

Cabinet Paper material

Proactive release

Minister & portfolio Hon David Seymour, Associate Minister of Education
Name of package Approach to improving attendance in schools
Date considered 25 March 2024
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These documents have been proactively released:

Approach to improving attendance in schools

Date considered: 25 March 2024

Author: Office of the Associate Minister of Education

Briefing Note: Draft Cabinet paper – Approach to improving attendance in schools

Date considered: 23 February 2024

Author: The Ministry of Education

Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee Minute SOU-24-MIN-0010

Date considered: 20 March 2024

Author: Committee Secretary

Cabinet Minute: CAB-24-MIN-0098

Date considered: 25 March 2024

Author: Secretary of the Cabinet

Material redacted

Some deletions have been made from the documents in line with withholding grounds under the Official Information Act 1982. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

The applicable withholding grounds under the Act are as follows:

Section 9(2)(a) to protect the privacy of natural persons

Section 9(2)(f)(iv) to protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials

Section 9(2)(j) to avoid prejudice to negotiations

Some deletions have been made from the documents as the information withheld does not fall within scope of the Minister's portfolio responsibilities, and is not relevant to the proactive release of this material.

You can read the Official Information Act 1982 here:

<http://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1982/0156/latest/DLM64785.html>

In Confidence

Office of the Associate Minister of Education

Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee

Approach to improving attendance in schools

Proposal

- 1 This paper sets out my intentions for addressing the crisis that is New Zealand's current student attendance levels in schools.

Relation to government priorities

- 2 This policy supports the government's commitment to increase attendance in schools. It also supports commitments in the coalition agreement between the National and ACT parties which states that parties will "prioritise reporting and enforcement action to reduce truancy, including centrally collecting and publishing attendance data."

Executive Summary

- 3 The key measure of attendance is the percentage of enrolled students who are attending more than 90% of the term, referred to as Regular Attendance. In Term 2, 2023, 47% of all students attended school for more than 90% of the term. This percentage is lower for Māori and Pacific students, with 33% and 32% respectively meeting the Regular Attendance criteria. Regular Attendance was highest for Asian students (59%) and 50% of European / Pakeha students were regularly attending.
- 4 Attendance is a significant factor in student attainment levels. New Zealand's 15-year-olds' average scores in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) dropped 15 points in mathematics. Science and reading scores fell four to five points. The gap between rich students and poor students grew between 2018 and 2022.¹
- 5 We are yet to understand the economic and social consequences of these deteriorating education outcomes. However, we do know that chronic non-attendance leaves an 80-year shadow of people who miss out on education when they are young. Students who leave school without NCEA Level 2 or the equivalent are more likely not to be in employment or further education or training and are likely to earn less than those with an upper secondary qualification.²
- 6 Improving education outcomes has positive effects for labour market and health outcomes. Gains made in each area can complement and build on each other.

¹ Ministry of Education (2023), PISA 2022 Aotearoa New Zealand Summary Report, May, S. and Medina, E., [PISA-2022-summary-report.pdf](#) ([educationcounts.govt.nz](#))

² Scott, D. (2018). Post-school labour-market outcomes of school-based NCEA. Wellington: Ministry of Education

Attending school matters because it is strongly associated with attaining educational qualifications.³

- 7 There are 70,000 more people on a Jobseeker unemployment benefit today than there were in 2017. That is like adding every man, woman and child in Napier onto the Jobseeker benefit in just six years. Even more catastrophic is that if you do go onto a benefit, you'll stay there for longer. MSD have told us that for the 2,000 young people receiving a youth payment or young parent payment, they are now expected to spend an average of 24 years of their working life on a benefit. *
- 8 The previous Labour-led Government tried to hide the statistics. We need to be honest and tackle this catastrophe head on. The next release of attendance data, on 12 April 2024, is of Term 4 2023 data. The school attendance rates need to be viewed as a national crisis by politicians, educators, parents, iwi leaders, Pacific leaders, community leaders, Church leaders, cultural and sporting icons, the media, and most importantly the students. And we all need to work together to tackle it.
- 9 We know there are many reasons for the attendance decline. It is a very difficult problem to tackle. Our solutions need to be targeted, effective and measurable. This is why I need to take a considered, multi-faceted approach to lifting attendance rates.
- 10 The Attendance Action Plan takes some **immediate action**:
 - 10.1 Shifting public attitudes and behaviours towards school attendance through public messaging.
 - 10.2 Publishing more frequent attendance data.
 - 10.3 Clarifying expectations around attendance to School Boards.
 - 10.4 Ensuring local supports for schools in supporting attendance are effective and efficient.
- 11 At the same time I am **investigating more systemic change** that should have meaningful impact.
 - 11.1 Better understanding the drivers of non-attendance and targeting interventions particularly for the chronic non-attenders or students that are now not enrolled.
 - 11.2 Mandating daily reporting of attendance data.
 - 11.3 Strengthening School Board focus and accountability by making attendance a strategic priority.
 - 11.4 Taking opportunities to strengthen the focus of educators and school leaders through Kahui Ako (communities of learning) as they arise.
 - 11.5 Strengthening parents' accountability by developing the Traffic Light System for attendance to guide enforcement action where needed.

³ He Whakaaro: What is the relationship between attendance and attainment? Ministry of Education. 2021. – Strong positive correlation between attendance and literacy and numeracy scores over Years 4-10, as well as NCEA attainment across Levels 1, 2 and 3.

* Statistics relating to Jobseeker benefits outlined at paragraph 7 were derived from the report Ministry of Social Development: Social Outcomes Modelling – 2022 Results, which is publicly available at: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/official-information-responses/2023/december/social-outcomes-modelling-2022-results-report-draft.pdf>

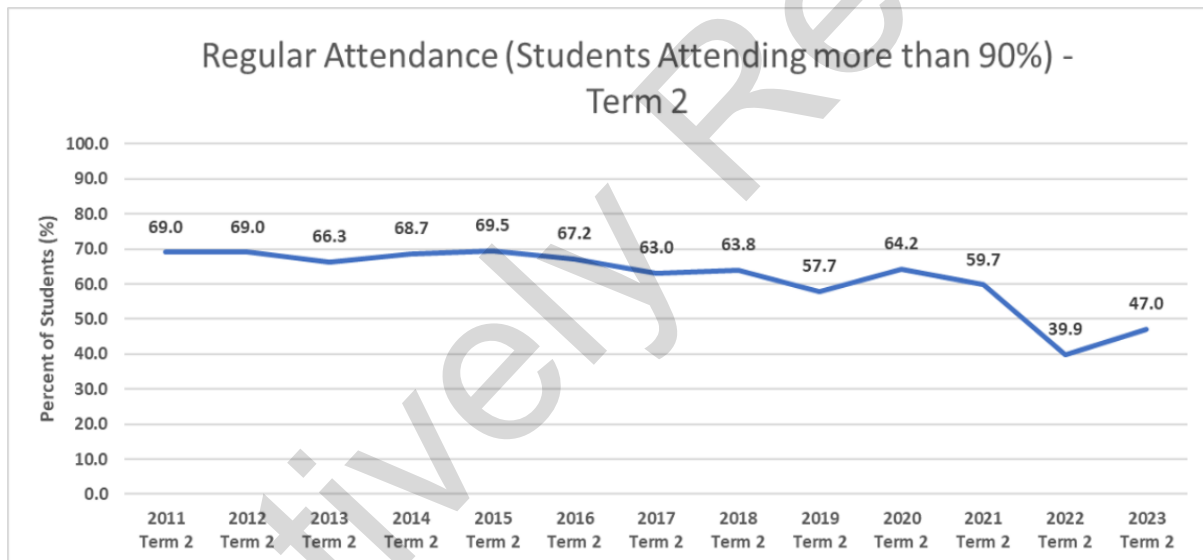
- 12 I intend to return to Cabinet with further proposals to support my Attendance Action Plan. The above initiatives will help us to improve school attendance, but it will take time, consistent focus, and the efforts of many including front-line educators, iwi, service providers, parents and students.

Background

Regular attendance rates have been declining over the past few years and some students are more impacted than others

- 13 I am deeply concerned about the ongoing decline in attendance. Regular attendance rates in New Zealand have declined since 2015 from 69.5% in Term 2 2015 to 57.7% in Term 2 2019.⁴
- 14 This decline has accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic to 47% in Term 2 2023, and 45.9% in Term 3 2023.

Figure 1: Regular attendance in New Zealand has been declining



- 15 Internationally we are performing poorly. Table One compares regular attendance rates in New Zealand with the latest available data from other countries that use similar attendance measures⁵. All countries have experienced similar declines in regular attendance since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

⁴ Percentage of students attending school more than 90% of the time each term.

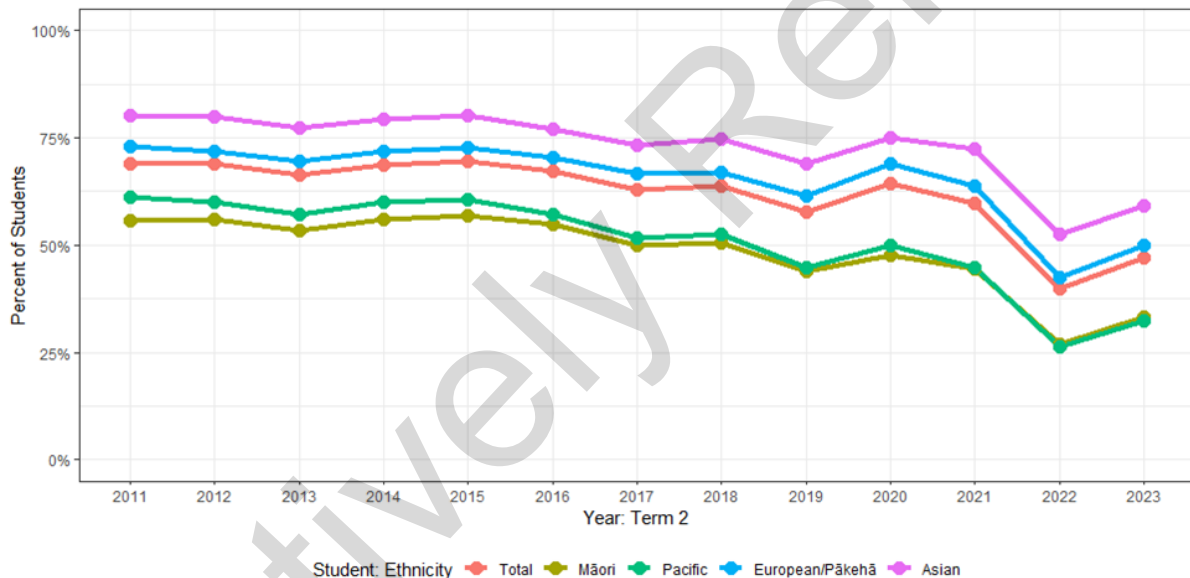
⁵ There are some differences in how each country measures and reports on attendance, which mean the differences and levels are indicative. For example, Australia reports for Semester 1 which combines Term 1 and Term 2.

Table One. International comparison Attendance Rates 2018 - 2023⁶

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
NZ	63.8	57.7	64.2	59.7	39.9	47
Australia	75.2	73.1	NA	71.2	49.9	61.6
USA	84	83.8	88.1	79.5	70.3	NA
England	89.1	86.9	87	76.5	75.1	NA
Ireland	87.9	93.4	88.6	64.7	NA	NA

- 16 In New Zealand, some student groups have been more impacted than others. Declines in attendance since 2015 have been more pronounced among students who are in schools with more socioeconomic barriers to achievement, who are Māori, or Pacific, for different year levels and in different regions. These inequities appear to have been perpetuated further by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further detail on the impacts for various groups is provided in **Appendix One**.

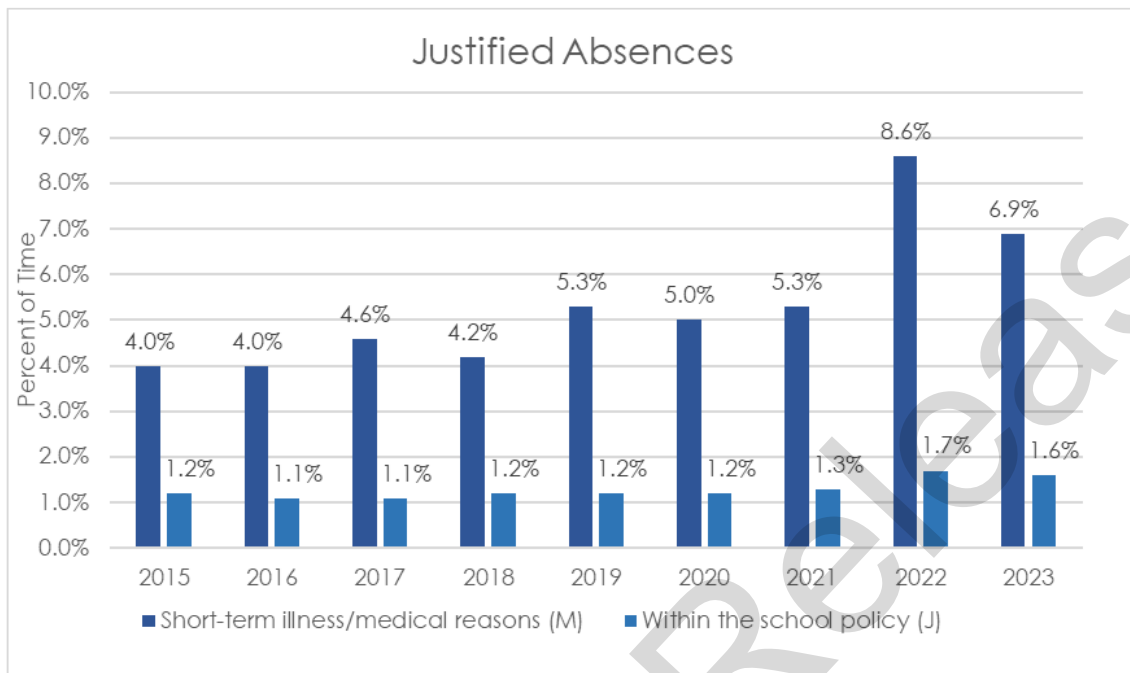
Figure 2: Regular attendance by ethnicity in Term 2 from 2011-2023



- 17 There are several drivers for declining regular attendance rates. The main driver for non-attendance continues to be short-term illness or other medical reasons, including COVID-19 and other typical winter illnesses. Absences due to short-term illness/medical reasons made up 6.9% of time in Term 2 2023, down from 8.6% in Term 2 2022.

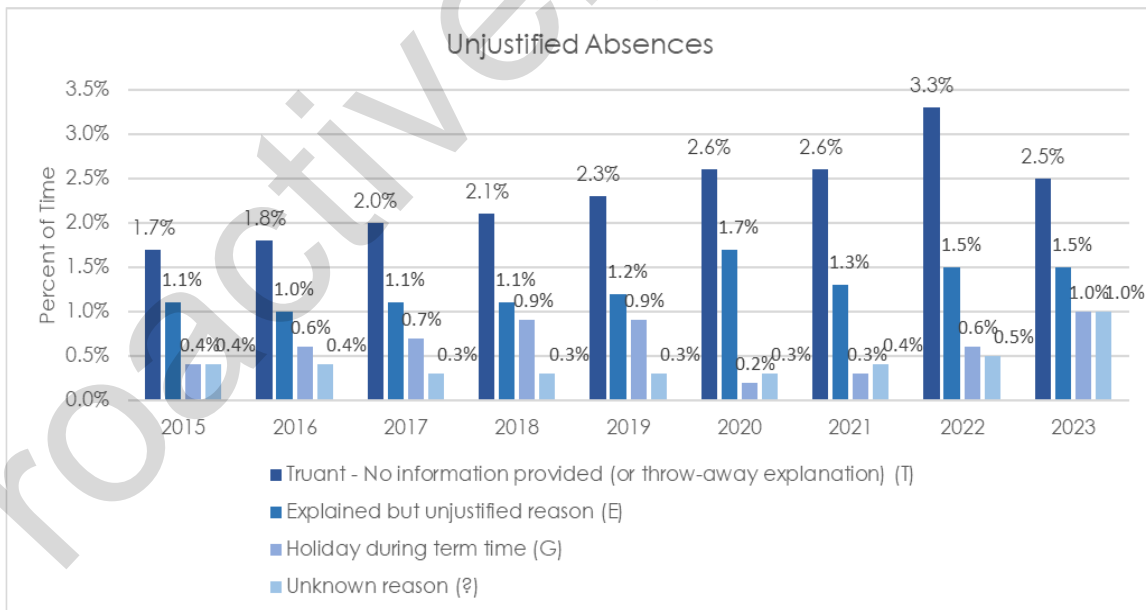
⁶ NA = Not Available

Figure 3: Absence due to short-term illness/medical reasons and justified absences within school policy Term 2 2015 to 2023



18 Truancy was the largest contributor to unjustified absences, making up 2.5% of all time in Term 2 2023, down from 3.3% in Term 2 2022.

Figure 4: Absence for unjustified reasons Term 2 2015 to 2023



This is concerning because attending school is associated with achievement, which in turn affects long-term prospects

- 19 Attending school matters because it is strongly associated with attaining educational qualifications⁷. Analysis under the previous decile system suggests that the learning of students in low decile schools may be more impacted by even small absences from school, than it is for students in high decile schools.⁸
- 20 Higher levels of educational attainment have been shown to be associated with better health and mortality outcomes, higher lifetime income and job stability, lower criminality, and increased civic engagement and social cohesion.⁹ Improving education outcomes has positive effects for labour market and health outcomes. Gains made in each area can complement and build on each other.
- 21 As an example of the poor life outcomes, I am trying to avoid by focussing on attendance, there are 70,000 more people on a Jobseeker unemployment benefit today than there were in 2017. MSD have told us that for the 2,000 young people receiving a youth payment or young parent payment, they are now expected to spend an average of 24 years of their working life on a benefit. *
- 22 Regular school attendance is one of the five Child Poverty Related Indicators currently used to measure our progress in addressing the wider causes and consequences of child poverty. This is because poverty and disadvantage can pose barriers to school attendance. Our work to improve school attendance will also be an integral part of grappling with child poverty.¹⁰

There are a number of drivers for non-attendance

- 23 We know from the range of research and evidence into the reasons for non-attendance, (e.g. the Growing Up in New Zealand Study)¹¹, that there are many and varied reasons students aren't attending school. From this body of research, drivers of non-attendance can be grouped into three broad categories:
 - 23.1 *school-level factors* - for example, bullying and discrimination; poor teacher-student or teacher-parent relationships; curriculum not engaging; attendance related attitudes and norms in the school;
 - 23.2 *family-level factors* - for example, lack of resources for transport, food or school-related materials; conflicting priorities; holidays and family-related trips; disruptive or traumatic events; negative intergenerational experiences in the education system; low parental expectations; and family violence;

⁷ He Whakaaro: What is the relationship between attendance and attainment? Ministry of Education. 2021. – Strong positive correlation between attendance and literacy and numeracy scores over Years 4-10, as well as NCEA attainment across Levels 1, 2 and 3.

⁸ This pattern does not apply to Kaupapa Māori and Māori medium settings. Despite the lower levels of attendance of Māori students in Kaupapa Māori and Māori medium settings, both in general and during Covid-19, these students achieve higher rates of NCEA attainment when compared with Māori students in English medium settings.

⁹ NZIER. 2021. Under-served learners: The economic and wellbeing benefits of improving education outcomes. A report to UP Education.; OECD. 2021. Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators, Indicator A6 – How are social outcomes related to education.

¹⁰ Child Poverty Related Indicators Report (2020/2021) | Child and Youth Wellbeing (childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz)

¹¹ This information comes from a range of research and evidence including domestic and international surveys, and represents reasons for non-attendance that have been self-reported by students and their whānau.

* Statistics relating to Jobseeker benefits outlined at paragraph 21 were derived from the report Ministry of Social Development: Social Outcomes Modelling – 2022 Results, which is publicly available at: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/official-information-responses/2023/december/social-outcomes-modelling-2022-results-report-draft.pdf>

- 23.3 *community or system-level factors* - for example, insecure housing; poverty; community attitudes to schooling; and lack of systemic support to address these pressures.

Analysis

There is no one solution to our low attendance rates, and a multi-faceted approach remains essential

- 24 Given the complex reasons contributing to students not attending school, there is no simple fix to the problem. It is important to take a multi-faceted approach.
- 25 The Education and Training Act 2020 (the Act) recognises the importance of school attendance to learning and educational achievement by:
- 25.1 placing legal requirements on parents to enrol their children and ensure those children attend school;
- 25.2 requiring schools to take all reasonable steps to ensure students attend school when it is open.
- 26 Right now, we do not have good information about what individual schools are doing to address attendance issues or their effectiveness. Nor do we have specific expectations for parents, schools and the Ministry with regard to attendance. The value of education, and of attending school, seems to have been degraded over time.
- 27 I intend to build an integrated approach to lift regular attendance through regulatory changes, stronger accountability mechanisms and operational guidance. This paper outlines the **immediate actions** I will take alongside **further investigation and change** which will form my attendance action plan to lift attendance.

There are four key immediate actions

- 28 There are four key immediate actions in my attendance action plan:
- 28.1 ensuring the strategic and operational efforts of the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) and the Education Review Office (ERO) are geared towards attendance, as a key Government priority;
- 28.2 progressing public messaging initiatives to shift attitudes and behaviours about the importance of school attendance;
- 28.3 publishing attendance data more frequently to help raise public awareness and monitor progress;
- 28.4 ensuring that the local support available to schools for reducing barriers to attendance is efficient and effective.
- 29 I provide more detail on each of these below.

The Ministry and ERO are ensuring their strategic and operational efforts are geared towards attendance as a key Government priority

- 30 The Ministry is aligning its strategic and operational activities to drive the Attendance Action Plan as a key contributor to every child achieving to the best of their ability and gaining qualifications that will support them into further study and employment. As part of its recently announced Change Programme, responding to the Government's savings targets, the Ministry is identifying ways to become a more efficient and effective organisation.
- 31 This will include aligning structures and resources to deliver on priorities; working in an integrated manner from policy development through to front line support and delivery; and building an integrated evaluative framework so that it knows the impact of its interventions.
- 32 ERO's expert Evaluation Partners are working with schools across New Zealand to ensure that they are actively monitoring attendance data. Where concerns are identified ERO is prioritising schools putting in place targets and plans of actions to address attendance. ERO is also scrutinising Boards Assurance Statements to ensure they attest to monitoring attendance and having policies and practices in place to improve attendance.

The Ministry is progressing initiatives to shift attitudes and behaviours around school attendance

- 33 There is a need to shift public attitudes and behaviours towards school attendance. Public messaging about risks related to COVID-19 has taught parents and students to exercise an abundance of caution – but this may have contributed to unexpectedly high rates of absences recorded as sicknesses. Mental health and anxiety issues are increasing, with many children and parents viewing not attending school as, at least, part of the solution to these issues, contributing towards low attendance rates.
- 34 Health is a priority, but so is education – and public health practitioners recognise education as a significant determinant of positive health outcomes. I am concerned that children and young people are staying home even when it would be safe for them to attend school.
- 35 Furthermore, research by the Education Review Office (ERO) has shown that many parents do not see regular attendance at school as a priority and consider, for example, that absence to celebrate a birthday or to take a family holiday is acceptable.
- 36 As a first step, the Ministry has been working with the Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand on updating their public health guidance to take into account the importance of school attendance. This will occur in April. This should help parents, students and schools to make informed decisions about attendance.
- 37 As the Associate Minister of both Education and Health, I place priority on communicating clearly and effectively with parents and the health sector about changes in public health advice relating to attendance.
- 38 In addition to a press release, I intend to undertake joint ministerial communication activities to inform schools, boards of trustees and education peak bodies as well as general practitioner professional associations so these groups clearly understand

how the changes impact them. This is alongside clear guidance for parents so that students who are well enough to attend school do so.

39 In addition, I have directed the Ministry to develop a nationally supported, locally delivered information and behaviour change campaign to shift the attitudes of students, parents, and communities towards school attendance. This approach involves the Ministry providing its front-line regional teams with content and logistical support that schools and communities can draw on for their own locally designed attendance campaigns. It will include activities such as:

39.1 Providing consistent national attendance messaging and a campaign management approach;

39.2 Engaging people who are relatable to target audiences to deliver the messaging;

39.3 Delivering communications collateral for use in schools and kura;

39.4 Supporting regions to analyse data to improve campaign targeting where needed.

40 This campaign will draw upon the experiences of successful campaigns in the recent past. For example, Kura - Let's Do It was a successful local campaign in the Eastern Bay of Plenty which used social media and radio to engage students to return to school. The proposed campaign for improving attendance will also primarily use digital forms of communication including social media on national and local levels.

41 Although the exact funding needed for this campaign is yet to be determined, I expect it will be relatively low cost due to the digital focus. A similar national awareness campaign had a total cost of \$1m¹² and we estimate a cost of up to this amount for this campaign.

42 Alongside this campaign, I also intend to send a letter to School Boards to communicate my expectations around school attendance and the importance of reducing disruption to term times.

I have directed the Ministry to publish attendance data more frequently to raise public awareness and monitor progress

43 Currently attendance data is only published a number of months after the end of each school term. I have asked the Ministry to publish attendance data more frequently. Starting Term 2 2024, the Ministry will publish provisional daily attendance data on a weekly basis, showing the percentage of students attending school on any given day.

44 This will allow us to track our progress closer to real time as we introduce the other initiatives in the attendance action plan. This immediate action will be followed by further change in 2025 to improve how the Ministry publishes attendance data – which is discussed further from paragraph 48. How I intend to use this attendance

¹² This included agency costs (\$294,900), media costs (\$480,000), baseline research (\$56,600), focus group research (\$98,500) and impact assessment reports (\$70,000).

data to better understand the drivers and target interventions is discussed from paragraph 52.

There is also local support available to schools for supporting attendance which can be strengthened

- 45 There has been recent investment into the Attendance Service and the Regional Response Fund to provide local support for schools in reducing the barriers to attendance. Attendance Services are schools, iwi, non-government organisations and private providers who are contracted by the Ministry. The Regional Response Fund provides funding for the Ministry's regional directors to allocate to schools, community groups and students in their region (see **Appendix Two** for further information about these).
- 46 New Attendance Officers employed by Attendance Service providers work with schools to develop strategies to address issues contributing to students who are moderately absent (70-80% attendance) and irregularly absent (80-90% attendance) from school.
- 47 There is \$47.5m per annum invested into these and other initiatives and services to strengthen attendance. There is a need to investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of these services and programmes, given that attendance numbers have not improved since they were implemented.
- 48 I have commissioned ERO to undertake an urgent independent review of the Attendance Service, including the new Attendance Officers, and other supports for addressing persistent truancy, to inform future decisions. The Ministry is also undertaking an internal review of the Attendance Service and other programmes that they fund. These reviews will be driven by analysis of available performance and outcome data to determine how the current investment in attendance can have the greatest impact.

Further investigation and change

- 49 In addition to the immediate actions outlined above, I am undertaking further investigation into other initiatives to lift attendance. These initiatives will take longer because they require data improvements, further analysis and development of advice along with potential regulatory changes.

They include:

- 49.1 Understanding more about causes of non-attendance through research and analysis so that we better understand the drivers of non-attendance and target interventions particularly for chronic non-attendance or students who are not enrolled;

- 49.2 9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- 49.3 Strengthening School Board's accountability to make school attendance a strategic priority, 9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- 49.4 Strengthening the focus of educators and school leaders by exploring options to make attendance a required goal for each Kahui Ako; and
- 49.5 Strengthening parents' accountability for making sure their children are attending school every day and exploring the use of enforcement levers where necessary.

I want there to be better data reporting and plan to make the reporting of attendance data a mandatory requirement

- 50 I intend to report on attendance data more frequently, moving from weekly to daily reporting from Term 1 2025.
- 51 I am also looking into strengthening the mandatory reporting requirement for schools to submit attendance data. It is mandatory for schools to submit attendance data at the end of each term, but the Ministry has not emphasised the mandatory nature of this reporting. Not all schools have submitted attendance data.¹³ I intend to make it mandatory for schools to submit attendance data every day for the previous school day.
- 52 I will provide further information when I return to Cabinet to report on my proposal for the regulatory changes required to support attendance.
- 53 The Ministry is undertaking activities to make broader data improvements, for example to set and implement minimum National Student Number data requirements and to review Attendance Codes¹⁴, which explain why students are absent from school. There is an opportunity to streamline and improve clarity to improve consistency in data reporting, providing more accurate data from which to draw insights around the reasons for non-attendance.

I want to better understand the causes of non-attendance so I can target interventions to the root of the problem

- 54 I will make better make use of this attendance data to understand the long-term drivers and impacts for students not attending school. This includes looking to identify possible intervention points for early intervention to support students to reengage in learning. 9(2)(f)(iv)

- 55 9(2)(f)(iv)

I am exploring options for strengthening School Board's accountability for school attendance...

- 56 As well as communicating my expectations for school attendance to boards, I have asked the Ministry for advice on imposing a duty on School Boards to make

¹³ Around 95% of schools currently submit attendance data for the termly collections. Around 85% submit data for the weekly collection (not always the same schools every week).

¹⁴ There are currently 26 attendance codes, 17 which define presence and 9 which define absence.

attendance a strategic priority, to be monitored by ERO. This would ensure that schools put attendance at the forefront of their strategic and operational decisions. I will return to Cabinet with further advice on this.

9(2)(f)(iv)

57 9(2)(f)(iv)

58 9(2)(f)(iv)

59 9(2)(f)(iv)

Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning) may have a role to play in schools' attendance response

60 Kāhui Ako are a mechanism for teachers and leaders within and across schools to work together to tackle shared achievement challenges for students by utilising the skills, knowledge and experience of their colleagues.¹⁵

61 Kāhui Ako currently have significant autonomy to set goals which target specific challenges faced by the particular area. Currently only 5 percent have a specific attendance goal set. However, if an opportunity arises for Kāhui Ako to strengthen their focus of teachers and school leaders on attendance I will progress it alongside the Minister of Education, noting that this would likely have resourcing implications.

I want to set clearer expectations and strengthen accountability around attendance, and will be reporting to Cabinet with more detail about this soon with a proposed Traffic Light System

62 As mentioned earlier in the paper, we do not have a clear picture about what individual schools are doing to address attendance issues, and specific expectations for parents, schools and the Ministry are unclear.

63 The Traffic Light System will also set out the requirements and expectations for parents, schools, and the Ministry at different stages of a student's attendance. Each stage, from regular attendance through to a student becoming unenrolled, will have a trigger that will result in a response or a set of responses aiming to bring the student back to attending regularly. It will set out clear expectations for the responsibilities of everyone relating to unjustified absences.

¹⁵ The model is enabled through the establishment of Kāhui Ako roles: the Leadership Role, the Within School Teacher Role and the Across School Teacher Role, with associated allowances and release time.

- 64 There are enforcement levers in the Education and Training Act 2020 that enable prosecution and fining parents of children who are regularly absent from school. I do not consider that these levers are being used effectively. I am investigating whether we should use them more regularly as in other jurisdictions (such as the United Kingdom and many countries in Europe) and/or whether we need to introduce other regulatory levers.
- 65 I envisage that enforcement action against parents of children who are frequently absent from school would be part of a proposed Traffic Light System and be led by the Ministry of Education. It is my intention that as much as possible, support is provided to parents and whānau before or alongside any enforcement action.
- 66 I will return to Cabinet in April to outline the Traffic Light System for attendance, including associated regulatory changes required.

Cost-of-living Implications

- 67 There are no direct cost-of-living implications associated with this paper.

Financial Implications

- 68 There are some financial implications associated with this paper. These include:

- 68.1 9(2)(j) [REDACTED]
- 68.2 9(2)(j) [REDACTED]

- 69 These costs would be met within baseline funding.

Legislative Implications

- 70 There are no direct legislative implications associated with this paper.

Treaty of Waitangi Implications

- 71 Efforts to increase student attendance will have a positive effect on Maori student achievement and wellbeing.

Impact Analysis

Regulatory Impact Statement

- 72 A Regulatory Impact Statement has not been prepared for this paper as no regulatory changes proposed.

Population Implications

- 73 Declining attendance rates is problem across all population groups, as a result, there will be implications for all student groups.
- 74 We know, however, that some population groups are disproportionately impacted. Recent attendance data shows a greater decline in regular attendance between 2015 and 2019 compared to the general student population for students who are:

- 74.1 in schools with more socioeconomic barriers to achievement, (14 percentage point decline compared to 11 percentage point decline for students in schools with less socioeconomic barriers to achievement);
- 74.2 Māori or Pacific (14 percentage point decline compared to 12 percentage point decline for the general student population);
- 74.3 in primary and intermediate school (14 percentage point decline compared to 8 percentage point decline for secondary students).
- 75 Action to lift attendance can benefit all student groups, but there will continue to be local responses tailored to the needs of different student groups.
- 76 When regular attendance increases across the system, I expect to see these students making more progress at school and experiencing higher rates of achievement, which can support equity.

Human Rights

- 77 There are no human rights implications for this paper.

Use of external resources

- 78 The Ministry has used a time-limited attendance programme team, made up primarily of contractors with specialist skills, to drive specific improvements in service delivery, information technology, business process support and evaluation in the implementation of the Attendance and Engagement Strategy (Budget 2022) and subsequent Attendance Turnaround package (Budget 2023). This programme is now transitioning activity to permanent Ministry teams and will conclude by June 2024.
- 79 The knowledge and expertise of three contractors was used in two one-hour meetings and in the review of documents to provide specialist operational policy knowledge and contextual evidence in the development of this Cabinet paper. This supported the completeness and expediency of advice development within the desired timeframes.

Consultation

- 80 The Ministry has consulted with Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Treasury, Ministry of Health, Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Social Development.

Communications


- 81 Some of the initiatives proposed will involve communications with the sector, including communications aimed at parents, students, communities and schools. Following Cabinet consideration of this paper, the Ministry will discuss communications plans with my office.

Proactive Release

- 82 I intend to release the material within this Cabinet paper within 30 days after decisions have been made by Cabinet, subject to any redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- 1 **note** that lifting attendance is one of my main priorities and I plan to take a multi-faceted approach through an attendance action plan that includes both immediate actions as well as further investigation and change;
- 2 **note** that we need tackle this catastrophe head on, and New Zealand's school attendance rates need to be viewed as a national catastrophe by politicians, educators, parents, iwi leaders, Pacific leaders, community leaders, Church leaders, cultural and sporting icons, the media, and most importantly the students;
- 3 **note** that we need a better understanding the drivers of non-attendance so we get very clear problem definition and can target interventions effectively, particularly for the chronic non-attenders or students that are now not enrolled;
- 4 **note** the strategic and operational efforts of the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) and the Education Review Office (ERO) are geared towards Attendance, as a key Government priority;
- 5 **note** that officials are considering how best to support behavioural change to encourage attendance, including developing a nationally coordinated, locally delivered information and behavioural change campaign;
- 6 **note** that the Ministry of Education is working with the Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand to update public health guidance to reflect the importance of school attendance when students are well enough to do so;
- 7 **note** that the Ministry of Education will increase the frequency of reporting on attendance data, by reporting weekly from Term 2 2024 and daily from Term 1 2025;
- 8 **9(2)(f)(iv)**

- 9 **note** that the Ministry of Education is considering how best to strengthen local support for schools for reducing barriers to attendance;
- 10 **note** that I am seeking advice on strengthening accountability of School Boards which will be part of my Attendance Action Plan;
- 11 **note** I have asked the Ministry of Education to develop a Traffic Light System for lifting attendance, and it will provide for a systematic response to unjustified absences.
- 12 **note** that the above initiatives will help us to improve school attendance, but it will take time, consistent focus, and the efforts of many including front-line educators, iwi, Pacifica leaders, service providers, parents and students.
- 13 **note** that I will return to report to Cabinet with further proposals to support my attendance action plan.

Hon David Seymour
Associate Minister of Education

Proactively Released

Appendices

Appendix 1: Detailed data on regular attendance rates

Appendix 2: (Draft) *The Education (When State Schools Must Be Open and Closed) Regulations 2023*

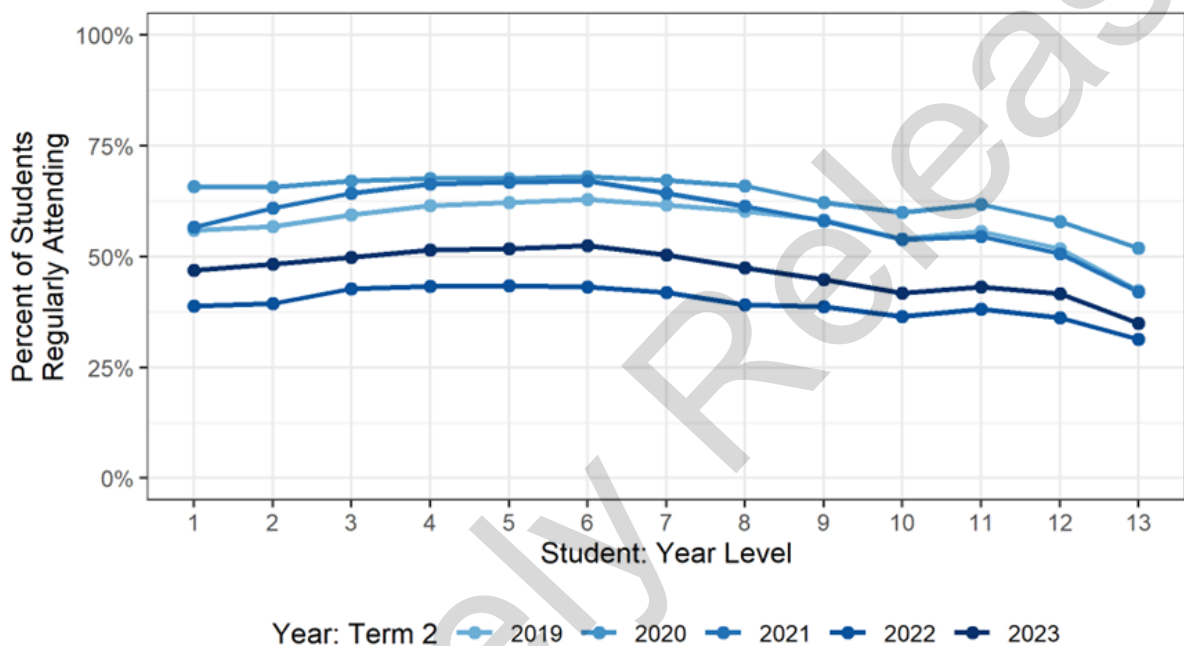
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Appendix One: Detailed data on regular attendance rates

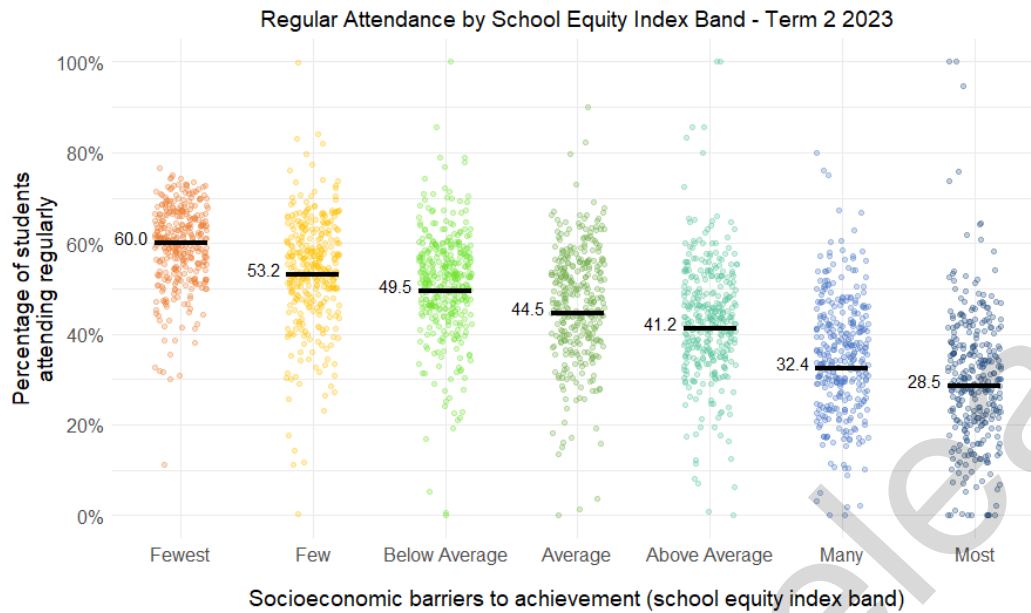
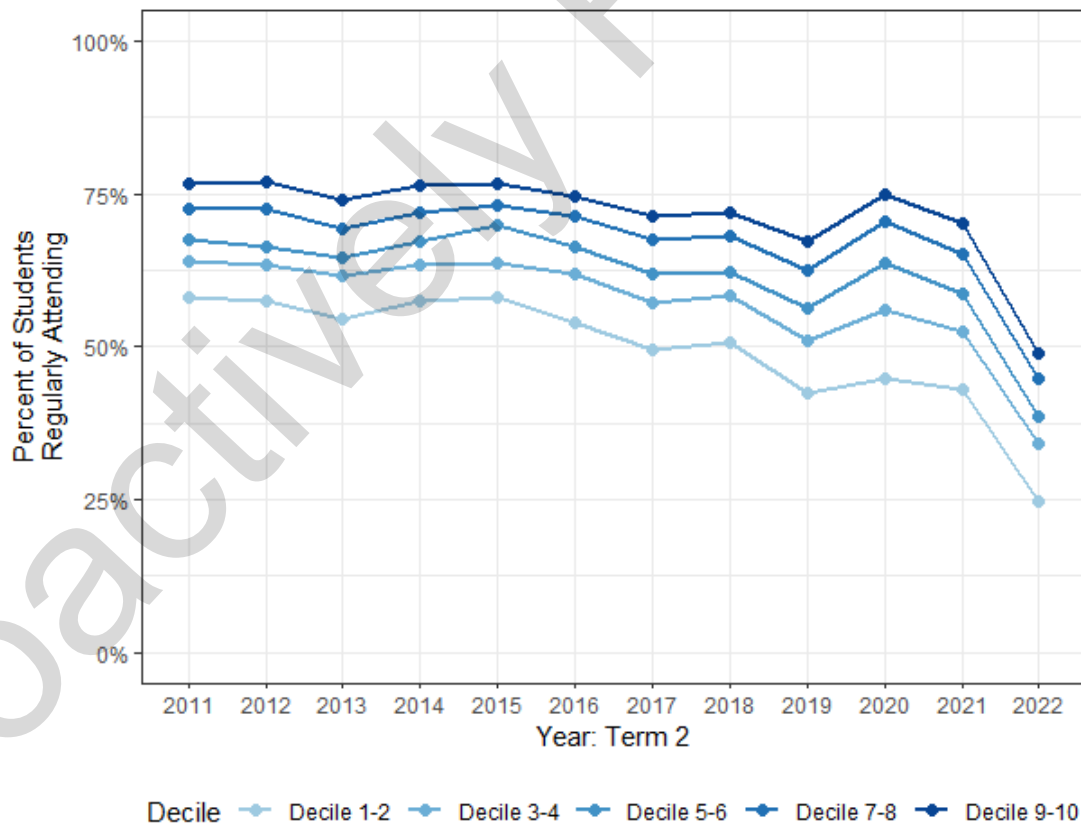
The following graphs provide further details on the trends for different groups of students.

- 14 The percentage of students regularly attending school and kura usually increases for students in Years 1 to 6 and then falls through students' intermediate and secondary years. In Term 2 2023, regular attendance for primary students was 49.8% and for secondary students it was 41.7%.

Figure 3: Regular attendance by year level in Term 2 2019-2023

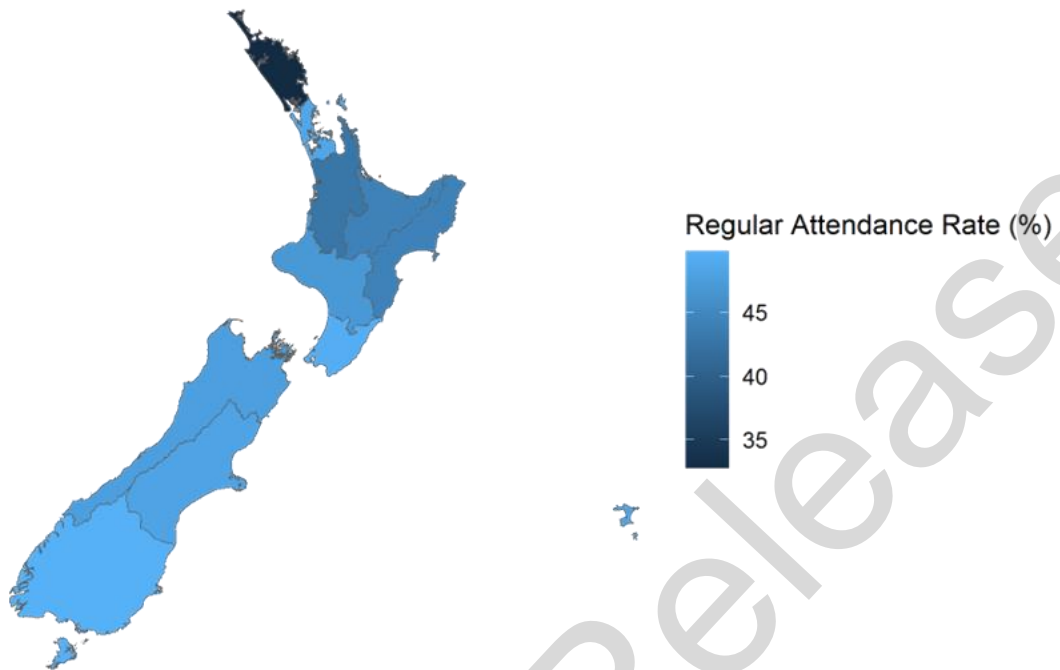


- 15 The graphs below show regular attendance for Term 2 2023 by School Equity Index Band and for decile up to 2022. The average regular attendance rates are lower for students in schools with higher socioeconomic barriers, but there is significant variation in attendance rates for schools within each band. The variation in attendance rates is greater in schools with higher socioeconomic barriers to achievement.

Figure 4: Regular attendance by Equity Index band Term 2 2023¹⁶**Figure 5: Regular attendance by Decile groups 2011 - 2022**

¹⁶ The solid line is the overall percentage (mean) of students attending regularly for each band and each point denotes an individual school.

Figure 6: Regular attendance rates by Education region in Term 2 2023



Appendix Two: Current Government supports

Attendance Service and Attendance Officers

- 16 There are 78 Attendance Services which work with schools in a designated area to assist with student absences. They contract Attendance Advisors who work with students who are chronically absent or non-enrolled to help get these students back into school through case-by-case management with individual students. The demand for this service has increased in recent years.
- 17 New Attendance Officers were introduced in 2023 as part of the existing Attendance Services. These Attendance Officers focus on enrolled students who are moderately or irregularly absent, whom were previously outside the scope of Attendance Services' work.
- 18 These Attendance Officers are not to be confused with the Attendance Officers under section 48 of the Education and Training Act 2020. The Attendance Officers under the Act focus on chronic absences and have powers under section 49 of the Act to directly intervene and may detain students between 5 and 16 years old who appear to be absent from school. These Attendance Officers are employed by individual School Boards.
- 19 Unlike Attendance Advisors and the Attendance Officers under the Act, these new Attendance Officers do not generally work directly with individual students. Instead, they help schools to develop strategies to address issues contributing to high levels of moderate and irregular absence.
- 20 There are 65 Attendance Services that are contract holders for the Attendance Officer role and 76 full-time equivalents for the Attendance Officer role. Most Attendance Officers have contract terms through until 31 December 2025, plus a two-year right of renewal. There is a standard termination clause that enables the Ministry to terminate these contracts with at least 90 days' notice in writing.

Regional Response Fund

- 21 The Regional Response Fund is a fund of \$10 million per annum that is intended to provide additional resources and programmes to support participation in education by reducing barriers to attendance and engagement for ākonga (learners) who are disengaged or disengaging from education.
- 22 It was implemented in Budget 2022 in response to the impacts of COVID-19 on attendance and prioritises supporting Māori ākonga, Pacific learners and learners with high needs.
- 23 The fund is allocated to Regional Directors of Education across the different regions of New Zealand. These directors are given broad criteria to best allocate this funding among schools and students in the region to support attendance.
- 24 Since July 2023, the Ministry has tightened reporting requirements associated with each Regional Response Fund initiative to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions. The first annual evaluation report will be published in August 2024.



Briefing Note: Draft Cabinet paper – *Approach to improving attendance in schools*

To:	Hon David Seymour, Associate Minister of Education (Partnership Schools)		
Cc:	Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education		
Date:	23 February 2024	Priority:	High
Security Level:	In-Confidence	METIS No:	1323265
Drafter:	Lawrence Gao	DDI:	9(2)(a)
Key Contact:	Jennifer Fraser	DDI:	9(2)(a)
Seen by the Communications Team:	Yes	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Briefing

The paper provides you with the draft Cabinet paper *Approach to improving attendance in schools* for your review and feedback (Annex 1).

Next Steps

1. Here is the proposed timeline for taking this paper through Cabinet.

Deliverable	Due
Draft Cabinet paper to Minister for feedback	Friday 23 February
Consultation with Minister Stanford	Monday 26 February- Wednesday 28 February
Ministerial consultation	Thursday 29 February- Wednesday 6 March
Cabinet paper due to be lodged	Thursday 7 March (before 10am)
CBC consideration	Monday 11 March
Cabinet consideration	Monday 18 March

2. We can update the Cabinet paper based on your feedback as required.
3. Note this paper would normally be considered by the SOU committee, so we suggest that your office confirm with the Cabinet office that it can go to CBC on 11 March.
4. We will provide you with further advice to take to Cabinet on proposed regulatory changes to support this policy. Here is an indicative timeline for the advice on the regulatory change:



Milestone	Dates (2024)
Draft Cabinet paper to your office for feedback	28 March
Cabinet paper lodged	4 April
Social Outcomes Committee consideration	10 April
Cabinet confirmation for drafting	15 April
9(2)(f)(iv)	

Recommended Action:

- a. **note** we have attached a draft Cabinet paper for your feedback which would be due to be lodged on Thursday 7 March.

Noted

- b. **note** we can provide you with an updated version of the draft Cabinet paper before Ministerial consultation starts on Thursday 29 February.

Noted

Proactive Release

- c. **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full following Cabinet decisions on the attached papers.

Agree / Disagree


Jennifer Fraser
General Manager, Schools Policy
Ministry of Education

23/02/2024

Hon David Seymour
Associate Minister of Education

— / — / —

Annex 1: Cabinet Paper: Approach to improving attendance in schools (*attached separately*)

Proactively Released



Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Approach to Improving Attendance in Schools

Portfolio **Associate Education (Partnership Schools)**

On 20 March 2024, the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee:

- 1 **noted** that lifting attendance in schools is a Government priority, and that the Associate Minister of Education (Partnership Schools) (the Associate Minister) plans to take a multi-faceted approach through an attendance action plan that includes both immediate actions as well as further investigation and change;
- 2 **noted** that New Zealand's school attendance rates need to be viewed as a national catastrophe by politicians, educators, parents, iwi leaders, Pacific leaders, community leaders, Church leaders, cultural and sporting icons, the media, and most importantly the students, and that this catastrophe needs to be tackled head on;
- 3 **noted** that there needs to be a better understanding of the drivers of non-attendance so that there is a very clear problem definition and interventions can be targeted effectively, particularly for the chronic non-attenders or students that are now not enrolled;
- 4 **noted** that the strategic and operational efforts of the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) and the Education Review Office (ERO) are geared towards attendance, as a key Government priority;
- 5 **noted** that officials are considering how best to support behavioural change to encourage attendance, including developing a nationally coordinated, locally delivered information and behavioural change campaign;
- 6 **noted** that the Ministry of Education is working with the Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand to update public health guidance to reflect the importance of school attendance when students are well enough to do so;
- 7 **noted** that the Ministry will increase the frequency of reporting on attendance data by reporting weekly from Term Two 2024 and daily from Term One 2025;
- 8 9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]
- 9 **noted** that the Ministry is considering how best to strengthen local support for schools for reducing barriers to attendance;

- 10 **noted** that the Associate Minister is seeking advice on strengthening accountability of School Boards, which will be part of the Attendance Action Plan;
- 11 **noted** that the Associate Minister has asked the Ministry to develop a Traffic Light System for lifting attendance, and that it will provide for a systematic response to unjustified absences;
- 12 **noted** that the above initiatives will help to improve school attendance, but it will take time, consistent focus, and the efforts of many including front-line educators, iwi, Pacifica leaders, service providers, parents and students;
- 13 **noted** that the Associate Minister will report back to Cabinet with further proposals to support the Attendance Action Plan.

Rebecca Davies
Committee Secretary

Present:

Rt Hon Christopher Luxon
Rt Hon Winston Peters
Hon David Seymour
Hon Nicola Willis (Chair)
Hon Dr Shane Reti
Hon Erica Stanford
Hon Paul Goldsmith
Hon Louise Upston
Hon Mark Mitchell
Hon Tama Potaka
Hon Matt Doocey
Hon Melissa Lee
Hon Nicole McKee
Hon Casey Costello
Hon Penny Simmonds
Hon Chris Penk
Hon Karen Chhour

Officials present from:

Office of the Prime Minister
Office of Hon Dr Shane Reti
Officials Committee for SOU



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report of the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee: Period Ended 22 March 2024

On 25 March 2024, Cabinet made the following decisions on the work of the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee for the period ended 22 March 2024:

Out of scope [redacted]

SOU-24-MIN-0010 **Approach to Improving Attendance in Schools** CONFIRMED
Portfolio: Education

Out of scope [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Rachel Hayward
Secretary of the Cabinet