THIS CIRCULAR IS ABOUT: The attendance record keeping requirements for schools using computers to manage their attendance records and prepare their roll returns.

THE ACTION REQUIRED IS: For schools to use these guidelines as the minimum standards for recording keeping and best practice to meet legal requirements.

IT IS INTENDED FOR: Chairpersons of Boards of Trustees and Principals in all state and state integrated schools which have Ministry of Education approval to use an alternative attendance register.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Contact the Resourcing Division Contact Centre, Ministry of Education, PO Box 1666, Wellington. Phone: 04 463 8383 Fax: 04 463 8374 Email: resourcing@minedu.govt.nz

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Introduction

More and more schools are using computers to manage attendance records of their students. This Circular is intended to provide schools with clear guidelines as to the minimum standards of recording keeping and best practice to ensure that their legal requirements are being met and they have procedures that will operate in an emergency.
This Circular is to be read in conjunction with Circular 1998/48 (relating to Roll Returns 1 March and 1 July) and 1997/24 (relating to Register of Daily Attendance of All Students). This Circular applies to those schools that have Ministry of Education approval to use an alternative attendance register.

The Education (School Attendance) Regulations 1951 place a legal requirement on schools to keep an admission register and a register of daily attendance for all students attending school. The attendance of students is to be recorded every morning and afternoon in the register of daily attendance.

This allows the school to manage its obligation to parents to monitor the attendance and absence of students who are in their care. It also provides assurance that students are attending school and that those who are absent are being followed up.

In the event of an emergency, the school must have the ability to immediately identify which students are actually at school. This means that in an emergency such as an earthquake or fire, where power to the school is immediately interrupted, the school will be unable to rely on electronic systems for creating class lists.

The register of daily attendance can be used as evidence in any proceedings under the Education Act 1989 such as for irregular attendance of a student under section 29 of the Act.

School attendance registers are legal documents and the basis of the financial system from which funding is derived, and it is essential that the attendance registers are a permanent and accurate record of attendance.

Attendance Records

Where schools are using a computer programme that allows direct electronic data entry from the class room into the schools networked computer programme, schools must keep supporting documentation at the same time which shows a teacher has verified the attendance of a student by manually completing the register of daily attendance. Schools must use a list of students expected to be in a class where the teachers is required to physically mark the attendance of the students as either present or absent.

Some computer programmes provide bar codes or weekly attendance sheets for this purpose. Again, these records must mark each student as either present or absent.

A register should not be kept as an "absence" register, only showing the days when students were absent. A clear record of the students attending at any given time must be maintained. In the event of an emergency another person unfamiliar with the class would be unable to check an absence. Schools using computerised programmes must ensure that the programme defaults to an
absence so that all students will be shown as absent until they have been marked present.

School registers are legally required documents, which cannot be destroyed until authorised by the Minister. They provide the school with an archived history of students who have attended the school. The practice of replacing the legally required school register (E19/1) with computerised attendance records means that attendance history that is stored in the computer can be lost due to a virus or the computer software collapsing. The source documents which are used as the basis for data entry are deemed to be part of the Attendance Register and, accordingly, must also be kept until destruction is authorised by the Minister.

Schools are required to print off and archive hard copies of the attendance records for all of their classes at the end of each term. For primary schools this is the attendance record of the classroom where the student regularly attends. In secondary schools this will be the school’s form, whanau or tutor group, along with records for the school’s adult and part time students and offsite providers. There must be attendance records printed for all students enrolled at the school. The school must store these archived records until their destruction is authorised by the Minister.

Roll Returns

Schools complete an annual return of students at 1 March and at 1 July for the purpose of informing the Ministry of Education of the number of students attending that school on those dates. The staffing and funding levels applied to schools is based on the number of students attending. The Ministry requirements for roll returns are fully outlined in Circular 1998/48. The following requirements are essential for schools using computers to manage their attendance records and prepare their roll returns:

a. schools must be able to provide a list of names of those students who are included in their statistical return to the Ministry. This is an alphabetical listing of all students attending the school on the return date, showing the form (class, whanau or tutor) group to which they have been allocated and the FTE (full time equivalent) for the listed students;

b. a set of class (form, whanau or tutor) lists for all students is to be printed on the roll return date. This is to be checked by the class teachers to confirm that the computer records are correct and signed by the teacher confirming that all of the students in the class are on the class list and are attending school. This should be marked on the list by showing the students who are present on that day and including a comment to explain the reason for any student's absence on that day;

c. attendance records as detailed in this Circular;
d. a listing of all students in years 11, 12, and 13 showing details of the courses they are following; and

e. for schools receiving Maori Language Resourcing, a listing of all students who have been included in the return as taking Maori Medium Education showing the ethnicity and year level of each student.

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