having attended more than 90% of all half-days in the given term.

We have also introduced a measure of how often students arrive late to class. The rate of “Lateness” measures how many classes students were marked as arriving late to, out of all the classes they attended.

In addition to attendance and lateness statistics, this report analyses the relationship between the achievement of Year 11 students in 2015, and their attendance in that and previous years.

Alongside the legal responsibility that schools, parents and guardians have for ensuring children are attending school, the reality is that every day a student is not at school is a day they are not learning. Therefore the Ministry provides a range of support for schools to address poor attendance. In the most severe cases of non-attendance schools can request the support of the integrated Attendance Service.

In early 2016 the Ministry introduced Every Day Matters, an initiative to assist schools to turn attendance data into insights. As part of this initiative, schools volunteer to provide their attendance data to the Ministry each term and in return receive attendance reports. All schools who participated in the 2016 annual attendance survey also received a report on their Term 2 attendance.
National Attendance

Students Attending Regularly and Half-Day Attendance

In this report regular school attendance is defined as being present at school for more than 90% of all half-days in Term 2. Being present at school does not include any sort of half day absence regardless of whether the school deems the explanation to be satisfactory. It does include classes where a student is at school for the day but needs to attend an in school or out of school appointment, or where the student is on a school organised outing.

![Figure 1: Students Attending School Regularly, Term 2](image)

Nationally, there has been a decrease in the number of students attending school regularly.

During Term 2 of 2016 67.2% of students attended school regularly. This compares to 69.5% in 2015 (Figure 1). From 2011 to 2016, the percentage of students attending regularly peaked in 2015. This was 3.2 percentage points higher than in 2013 (66.3%) which was also the year when the percentage of students attending regularly was the lowest.

When we look in more detail (Figure 2) we can see how student attendance changed between 2015 and 2016, and how this relates to the national decrease in students attending regularly. The proportion of students with attendance just below that required to be considered attending regularly (i.e. attending 85-90% of all half-days) increased, while those with attendance just above the attending regularly threshold (i.e. attending 90-95% of all half-days) decreased. The adjacent categories had similar proportions of students in them in both 2015 and 2016.
Lateness

We define a rate of lateness as the percentage of classes for which students were marked as arriving late, out of the classes they attended. This is an average over all students and classes, and is not a student-level measure like Attending Regularly. See the Appendix under Definitions of Attendance for more information.

Figure 3: Students Arriving Late to Class, Term 2

The percentage of classes that students arrived late to in Term 2 has remained fairly over time (Lateness)

We define a rate of lateness as the percentage of classes for which students were marked as arriving late, out of the classes they attended. This is an average over all students and classes, and is not a student-level measure like Attending Regularly. See the Appendix under Definitions of Attendance for more information.

Figure 3). On average, students were late to 1.3% of classes in 2016, an increase of less than 0.1 percentage points since 2015.
**Time Attending Class**

In this section we look at attendance in a different way to the previous section. Instead of using half-days we use the total number of minutes in class. Please note that the analysis in this section is not directly comparable with the rest of this report, due to this difference.

Attendance data from schools comes in the form of codes used to classify the attendance of students for each class. This allows us to measure time present or absent by type of attendance or reason for absence. Time in half-days is derived from time in minutes; however the two are not directly comparable.

![Figure 4: Time Attending or Not Attending Class, Term 2](image)

Students on average attended 90.8% of class time in Term 2, 2016, a decrease from 91.0% in 2015, but returning to the same value as in 2014 (Figure 4).

The time which students were justifiably absent decreased by 0.2 percentage points between 2015 and 2016 (5.4% to 5.2%), while the time they were unjustifiably absent increased slightly (3.5% to 3.8%), between 2015 and 2016.

This may be due to the introduction of the holidays during term attendance code in 2015. Holidays during term time are regarded as an unjustified absence. Previously, schools recorded this reason for absence as either a justified or unjustified absence depending on their school policy. For this reason, care should be taken when interpreting movements in the years following the change.

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1 See the Attendance Code List on the [electronic Attendance Register (eAR) page](#) for more information on these codes.
Students attended class for 90.8% of all class time in Term 2, 2016.

The percentage of time spent absent due to short-term illness or medical reasons, visiting family members on an overseas posting (justified overseas), and being stood down or suspended have remained static since 2015 (Figure 5). Over the same time period, the percentage of time spent for other justified absences (reasons for absence within the school policy) decreased by 0.1 percentage points.
Holidays during term time accounted for 0.6% of all class time (Figure 6), an increase of 0.2 percentage points from 2015. This represents approximately 36,000 surveyed students with at least one half-day of holiday during Term 2 2016. These holidays averaged 9.5 half-days in duration, or nearly a full week of school. Absences where no information was provided (e.g. students were truant or provided throw-away explanations) increased by 0.1 percentage points between 2015 and 2016. All other types of unjustified absences decreased or remained static since 2015.

Absences for unknown reasons, as a percentage of total time, decreased by 0.5 percentage points between 2011 and 2016. This indicates an improvement in the recording of reasons for absence by New Zealand schools.
Student Analysis

Gender and Year Level

The percentage of students attending regularly increases from Year 1 to Year 6 and then tends to fall through intermediate and secondary years.

There is no obvious gender difference in students attending regularly from Years 1 to 9 (Figure 7); however a noticeable difference starts to emerge in senior secondary schooling, where females have lower attendance rates than males. This difference is largest in Year 13, where 43.5% of female students attended regularly, compared to 49.9% of male students.

These trends have been consistent since the Term 2 data collection began in 2011.
When we look at arriving to class late the pattern is different (Figure 8). The percentage of classes to which students arrive late decreases between Year 1 and Year 9, with the exception of an increase in Year 8, and then increases through secondary school. Female students are generally late to more classes from Years 1 to 6, while male students are late more often in Years 7 and above. Again, these trends have been observed since 2011.

In 2016, the percentage of classes to which students arrived late was lowest in Year 9 (0.9% for female students, 1.0% for male students). Lateness was highest in Year 2 (1.9% for female students, 1.8% for male students).
In Year 13 male students spent more school time truant than female students (Figure 10). Female students, however, spent more time absent for each other unjustified absence reason, and overall had a higher level of unjustified absence.
As shown in Figure 7, in the senior secondary year levels fewer female students were attending school regularly. This is reflected in
Figure 9 - Figure 11 in regards to overall time absent, time absent for unjustified reasons, and time absent for justified reasons.

The percentage of time spent absent for each unjustified or justified reason was similar between the genders for the primary school year levels (Figure 10, and Figure 11).

Female students spent more time absent for each justified absence reason, except for being stood down or suspended, than male students, and had a higher level of justified absence overall (Figure 11). There was a noticeable difference in the time spent absent for short-term illness or medical reasons between the genders in Years 10-13.
In 2016 Asian students had the highest percentage of regular school attendance at 77.0%. European/Pākehā and MELAA\(^3\) students followed at 70.5% and 69.4%, respectively. Māori students had the lowest percentage of regular school attendance at 54.7% and Pasifika students had a slightly higher rate of 57.2% (Figure 12).

When we look at the percentage of classes arrived to late (Figure 14), Māori and Pasifika students had the highest rates at 2.1% and 2.8%, respectively. European/Pākehā and Asian students were late least often, at 1.0% of classes.

\(^2\) This data uses total response ethnicity; students who identified in more than one ethnic group have been counted in each ethnic group, but only once in “Total”.

\(^3\) MELAA stands for Middle Eastern/Latin American/African.
The pattern of students attending regularly by ethnicity shown in Figure 12 is reflected in Figure 15, regarding the percentage of time attending or not attending class.

The percentage of time spent truanting for Māori and Pasifika was over twice the percentage for all other ethnicities. Asian students had the highest percentage of time spent on holiday during term time, followed by MELAA and European/Pākehā students (Figure 16).
Asian and MELAA students spent the smallest percentage of time absent due to short-term illness, when compared to other ethnicities (Figure 17). Māori, Pasifika, and European/Pākehā all spent a similar percentage of time absent for this reason, with Māori having the highest percentage by a small margin (0.3 percentage points higher than European/Pākehā at 4.2%).
School Analysis

Type of School

In New Zealand the majority of school types are defined by the year levels of the students who attend them. For this reason the school type results generally reflect the year level results described earlier in this report.

Figure 18: Students Attending School Regularly, by School Type, Term 2, 2016

Figure 19: Half-Day Attendance, by School Type, Term 2, 2016

Figure 7 shows that a larger proportion of students were attending regularly in the years before secondary schooling. This is shown again in Figure 18 with Full Primary (71.5%), Contributing Primary (71.7%), and Intermediate Schools (71.2%) having the highest percentages of students attending school regularly.

The trend of secondary school student attendance declining is also reflected here. Secondary (Year 7-15) (64.6%), Composite\(^4\) (60.6%), and Secondary (Year 9-15) (59.3%) had the lowest proportions of students attending school regularly.

The percentage of students attending regularly at Special Schools was 60.1% and the majority of non-attendance at Special Schools was for justified reasons. This is likely related to the fact that special schools support high needs students. Consideration of this should be made when interpreting their results.

\(^4\) This includes Composite and Restricted Composite schools.
Again, trends previously observed in Figure 8 are reflected in the percentage of classes that students arrive late to by school type (Figure 20). Although primary schools had high levels of students attending regularly, they also had high levels of lateness, with Contributing Primary, and Intermediate Schools having the highest percentages overall (1.7% and 1.8%).

Secondary schools had lower levels of lateness, with Secondary (Year 7-15) and Composite schools having the lowest rate overall (1.0%).

**Decile of School**

School deciles indicate the extent to which the school draws their students from low socio-economic communities. Deciles are used to target funding, for state and state-integrated schools, to help them overcome any barriers to learning that students from lower socio-economic communities might face. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.
As school decile increases so does the percentage of students attending school regularly (with the exception of decile 6). Of students at decile 10 schools 74.5% attended school regularly, a decrease from 2015 (77.1%). At decile 1 schools 52.9% of students attended school regularly, this compares to 57.2% in 2015 (Figure 21 and Figure 22).

Schools with high levels of students attending regularly also tended to have low levels of lateness. Decile 1 schools had the highest percentage of classes arrived to late, at 2.9%, while deciles 9 and 10 had the lowest, at 0.8% (Figure 23). In 2016, there was a small peak in lateness at decile 8, which was also seen in 2015 but not in earlier years.
Regional Analysis

The regional analysis in this section focuses on education areas, as defined by the Ministry of Education. Data based on regional council is also available in the data tables released alongside this report.

Education Area

Student attendance rates in the South Island education areas were above the national average of 67.2%. The North Island education areas had a range of attendance rates below, at, and above the national average. As shown in Figure 24 the Otago/Southland education area had the highest percentage of students attending school regularly (71.2%), whereas Tai Tokerau had the lowest (55.9%).
The percentage of students with very low levels of attendance (i.e. attended less than 75% of all half-days) was highest in the Tai Tokerau and Hawke’s Bay education areas (12.3% and 10.2%, respectively). In contrast this percentage was lowest in the Otago/Southland education area, at 5.8% (Figure 25).

The South Island education areas had the lowest percentage of classes that students arrived late to, with Otago/Southland having the lowest of all education areas at 0.9% (Figure 26). Wellington had the highest level of lateness, at 1.6% of classes, despite having an above average percentage of students attending regularly.
Attendance and Achievement

Why Attendance Matters

In this section we present a model that analyses the relationship between attending school and the likelihood of achieving NCEA Level 1 for Year 11 students. We have five years of Term 2 attendance data for students who were in Year 11 in 2015. That means we have their attendance for Year 7 through to Year 11.

There is a strong relationship between attendance in Year 11 and the probability of achieving NCEA Level 1 in Year 11.

![Figure 27: Probability of Year 11 Students in 2015 Achieving NCEA Level 1, by Attendance at School in Term 2](image)

The absence of data points in the top-left corner of Figure 27 and the presence of data points in the bottom-right corner can be interpreted as that while attendance is required to have a high probability of achieving, it does not guarantee it. This reflects situations where other circumstances may affect a student’s ability to achieve.

Student attendance rates in Years 9 to 11, out of all years from Years 7 to 11, were found to be the most significant predictors of achievement in Year 11. Attendance in Year 11, out of all years from Years 7 to 11, had the largest effect on the probability of a student achieving NCEA Level 1. This indicates that it is never too late to improve a student’s chances of achieving by improving their attendance.

Attendance in Year 10 had the next largest effect on achievement with the effects of non-attendance in previous years observed, in Figure 28.

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5 More information regarding the model used to analyse the data in this section can be found in the section Appendix: Supplementary Information.
Figure 28: Probability of 2015 Year 11 Students Achieving NCEA Level 1, by Attendance at School during Term 2

- 0-50% Attendance in Year 10
- (50)-85% Attendance in Year 10
- (85)%+ Attendance in Year 10
Week-by-Week Analysis

In this section we look at average student attendance by week. Using the data for all of Term 2 provides a much richer picture of how attendance at school changes over the term. Note that, as with the percentage of time analysis, this section is not directly comparable with the rest of the report. In week 1 of Term 2, 2016, 92.9% of all half-days were attended. This decreased over the course of the term to be 87.3% in the last week of Term 2.

Figure 29: Weekly Attendance, Term 2, 2016

There were weeks of the term which had peaks in students being absent for unjustified reasons (e.g. skipping class or holidays during term time). This occurred in week 5 (beginning 30 May) rising by 0.3 percentage points from the previous week, and also in the final week of term, rising by 2.2 percentage points from the previous week.

Students absent for justified reasons (e.g. sickness) appear to be more variable over the course of the term, with peaks (greater than 0.5 percentage point change from the previous week) occurring in weeks 2, and 4.

Exam leave (presented in Figure 29 but too small to be observable) represents up to a maximum of 0.4% of half-days in any week in Term 2.
Survey-week analysis

As outlined earlier in the report we are continuing to produce the week-long national attendance estimates. These can be interpreted as the average daily absence rate during the survey-week.

National Summary
The survey-week in 2016 was from 13-17 June.

• The national absence rate (both justified and unjustified absences) was 10.2% or 76,500 students per day, with a margin of error of 0.7%.

• The 2016 national absence rate shows an increase since 2015 (9.9%). This was due to an increase in unjustified absences.

• The total unjustified absence rate was 4.5%. This compares to 4.1% in 2015, and 4.6% in 2014.

• The national frequent truant rate (students who were unjustifiably absent for three or more days in the survey week) was 1.4%. This rate was higher than in 2015 (1.2%).

• In 2016, all state and state integrated schools were invited to participate in the attendance survey. The response rate was 76.3%, compared to 77.7% in 2015.
Appendix: Supplementary Information

Collection Change Explanation

The Ministry of Education has changed the way that attendance in New Zealand schools is reported. Since 2011, data has been collected that includes attendance for each day of Term 2. In the Attendance in New Zealand Schools 2015 report, we began to analyse the entirety of this data, thereby removing some of the noted limitations of the previously reported survey-week analysis. The national picture, using survey-week analysis, is still reported in this report for continuity purposes.

All supporting data tables for the survey-week analysis have also been provided for download from Education Counts, under the name “Survey Week Data”.

New Measure

In the 2015 report we introduced a new student attendance measure. This new measurement focuses on individual student attendance. An attendance rate is calculated for each student (e.g. present for 92 percent of half-days in Term 2) and reported on. A student is recorded as attending school when they are present at school and/or they are participating in a school activity (e.g. a sports exchange). Justified absences (e.g. sickness) are not counted as attendance.

For the purpose of this report a student that attends more than 90 percent of half-days is classified as attending school regularly. Ideally each student would attend 100% of the time; however we have used 90% as a minimum threshold for this attendance measure in acknowledgement that sometimes students are unable to attend for unavoidable reasons such as sickness. This does not mean the Ministry considers 90% attendance as adequate, it is not.

Response Rates

Of the 2,414 schools invited to submit Term 2 attendance data, completed returns were received from 1,843 schools, a response rate of 76% (78% in 2015). In total, the responding schools had approximately 630,000 students on their rolls, equating to 84% of the student population in all state and state integrated schools on 1 July 2016 (86% in 2015).

Definitions of Attendance

Attendance data was collected for each student for each day of the term. Other information about the school was also collected; this additional information was used to determine if a student’s attendance data should be included in this report.

- If a student was enrolled for less than 30 half-days during Term 2 their data has not been included in the estimates presented in this report.
- Alternative education students and students attending teen parent units are excluded from this report.
- Students attending private schools are not included in this report.

The main classifications for attendance are:

- Being **present** at school does not include justified nor unjustified absence from school. It does include classes where a student is at school for the day but needs to attend an in school or out of school appointment or is on a school organised outing.
- **Justified and unjustified absences** are absences with explanations that have been deemed satisfactory or unsatisfactory, respectively. School principals are required to make a judgement
as to which explanations they will accept, based on school policy. These policies may vary slightly and could lead to small differences in data between schools.

- **Students attending regularly** are defined as having attended more than 90% of all school time in Term 2, where time is measured in half-days.
- **Students arriving late to class** are classified as attending the class, as the student was present for the class after arriving late. Therefore, to accurately report on lateness, only classes that were attended are included in this measure. School policy will determine when a student is recorded as arriving late to class (e.g. more than 10 minutes late).

**Survey-Week Definitions**

Attendance data was analysed for each student for each day of the survey week. Absence rates relate to the average daily absence for the survey week. Note that this does not tell us whether the same students were absent each day.

Absences were classified into three main absence types: justified absences, unjustified absences, and intermittent unjustified absences. **Total absence** relates to the sum of these three absence types.

- **Justified and unjustified absences** are absences with explanations that have been deemed satisfactory or unsatisfactory, respectively. School principals are required to make a judgement as to which explanations they will accept. The basis for this judgement is a matter of school policy and as such the balance of justified and unjustified absence may vary slightly from school to school.

- Unjustified absences are considered **intermittent** if the absence occurred for part of the day, rather than the majority thereof.

- **Total unjustified absence** relates to the sum of unjustified absence, and intermittent unjustified absence.

- The rate of **frequent truants** was also estimated. A student was classified as a frequent truant if they were unjustifiably absent for three or more days during the survey week.

**Attendance and Achievement Data Considerations**

The students included in the attendance and achievement analysis are a cohort of Year 7 students in 2011, whose attendance can be tracked until they are in Year 11. Their achievement in Year 11 is then compared with their attendance in each year, to identify a relationship between attendance and achievement.

Students may move between schools over time, and not all schools submit Term 2 attendance data, so some students are not in the data in some years. This means the cohort of students able to be found in all years between 2011 and 2015 is approximately 20,000 students.

The model used to analyse this data accounts for the effect of ethnicity, gender, and school decile (as at Year 7, and Year 11) on achievement, as well as the fact that students attending the same school are likely to be similar in nature. The effect of student type (e.g. domestic or international students), when included with other effects, was not found to be significant, and so was not included in the model.

Interpretations of this data should be made with caution. While we can say that attendance and achievement are positively related, or that students that attend school more often usually have
higher achievement, we cannot say that students that attend school more often achieve better results because of their higher attendance.

Methodology
The 2016 attendance report uses student attendance data from Term 2, 2016 (2 May - 8 July). This report investigates the relationships between attendance, and achievement, school factors (school type, and decile), student factors (gender and year level, and ethnicity of the student), or regional factors (education area).

In 2011 to 2016, all state and state integrated schools in New Zealand were invited to submit Term 2 attendance data. Schools that are able to enter their attendance records into their Student Management Systems (SMS) were asked to provide an extract of this data electronically.

The electronic files supplied by schools contain detailed attendance records. Each half-day’s attendance or non-attendance is then reported.

Detailed attendance records are required for the analysis performed in this report, therefore only schools that can provide attendance data electronically are able to participate in this analysis. In earlier years, there were more schools that could not provide electronic extracts of their attendance data, and these schools were typically smaller primary schools. Therefore the data in this analysis has become more representative over time, as more schools are able to provide this data.

Survey-Week Methodology
The 2016 attendance survey used student attendance data from the week of 13-17 June 2016.

In 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2011 to 2016, all state and state integrated schools in New Zealand were invited to participate in the attendance survey. All surveys from 2004 have used the same instructions. In 2009, a representative sample of 768 schools was invited to participate. Due to the nature of the sample and the number of responses from schools, some comparisons against 2009 are not possible.

Prior to 2009, data was collected using paper forms only. Since 2009, two forms of data collection have been used. Schools that are able to enter their attendance records electronically into their Student Management Systems (SMS) were asked to provide an extract of this data electronically. Until 2013, schools that were not able to do this were invited to take part in the paper version of the survey. Before 2009 all surveys used paper form data only.

From 2014, paper forms are not used, and only schools with electronic attendance registers are able to participate in the survey. The electronic files supplied by schools contain detailed attendance records. Each day’s record was converted to a single daily attendance code. Schools recording absences on the paper form were required to make their own judgement as to whether a student was absent for all or part of a day, and whether the reason for the absence was satisfactory based on the definitions and instructions supplied.

In 2012 and all subsequent years, Teen Parent Units are not included in the computation of national absence rates.

Survey-Week Time Frame
The week of 13-17 June 2016 was used for the survey week analysis. This week is close to the middle of the second school term and was the same week of term as used in the 2009, and 2011-2015 survey-week analysis. By analysing data from a similar time of year, factors such as winter illness would have been at similar levels.
Prior to 2009, surveys were carried out in mid-August and early-September. Due to feedback from schools, starting 2009, surveys were carried out in mid-June, when absences due to winter illnesses were expected to be lower.

Some schools and local area activities resulted in school closures during the 2016 survey week. For schools that were closed or had data missing on days during the survey week, the missing data was replaced with an alternative day or days from an adjacent week. The corresponding day(s) from either the previous week or the week after were chosen at random.
Lifting aspiration and raising educational achievement for every New Zealander