## Students attending school regularly

Since 2015 regular attendance rates have decreased by 11 percentage points\(^1\). In 2019 the percentage of students who attended school more than 90% of the time in term 2 declined to 58% (64% in 2018).

### Indicator Description

The percentage of students who have attended more than 90% of term 2, where time is measured in half-days. A half-day can either be the minimum two hours before, or after, noon contributing to the minimum four hours of a school day.

### Why is regular attendance important?

Our education insights studies confirm that the fewer days a student attends school, the more likely their lower attendance is to impact negatively on their wellbeing. The Ministry used data from 15 year old New Zealand students to examine relationships between self-reported school attendance and other indicators of student wellbeing. We found that student reports of skipping a greater number of days in the last fortnight of school predict worse average outcomes relating to schoolwork-related anxiety, sense of belonging, bullying and motivation. In every case, students who report skipping no days of school report the best wellbeing outcomes\(^2\).

Attendance is also linked to levels of student attainment in secondary students. Recent research shows that each additional half day absence from school predicts a consistent reduction in the number of NCEA credits a student subsequently attains – whether that is the student moving from 100% to 99% attendance, or moving from 71% to 70% attendance. Students who are absent even 5-10% of the time (still “regular” attendance) obtain fewer NCEA credits than those with slightly higher attendance. There is no “safe” level of non-attendance\(^3\).

### How are we going?

In 2019 58% of students were regularly attending. Regular attendance rates have decreased by 11 percentage points since 2015. Half of this decrease was seen within the last year alone, where regular attendance decreased from 64% in 2018 (down 6 percentage points).

This trend over the past five years could suggest that there is a systemic (rather than one-off) driver.

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\(^1\) Percentage point is the difference of two percentages  
\(^2\) Pepa Mahi “School Attendance and Student Wellbeing” Ministry of Education Internal Study August 2019  
\(^3\) Pepa Mahi “School Attendance and Attainment” Ministry of Education Internal Study August 2019
Of the students who did not attend regularly in 2019, approximately 69,000 students were only short of regular attendance by 1 to 3 half days. This group of students has declined by 19,000 since 2018, when 88,000 were 1 to 3 half days short of regular attendance.

In contrast, there were 100,000 students who were short of achieving regular attendance by 4 to 10 half days in 2019, an increase of 12,500 students from 2018. This shows that more students are falling well within the irregular absence category and away from the ‘cusp’ of regular attendance.

**Figure 2: Students are falling further short of achieving Regular Attendance**
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Regions all throughout the country have experienced decline in regular attendance rates since 2015, with the highest being in the Taranaki region of the North Island, and West Coast regions of the South Island (-15 percentage points). The Otago and Southland regions saw the smallest decline in regular attendance rates (-7 percentage points). The national average decline has been (-12 percentage points) since 2015.

Although Taranaki and West Coast regions of the South Island experienced the largest declines overall since 2015 (down to 57% and 61% respectively in 2019), the Tai Tokerau region maintains the lowest level of regular attendance at 48% (51% in 2018); while Otago, Southland maintain the highest levels at 63% (67% in 2018).

Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury regions maintained regular attendance rates slightly above the national average in 2019 (59% Auckland, 60% Wellington, 61% Canterbury).

Figure 3: Decline in Regular Attendance rates since 2015
YEAR LEVEL AND GENDER

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

Regular attendance rates have dropped across all year levels from 2015.

Primary and intermediate schools (years 1-8) experienced a decline in regular attendance of 14 percentage points from 2015. Half of this decline was seen in 2019. Secondary students (years 9-13) experienced a decline in regular attendance rates of 8 percentage points since 2015. Nearly half of the decline was seen across 2019 (4 percentage points).

58% of male and female students attended school regularly in 20194, while 70% of male students and 69% of female students attended school regularly in 2015. The decline is affecting both genders equally.

Figure 4: The largest drop in regular attendance is in years 1 to 8

SCHOOL TYPE

Regular attendance rates amongst primary and intermediate schools declined 14 percentage points on average since 2015 and secondary schools averaged a 9 percentage points decline5.

Although special schools have the lowest rates of regular attendance, these are often offset by justified absences, with the student being in the care of other support agencies (e.g. health and disability support).

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4 Male students had a slightly higher attendance rate than females (58% compared to 57.5%)
5 Excludes Composite and Special schools
ETHNICITY

Large declines in regular attendance have been seen across all ethnicities. Māori and Pacific students experienced the largest decline in regular attendance rates relative to their population size since 2015, averaging 14pp. European/Pākehā and Asian students averaged an 11pp decline.

Asian students maintained the highest rates of regular attendance, 69% in 2019 (75% in 2018), while regular attendance rates for Maori students were 44% in 2019 (50% in 2018) Pacific students 45% in 2019 (53% in 2018) and European/Pakehā students 61% in 2019 (67% in 2018).

DECILE

A school’s decile indicates the extent to which the school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 is the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. A school's decile does not indicate the overall socio-economic mix of the school. There is a correlation between school socio-economic mix and the rate of student attendance. In general, as school decile increases so does the percentage of students attending school regularly.

Low decile schools have seen the greatest decrease in regular attendance rates since 2015. Students attending decile 1 to 3 schools averaged a 14.5 percentage point decline, students in decile 4 to 6 schools averaged a 13 percentage point decline and students in decile 7 to 10 schools averaged a 10 percentage point decline.

Decile 1-5 schools averaged 49% regular attendance in 2019 (63% in 2018), while decile 6-10 schools averaged 63% in 2019 (74% in 2015).
WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

To obtain more information about student attendance, consider publications:

- Pepa Mahi “School Attendance and Student Wellbeing” Ministry of Education Internal Study August 2019
- Pepa Mahi “School Attendance and Attainment” Ministry of Education Internal Study August 2019
- Attendance and Absence in New Zealand Schools

To obtain information about other forms of student disengagement consider indicators:

- Stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions from school

REFERENCES

The Ministry of Education has established an Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Program to systematically identify, evaluate, analyses, synthesis and make accessible, relevant evidence linked to a range of learner outcomes. Evidence about what works for this indicator can be found in: