



Back to class:

How are attitudes to attendance changing?





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Executive summary

Going to school is critical for our children's future. The evidence is clear that every day of school matters – missing school leads to lower achievement. In New Zealand, students are expected to attend school every day the school is open. And yet many don't. The Education Review Office (ERO) was commissioned to undertake a national review to identify whether regular attendance and attitudes to attendance have changed and what school actions and supports make a difference. We found that, for the first time since 2022, attendance is improving. This summary sets out why and what more can be done.

What is attendance?

Attendance is when students are at school and in the class they are supposed to be in. If students miss a week or more of school in a term they have 'non-regular attendance'. Students who miss a week each term will have missed out on a year of schooling by the time they are 16.

Why is attendance important?

Attendance is a key driver of students' achievement, engagement in school, wellbeing, and their lifelong outcomes. Regular attendance is linked to academic achievement in both primary and secondary schools. Conversely, poor attendance is associated with increased anxiety about schoolwork, lower sense of belonging, lower motivation, greater exposure to bullying, and feeling unfairly treated by teachers. Long-term consequences of poor attendance include lower qualifications, reduced employment and income, poorer health, increased justice system involvement, and higher government costs.

Why do attitudes to attendance matter?

Attitudes are deep beliefs that shape thoughts and decision-making. Attitudes matter because they influence behaviour, including whether a student goes to school regularly. Students who think daily attendance is important are more likely to attend regularly than those who don't. Parents who say they are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school are more likely to have a child who doesn't attend regularly.

Key findings

Our review led to 13 key findings across three areas.

Area 1: What has happened to attendance in New Zealand?

Finding 1: Attendance has been increasing since 2022 and is now back to pre-Covid levels.

- Now nearly six in ten students (58 percent) are attending regularly, up from four in ten (40 percent) in 2022.
- Both primary and secondary students have improved attendance to pre-Covid levels
- Encouragingly, students of different ethnicities and in schools within high and low-socio-economic communities have seen similar improvements to their attendance.
- Some students continue to face more barriers to attendance, including bullying, illness, and challenges with transport and having the uniform and equipment they need. Māori students, Pacific students, and students in low socio-economic communities still have lower rates of attendance.

Area 2: Why are students going to school more?

ERO looked at why students are going to school more. Identifying the reasons will enable us to continue to raise attendance. ERO found three key reasons:

- Student attitudes
- Parent attitudes
- School actions

Reason 1: Students' attitudes

Finding 2: More students now think education is important for their future, think attending daily is important and never want to miss school.

- Attitudes drive attendance, students are 1.7 times more likely to attend regularly if they think daily attendance is important.
- Three-quarters of students (73 percent) now think daily attendance is important, compared to two-thirds (67 percent) in 2022. Students of all ages tell us that daily attendance is important for keeping up with their learning and to improve their career opportunities and wider life skills.
- Eight in ten students (82 percent) now think school is important for their future, an increase of four percentage points since 2022.
- Almost a third of students (28 percent) report they never want to miss school – up from 15 percent in 2022. Students tell us they want to go every day when they do fun and interesting things at school and because they want to see their friends, highlighting the importance of social connectedness.

- Encouragingly, students in schools in low socio-economic communities show double the improvement in attitudes to daily attendance (12 percentage point increase compared to 6 percentage points for students in high socio-economic communities) and now have better attitudes to daily attendance than other students.
- Students in low socio-economic communities now think school is just as important for their future as students in high socio-economic communities (82 percent and 84 percent respectively). Low socio-economic students' attitudes were previously 10 percentage points lower than high socio-economic students.
- Pacific students continue to have better attitudes to daily attendance than other students (78 percent compared to 71 percent).
- Concerningly, Māori students are the only group of students whose attitudes to daily attendance have not improved (only two thirds, 67 percent, see daily attendance as important).

Reason 2: Parents' attitudes

Finding 3: More parents now understand the importance of their child not missing a lot of school.

- Parents' attitudes matter – parents who are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school are over four times more likely to have a child not attending regularly.
- Fewer parents are comfortable keeping their child off school for a week or more. Now only three in ten parents (31 percent) are comfortable with keeping their child off school for a week or more in a term compared to four in ten (41 percent) in 2022.
- Parents tell us they are less comfortable with extended absences due to school messaging around the importance of attendance, through newsletters and direct communications with teachers. This messaging is especially impactful when schools refer to the impacts on their child's achievement and lifelong outcomes.
- Parents are being firmer on their children going to school rather than staying at home for mental health reasons. Parents willing to keep their child off school for mental health reasons have reduced from almost half (46 percent) in 2022 to around a quarter (28 percent) in 2025. Parents tell us that knowing their child will receive the right supports at school makes a difference.
- More parents see the law as a reason to attend school, especially Pacific parents. Around two-thirds of all parents (65 percent) now see the law as a reason to attend school (up from 58 percent in 2022. Seven in ten Pacific parents (70 percent) report the same.

Finding 4: However, parents are not yet taking daily attendance more seriously.

- While fewer parents are comfortable with their child missing a week or more, more parents are comfortable with their child missing a couple of days in a school term – up nine percentage points from half of parents (50 percent) in 2022 to six in ten parents (59 percent) in 2025.

- Nearly half of parents (47 percent) are still willing to let their child miss school for family holidays of one or two days (the same as 46 percent in 2022).
- Concerningly, Māori parents' attitudes to daily attendance have declined the most, only 86 percent see daily attendance as important, down five percentage points since 2022.

Finding 5: Parents are increasingly content for children to miss school for some 'justified' reasons.

- Concerningly, more parents are now willing to let their child miss school for family and cultural events (76 percent compared to 67 percent in 2022). Parents are especially likely to prioritise family events over school when relatives live far away.
- Worryingly, more parents are also willing to let their child miss school for out-of-school events (e.g. sports) (58 percent compared to 41 percent in 2022).
- We heard from parents across diverse communities that when they prioritise out-of-school events such as sporting tournaments and cultural celebrations—including kapa haka competitions, Polyfest, and regional sports fixtures—this is because they view them as vital for identity and their child's personal development. Parents do not always understand how missing school can disrupt the habit of attendance and how missing learning can change to accumulate.

Reason 3: Schools' actions

Finding 6: Schools are making students feel connected to school, and this has the biggest impact on attendance and student attitudes to attendance. Roles and responsibilities can help with this.

- Students are five times more likely to think daily attendance is important if they feel they belong at school. Three-quarters of students (73 percent) feel they belong. ERO found that schools increase belonging by strengthening students' relationships with each other and between teachers and students.
- Students are twice as likely to think daily attendance is important if they have a role or responsibility at school. Half of students (52 percent) report they have one. ERO found that roles and responsibilities build pride and purpose to attend, and leadership positions can help create peer influence that further supports attendance.

Finding 7: Schools are setting clearer expectations which helps students see daily attendance as important and helps parents see the value of school.

- Students are twice as likely to think daily attendance is important if the school is setting clear expectations. Around nine in ten teachers and leaders (93 percent) report setting clear expectations with students and just under three in five (57 percent) report setting clear expectations more than last year.

- Students report being influenced by positive messaging that emphasises the impact of absences on achievement and life outcomes.
 - ERO found that schools are doing this in various ways, through weekly assemblies and in-class messaging, and some are using student and parent ‘contracts.’ They are also sharing attendance data with students to help them see how they are tracking against targets.
 - More schools are now using attendance data and keeping parents informed.
- Schools setting clear expectations about attendance is the most important factor for parents reporting that school is important for their child’s future – parents are twice as likely to report school is important if the school is setting clear expectations.

Finding 8: Schools are providing practical supports, and this has a positive impact on both attendance and parent and student attitudes to daily attendance. Schools in low socio-economic communities use practical supports a lot more.

- Students are twice as likely to think daily attendance is important if the school is providing practical supports, and parents are 1.4 times more likely to report their attitudes to daily attendance have improved in the last year if the school is providing practical supports.
- Schools in low socio-economic communities are more likely to provide practical supports – over nine in ten teachers and leaders (93 percent) report they provide these compared to six in ten (60 percent) teachers and leaders in high socio-economic schools. ERO found practical supports commonly used include providing clothing, transport and meals.

Finding 9: Schools are providing rewards that help both parents and students see daily attendance as important. Most schools in low socio-economic communities use rewards, while most schools in high socio-economic areas don’t.

- Parents are 1.8 times more likely to think daily attendance is important if the school is using rewards. Students are 1.4 times more likely to think daily attendance is important if the school is using rewards.
- Schools in low socio-economic communities are three times more likely to use rewards than schools in high socio-economic communities (79 percent compared to 24 percent).
- ERO found that rewards can be individual or collective, celebrations, house points, or prizes. Rewards are motivating if students see them as valuable and achievable. Collective rewards can be especially motivating because students like the ‘team’ element and don’t want to let their peers down.
- Consequences are used least and much less by primary schools. ERO found that consequences have a positive influence on parents’ attitudes, but a negative impact on students’ attitudes to daily attendance. Students who report their school uses consequences are a third less likely to report they attend school regularly; they report being demotivated by consequences they think are unfair.

Finding 10: Schools that are successful in raising and maintaining attendance (even in challenging circumstances) have an “end-to-end”. They are aspirational, with leadership that drives a strong culture of attendance. They stay relentlessly focused on improvement, work in clearly defined roles, apply practices consistently, and partner with parents and whānau.

- High expectations are maintained even in the face of challenges. Out-performing schools have a strong commitment to and belief in improving attendance rates for all students.
- Leaders make raising attendance a priority by establishing targets and plans for improvement that they monitor for effectiveness. Staff have specific roles in improving attendance and do them well. Having a lead for attendance can help drive things forward.
- Out-performing schools develop solutions with parents, setting out clear roles and responsibilities for the school, the parents, and the student.

Finding 11: Schools’ patterns of closures also matter, as they can impact parent and student attitudes to attendance.

- Although school size, location, and socio-economic levels are stronger predictors of attendance, there is a link between how often schools are closed and regular attendance for primary schools.
- The timing of school closures can encourage absenteeism – closures on Thursdays or Tuesdays can lead to extended weekends and half-day closures can result in full-day absences.
- ERO found that frequent and short notice closures reinforce a more casual attitude toward attendance, undermining the message that every day matters.

Area 3: What are the challenges schools still face?

Finding 12: Schools report term-time holidays remain their main challenge for attendance. Term-time holidays are more of a challenge for schools in high socio-economic communities.

- Almost nine in ten teachers and leaders (88 percent) in schools in high socio-economic communities report holidays as a main challenge compared to 49 percent of teachers and leaders in low socio-economic communities.
- ERO found that families often go in term-time because it’s cheaper, weighing attendance against broader experiences and family connection.

Finding 13: Schools with significant attendance challenges can be overwhelmed and need support.

- Teachers can feel overwhelmed by the responsibility (particularly if the school has other issues it is facing) and want additional roles to help with attendance and help with educating parents about the importance of regular attendance.
- Some attendance challenges facing families are beyond what school can address and require broader responses.

How can we continue to increase attendance?

Based on these findings, ERO makes 10 recommendations across three areas to raise attendance.

Area 1: Continue to do what works

The Ministry of Education and schools should continue to:

Recommendation 1: Provide parents with visibility of their child's absences and total attendance through school reports and regular updates.

Recommendation 2: Target parents with both centralised and localised messaging to reinforce why every day matters – communicating the impact of absences on achievement and how missing bits of learning can lead to gaps in students' knowledge.

Recommendation 3: Provide practical support and data for school leaders to:

- understand what the evidence shows are the most effective things schools can do to support attendance – building students' connection to the school, setting clear expectations, providing practical supports, and using rewards.
- track the school's performance and learn from schools 'like them' about which methods and approaches are most effective.

Area 2: Strengthen accountability for attendance

The Ministry of Education and schools should continue to:

Recommendation 4: Remove the distinction between justified and unjustified absences so that schools and parents focus on what matters the most – the number of days students are in school learning.

Recommendation 5: Increase parents' awareness of the legal consequences already in place for parents that won't (not can't) support their child's attendance.

Recommendation 6: Make attendance a 'whole of society' issue, with increased expectations for other agencies engaging with parents and students (such as medical professionals, social services and others) to reinforce expectations of attendance.

Recommendation 7: Consider whether an attendance requirement or a visible record of attendance can be included for the new senior school qualifications so that it incentivises students to attend while also avoiding disadvantaging students who face significant barriers to attendance.

Recommendation 8: Monitor school closures and their impact on attendance and look carefully at which days schools are open for instruction and how this is communicated to parents to support attendance.

Area 3: Look more broadly

Recommendation 9: Consider innovative solutions that reduce the main drivers for students to miss schools – for example, consider international models of regional school holidays to reduce the cost of travelling in the school holidays and how extra-curricula providers can schedule activities for outside school time.

Recommendation 10: Reduce the impact of absence on attainment – for example, recognise that New Zealand’s remote location and high proportion of foreign-born residents create unique drivers for school absences and invest in supporting schools to ‘catch up’ students when they return.

Together these actions can help schools maintain the upward trend of increasing numbers of students attending regularly.

Conclusion

We found that attendance has improved and is now back at pre-Covid levels. Schools have put in place actions that have an impact. More students now think education is important for their future and daily attendance is important. More parents now understand the importance of their children not missing a lot of school. But we still have further to go, as parents are not yet taking daily attendance more seriously. We found that even in challenging contexts, schools can make a difference. Students feeling connected to school has the biggest impact, as well as schools setting clear expectations, providing practical supports, and incentivising attendance with rewards. Out-performing schools are using these actions strategically as part of a package and whole-school approach.



About this report

This report is about school attendance in New Zealand in 2025. It looks at attendance rates, attitude changes to attendance, successful approaches to raising attendance, and how we can support schools to tackle poor attendance.

What we looked at

The Government has set a target that 80 percent of students will be present in school for more than 90 percent of the term by 2030. There is a programme of work – called the Attendance Action Plan – underway to help reach this goal. Schools also use a range of actions to help lift and maintain attendance. The Education Review Office (ERO) was commissioned to undertake a national review to identify whether regular attendance and attitudes to attendance have changed and what school actions and supports make a difference. This review builds on ERO's previous research, including our 2022 study.¹

Our 2022 study highlighted the alarming decline in regular attendance across New Zealand's schools, which started in 2015, well before the Covid-19 pandemic. The report made findings about key drivers of attendance, including attitudes, student motivation, and school experiences. Aligning with the international literature, the report also noted key barriers to attendance, including sickness and mental health, family circumstances, student friendships and bullying, and lack of interest in learning. The current review builds on these findings to understand what drives attitudes and what schools are doing to improve attendance.

We set out to answer four key questions:

- 1) What has happened to attendance?
- 2) What has happened to attitudes to attendance and why?
- 3) What are schools doing that is making a difference?
- 4) What are the challenges, and what supports do schools need?

What is regular attendance?

This review focuses on regular attendance, which is when students attend school more than 90 percent of the time, which means missing fewer than five full days per term. We say more about what attendance is and why it matters in Part 1 of this report.

What are attitudes and why do they matter for attendance?

We looked at students’ and parents’ attitudes to attendance because we previously found that attitudes predict attendance. Attitudes are deep beliefs that shape thoughts and decision-making.² They reflect core values.³ They are influenced by past experiences and feelings about these experiences,⁴ and also by knowledge.⁵ For example, international evidence shows that parents may not view regular school attendance as important if they don’t know the consequences for their child’s future.⁶

What we did

The findings of our review are evidenced by a range of data and analysis

We have taken a robust, mixed methods approach to deliver breadth and depth, including:

Action	Who
Over 14,600 survey responses from:	<div>→ 890 school leaders</div> <div>→ 1,967 teachers</div> <div>→ 5,082 students</div> <div>→ 6,683 parents and whānau</div>
Interviews and focus groups with over 300 participants including:	<div>→ 42 school leaders</div> <div>→ 43 teachers</div> <div>→ 134 students</div> <div>→ 59 parents and whānau</div> <div>→ 30 experts</div>
Site visits to:	<div>→ 16 schools – 10 ‘out-performing’ schools and six ‘under-performing’ schools (outliers on the correlational trendline for school Equity Index and attendance)</div>
Data from:	<div>→ analysis of administrative data from ERO and the Ministry of Education</div> <div>→ a review of the international and New Zealand literature</div>

Our data represents the diversity of English Medium schools and students in New Zealand

We collected data in Term 2, 2025. This timing was chosen to link up as closely as practical with our last data collection on this topic which spanned both Terms 2 and 3 in 2022.

National attendance data included in this report encompasses data from all schools in New Zealand. For our school visits and surveys, we collected data across a range of English medium state and state-integrated, primary and secondary schools, including:

- urban and rural
- school size – small, medium, and large
- schools from low to high socio-economic communities.

Māori medium kura and non-mainstream schools (e.g., special schools, activity centres, teen parent units) were not included in our review.

Student, parent, and school survey responses were collected to be representative of different ethnicities, genders, and regions of New Zealand. More information about our methodology can be found in the technical appendix for this report, at www.evidence.govt.nz. This includes details about the schools that participated in our in-depth case study visits.

Report structure

This report has nine parts.

- **Part 1** sets out **what attendance is and why it matters**, outlining the impact of missing school. This part also provides international and New Zealand evidence on why attendance matters for achievement, wellbeing, and lifelong outcomes.
- **Part 2** describes the **current approach to attendance**, who's responsible for attendance, and what's been done to improve attendance. This part also provides context about current efforts by the Government to raise attendance.
- **Part 3** reports on **how attendance has changed over time**, how attendance looks for different groups of students and schools, and how attendance in New Zealand compares to other countries.
- **Part 4** looks at **how students' attitudes to attendance have changed** between 2022 and 2025, including change overall and change for different groups of students at different types of schools.
- **Part 5** looks at **how parents' attitudes to attendance** have changed between 2022 and 2025, including change overall and change for different groups of parents.
- **Part 6** explores the **reasons for changing attitudes and attendance**, including school actions that drive attendance and attitudes to attendance for both parents and students.
- **Part 7** describes **what schools are doing to improve attendance rates**. This part also examines what 'out-performing' schools are doing well and provides case studies for some of these schools.
- **Part 8** explores the views of teachers and leaders on **what are the main challenges and what support is most helpful**.
- **Part 9** sets out our key **findings and recommendations**, focused on what schools and the Government can further do to help improve regular attendance in New Zealand.



Part 1: What is attendance and why does it matter?

When students are in classrooms as expected, their achievement, wellbeing, and lifelong outcomes are much higher. The more students attend, the more they achieve. Irregular attendance has long-lasting effects on learning because the impact of absence builds over time. Early attendance habits are crucial — how often a student attends school in primary years strongly predicts their attendance in secondary school.

What we looked at

In this part of the report, we describe what attendance and regular attendance are in New Zealand. We then describe why regular attendance matters for students, including the impacts on achievement, engagement in school, wellbeing, and lifelong outcomes. These impacts highlight the importance of our national review and of knowing how to improve attendance across different types of schools and students.

This section outlines:

- 1) What attendance is
- 2) Why attendance matters.

1) What is attendance?

Attendance means students are in their classrooms when they're expected to be. In New Zealand, students should attend every day school is open, and schools must take reasonable steps to make this happen.⁷

Students with regular attendance are at school more than 90 percent of the time—missing fewer than five full days per term. Missing a week each term adds up to a full year of lost learning by age 16.

Absence levels are further classified as:

- **Irregular absence:** 80–90 percent attendance
- **Moderate absence:** 70–80 percent attendance
- **Chronic absence:** less than 70 percent attendance.

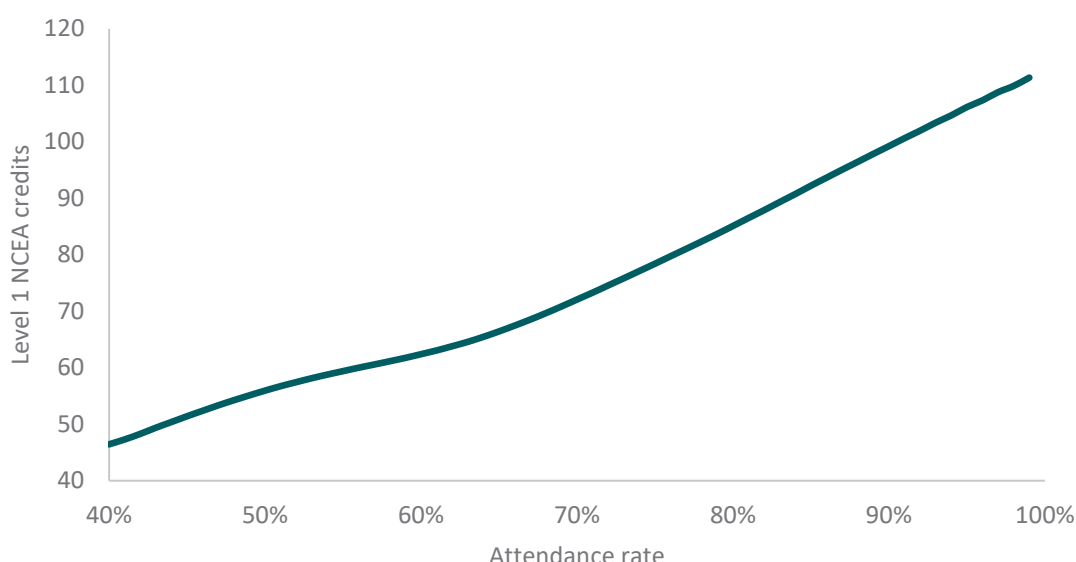
2) Why does attendance matter?

Attendance is a key driver of students' achievement, engagement in school, wellbeing and their lifelong outcomes.

a) Attendance and achievement

Attendance is closely linked to academic achievement in both primary and secondary schools.⁸ The more students attend, the better they perform, including gaining more NCEA credits.⁹ As the graph below shows, even missing just two days per term can lower achievement. Students who are otherwise engaged still miss vital learning when absent.¹⁰

Figure 1: *Overall relationship between attendance rate and attainment (NCEA Level 1 credits)*



Source: Ministry of Education^a

Irregular attendance has long-lasting effects on later attainment. This is because the impact of non-attendance builds over time and is why early attendance habits are crucial. How often a student attends school in primary years strongly predicts their attendance in secondary school.¹¹ Primary education also builds the foundational skills needed for success later on, and gaps created by missed learning can make it harder for students to keep up and stay engaged in secondary school.¹²

a Figure 1 visualises the relationship between overall attendance rate for students in Term 2 of Year 10 (pooled from 2011-2018) and the number of Level 1 credits they subsequently obtain.

b) Attendance, engagement and wellbeing

Being at school supports students' social and emotional wellbeing. The evidence shows that attendance is associated with:¹³

- Increased anxiety about schoolwork: Students who miss three to four days of school within two weeks report the highest levels of anxiety about schoolwork. This may reflect a cycle where anxiety contributes to absence, and absence in turn increases stress due to missed learning. The report doesn't establish causality but highlights a strong association.
- Lower sense of belonging: Students with lower attendance report a weaker sense of belonging. This may be because wellbeing challenges reduce engagement, or because missing school limits opportunities to build peer relationships.
- Lower motivation: Students who miss three or more days within two weeks report lower motivation. This could be both a cause and consequence of absence and may also reflect unmet learning needs.
- Greater exposure to bullying: Students with higher absence rates report more bullying. It's possible that bullying contributes to avoidance of school, or that irregular attendance makes students more vulnerable.
- Feeling unfairly treated by teachers: Students who miss five or more days within two weeks are more likely to feel unfairly treated by teachers. This may stem from weaker student-teacher relationships, which can be both a cause and effect of absence.

c) Attendance and lifelong outcomes

Poor attendance has long-term consequences.¹⁴ ERO's previous report highlighted the consequences for students who are chronically absent from school – by age 20-25 they are:¹⁵

- Less likely to complete NCEA Level 2 or gain University Entrance. Missing school makes it difficult for students to keep up with schoolwork, which can culminate to make it more difficult to re-engage in schoolwork, and affect learning and achievement.
- Less likely to be in employment and more likely to earn less – up to \$40,000 per year less. Chronically absent students often leave school with fewer qualifications, making them less likely to gain employment and more likely to depend on benefit.
- More likely to live in social housing and have emergency hospital admissions: it is more difficult for people with lower incomes to afford housing, while higher emergency admissions reflect the poorer health outcomes of chronically absent young people.

- Twice as likely to be charged with an offence and three times more likely to be in the corrections system, and more likely to be victims of crime. Increased offending during school years and greater prevalence of family dysfunction contribute to poor justice outcomes for chronically absent young people.
- Students who were chronically absent cost the Government nearly three times more than their peers, with higher costs in health, justice, and welfare systems.¹⁶ International research also links poor attendance to worse mental health and social functioning.¹⁷

d) All absences matter

Absences fall into two categories:

- **Justified absences** – These are explained and accepted under the school's attendance policy and include reasons like illness or injury, bereavement, or exceptional family circumstances.
- **Unjustified absences** – These are unexplained or for reasons not accepted by the school, such as sleeping in, term-time holidays, celebrating birthdays, or visiting relatives.

Other jurisdictions make similar distinctions – England classifies absences as authorised and unauthorised, as does Western Australia and Tasmania. Victoria in Australia and California refer to excused and unexcused. Despite these distinctions, the evidence is clear that all absences matter. Unjustified absences, those absences not agreed with the school, are linked to larger losses in learning than justified absences. However, both have an impact.¹⁸

Conclusion

Regular attendance means that students are in their classrooms every day that school is open. School attendance is more than just being present – it is essential for learning, wellbeing, achievement, and lifelong outcomes. Even small amounts of missed school can have lasting impacts. Supporting regular attendance is one of the most effective ways to improve outcomes for all students.

Part 2 of this report explains what schools and the Government have done to lift, support, and meet clear attendance targets.



Part 2: What action is being taken on attendance?

Attending school regularly is essential for lifelong success and poor attendance leads to negative outcomes. However, regular attendance can vary between schools and students, and the national rate dropped as low as 40 percent during Covid-19 times. The Government has set a target of 80 percent of students attending school regularly by 2030. To help reach this target, there is a national Attendance Action Plan that centres on attitudes, awareness, and accountability. The plan involves the education sector, wider services, parents, and communities working together to turn things around.

What we looked at

We looked at the national approach to attendance, including legal requirements, national and school policies, and the role of different agencies in helping students to attend. We also looked at recent developments to try and improve regular attendance, including who and what is involved.

This section sets out:

- 1) The current approach to student attendance in New Zealand
- 2) Who is responsible for ensuring students attend school
- 3) The work being done to improve school attendance.

1) What is the current approach to student attendance?

All children aged 6 to 16 are expected to be enrolled in school, and they must attend school if it is open.

Attending school is required by law in New Zealand. All students under the age of 16 who are enrolled in a school must attend school if it is open.

All children aged 6 to 16 must be enrolled in a registered school, unless they have an exemption by the Ministry of Education (the Ministry). The Ministry can make an exemption for reasons such as the student being homeschooled, the student being in residential care, or the student living too far away from a school.

Schools must record student attendance every day.

Student attendance is reported in half days. Students are considered present when they are in class. How schools record attendance varies by school – primary schools typically record attendance first thing in the morning and after lunch, and secondary schools typically record attendance for each class or lesson. When a student isn't present in class, they are recorded as absent for that half day.

Schools can record absences as 'justified' or 'unjustified'.

The Ministry provides guidelines for schools on how to record absences, including what to consider as a 'justified' or 'unjustified' absence. Schools use these guidelines to set their own policies.

Justified absences include when a student:

- is ill or unwell
- has been formally stood down or suspended
- are engaged in offsite study for exams
- has been approved to be absent by the school principal.

Unjustified absences include when the:

- reason for the absence is unknown
- student is absent without parent/guardian permission
- student is taking a holiday during term-time
- absence has been explained, but the reason is not approved by the school principal.

2) Who is responsible for student attendance?

Making sure students attend school is a shared responsibility. It involves parents, schools, government agencies, and support services.

Parents and whānau

Parents and caregivers play a key role. They are legally responsible for making sure their children are enrolled and attending school. If a child is chronically absent or not enrolled, parents may face fines.

Schools and school boards

Schools must take reasonable steps to ensure students attend. This includes:

- keeping accurate enrolment records
- reporting daily attendance to the Ministry
- contacting parents when a student is unexpectedly absent
- following their school's attendance management policy.

School boards are also responsible for making sure students attend when school is open. They must approve and oversee the school's attendance policy, which outlines how attendance is tracked and how absences are managed.

School boards can appoint Statutory Attendance Officers who have legal powers to manage student attendance. They can intervene directly—such as escorting students back to school or home if they're found out of school during school hours. These roles are funded through school operational grants.

Attendance services

Providers of Attendance Services include schools, iwi organisations, and non-government organisations. Attendance Services are contracted by the Ministry to support schools, students, and parents with the greatest need.^b Their job is to:

- identify reasons for poor attendance
- help students return to school
- work with other agencies like Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Social Development (MSD), New Zealand Police, iwi, and community services
- analyse school attendance data
- spot patterns of concern
- help schools develop strategies to improve attendance.

Other agencies

The Ministry of Education oversees attendance nationally. It manages data, sets expectations, and provides tools and guidance to schools.

Other agencies—like Oranga Tamariki, MSD, and New Zealand Police—also help make sure children are attending school. Police and Statutory Attendance Officers have powers to enforce attendance when needed. Community-based services, including iwi-led initiatives, often work alongside Attendance Services to support students and parents.

^b The Ministry of Education is introducing a new, integrated attendance service model for 2026.

3) What work is being done to improve school attendance?

The Government wants to make sure more students are regularly attending school. The goal is that by 2030, at least 80 percent of students will be at school more than 90 percent of the time. To help reach this goal, a national Attendance Action Plan has been created. It focuses on five key areas:

- a) Working together across agencies
- b) Changing attitudes and raising awareness
- c) Using data to drive change
- d) Making everyone accountable
- e) Supporting students who miss a lot of school.

a) Working together across agencies

Government departments like Education, Health, Police, Oranga Tamariki, and others are teaming up to make school attendance a priority. They're making sure their decisions support students being in school.

- The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) is leading the plan and has worked with Health agencies to update public health advice so students attend school when they're well.
- The Education Review Office (ERO) is helping schools track attendance and make plans to improve it.
- An Expert Advisory Group—including principals, attendance specialists, and community leaders—is guiding this work.

b) Changing attitudes and raising awareness

Many parents and students don't realise how important regular attendance is. In 2022, ERO found that better communication was needed.

- In 2022, the Ministry launched a national campaign called 'Every School Day is a Big Day' to highlight the importance of attending school, with messaging around the theme of 'Every Day Matters'.
- A new awareness campaign has been launched to increase engagement. This includes 'My Why' social media activity which shows how regular school attendance helps students achieve their aspirations.
- Regular updates on attendance rates help keep the issue visible.

c) Using data to drive change

Good data helps identify problems and track progress.

- Schools must now report daily attendance to the Ministry. This change was introduced with the School Attendance Rules 2025 (effective 1 January 2025). These rules also require that all schools use Ministry-approved electronic attendance registers and absence codes.¹⁹
- The Ministry has a data dashboard that allows them to review daily attendance data easily. The Ministry also uses this data to publish updates more often.
- ERO checks how schools are doing and whether they have strong plans to improve attendance. ERO is also taking a data driven approach to identifying and monitoring schools with concerning attendance.
- Schools with low attendance can be flagged for extra support.

This data driven approach is supporting faster and more effective responses to non-attendance and, combined with other actions described below, is providing greater insights into the underlying causes.

d) Making everyone accountable

Everyone has a role to play—schools, parents, and government agencies—and new rules and systems are being introduced to make responsibilities clearer:

- Parents are being informed about their role in supporting attendance and a firmer approach is being taken to prosecuting parents who do not comply with requirements and have failed to take up offers of support. The Ministry will take a lead role in these prosecutions.
- The Ministry is putting in place a nationwide, consistent approach to supporting, intervening and requiring accountability in schools.
- School boards are being reminded of their duties, and the Ministry is strengthening the use of graduated responses to absence. This includes working with ERO to put in place a stronger monitoring regime of schools who are under-performing and using statutory interventions, when needed.
- Schools must have an Attendance Management Plan (AMP) published online by Term 1 2026—outlining how they will identify and respond to absences. Plans will need to align to the Stepped Attendance Response (STAR) guidance issued by the Ministry (see more on this below).
- ERO will support stronger accountability to improve attendance. This includes identifying and escalating schools to the Ministry to take action. ERO will also monitor whether school boards have their Attendance Management Plans in place (once these are mandated) and make recommendations where these are insufficient.

The new STAR (Stepped Attendance Response) framework sets national expectations about who should be involved, when, and how. It outlines actions at absence thresholds and promotes school-wide approaches to strengthen attendance culture, improve attendance data quality and use, enable timely support and escalation points, and help schools identify what works and areas for improvement. The diagram below sets this out:

Green (0–4 days missed):	School follows up on absences with parents.
Yellow (5–9 days):	School meets with parents to make a plan.
Orange (10–14 days):	Support from external services may be needed.
Red (15+ days):	The Ministry may step in, including legal action if necessary.

e) Supporting students who miss a lot of school

Extra help is being provided for students who miss more than 70 percent of the school term.

- Attendance Services received more funding in Budget 2025 to support more schools and students.
- The Ministry is implementing a reformed Attendance Services model that delivers comprehensive services to chronically absent and non-enrolled students — focusing on areas with the greatest need and making sure support is delivered locally. The new service will be operational from January 2026.

For students facing serious challenges, their cases may be referred to multi-agency roundtables to get the right help.

Conclusion

Following a significant drop in attendance after Covid-19, the Government has set a clear target: by 2030, 80 percent of students should be attending school more than 90 percent of the time. To achieve this target, a wide-ranging Attendance Action Plan is underway.

This plan involves sharing the responsibility for attendance — parents, whānau, schools, government agencies, and community services all play a role in making sure students are enrolled and attending regularly. The plan sets out requirements for schools to report daily attendance to the Ministry and have attendance management plans. It also involves increased communication with parents and a redesigned Attendance Service to support students that miss a lot of school.

The following part of this report sets out how government and school actions have changed attendance, and attitudes to attendance.



Part 3: What has happened to attendance in New Zealand?

This part of the report sets out how attendance has changed over the last six years, how attendance looks for different types of students and schools, and how attendance in New Zealand compares to other countries. We found that regular attendance is finally back to pre-Covid-19 levels but is still too low, despite it being critical for student success.

This part looks at changes to attendance across time based on the school attendance data collated by the Ministry of Education. We will look more at why these changes are happening in Part 6.

What we looked at

Understanding national attendance rates—and how they vary across different student groups and school types—helps us gauge the scale of the issue and identify where improvements are most needed. This section looks at trends over time with a focus on change since our last report in 2022. We drew on:

- national attendance monitoring data
- New Zealand and international literature on attendance
- interviews with students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- site visits to schools.

This section sets out:

- 1) How attendance has changed
- 2) Which students have changed attendance
- 3) Which schools have changed their attendance
- 4) How New Zealand compares with other countries.

What we found – an overview

Attendance has been increasing since 2022 and is now back to pre-Covid levels.

Now nearly six in ten students (58 percent) are attending regularly, up from four in ten (40 percent) in 2022.

Both primary and secondary students have improved attendance to pre-Covid 19 levels.

Encouragingly, students of different ethnicities and in schools within high and low-socio-economic communities have seen similar improvements to their attendance.

Some students continue to face more barriers to attendance, including bullying, illness, and challenges with transport and having the uniform and equipment they need. Māori students, Pacific students and students in low economic school communities, still have lower rates of attendance. These findings are set out in more detail below.

1) How has attendance changed?

This section sets out what we know about how attendance has changed including:

- a) regular and irregular attendance
- b) justified and unjustified absences.

a) Regular and irregular attendance

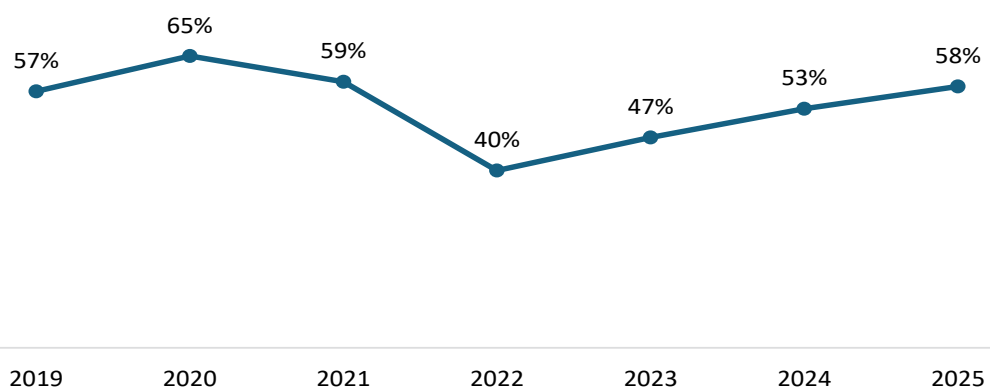
Encouragingly, regular attendance is continuing to improve and is back to pre-Covid-19 levels

Regular school attendance in New Zealand declined leading up to 2022, reaching a low point during the height of Covid-19 disruptions, when only 40 percent of students were attending regularly.

Since then, attendance has been improving, with 58 percent of students regularly attending in 2025 – an increase of 18 percentage points over the last 3 years.

This means regular attendance has returned to pre-Covid-19 levels when regular attendance was 57 percent.

Figure 2: *Percent of students regularly attending Term 2 from 2019 to 2025, nationally*



Source: Ministry of Education

Whilst attendance dropped sharply in 2022 due to high rates of illness and isolation during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the decline began even before Covid-19, in 2015, and reflects deeper issues like disengagement and changing attitudes toward school.²⁰

Absences have decreased.

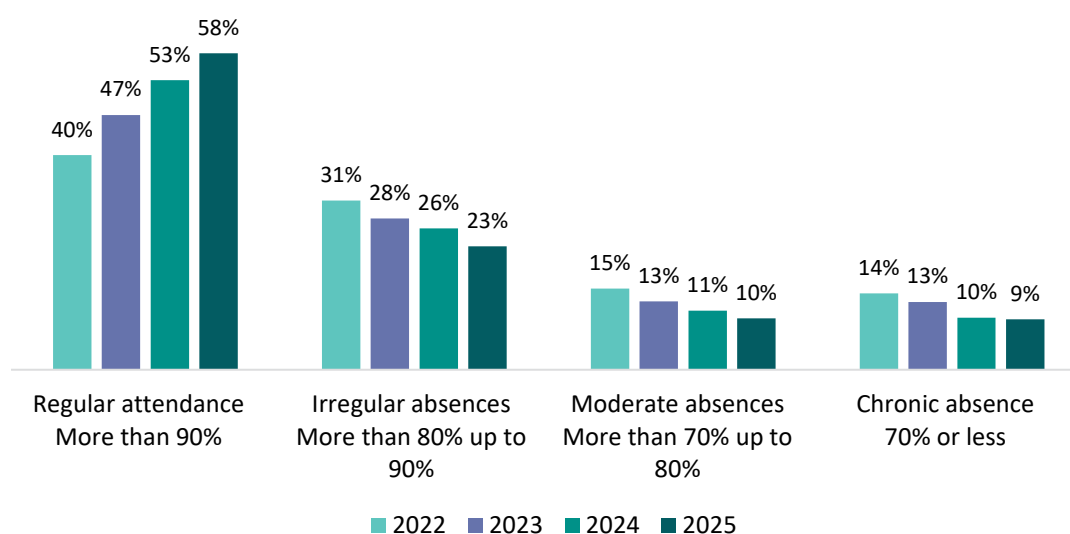
As detailed in Part 1, students who attend school 90 percent of the time or less are irregular attenders and fit into the following subcategories:

- **Irregular absence:** 80–90 percent attendance
- **Moderate absence:** 70–80 percent attendance
- **Chronic absence:** less than 70 percent attendance.

Encouragingly, all types of absence have reduced.

- The **irregular absence** rate has decreased by 8 percentage points over the last 3 years, from just under a third (31 percent) in Term 2 2022 to under a quarter (23 percent) in Term 2 2025.
- The **moderate absence** rate has decreased by 5 percentage points over the last 3 years, from one in seven (15 percent) in Term 2 2022 to one in ten (10 percent) in Term 2 2025.
- The **chronic absence** rate has decreased by 5 percentage points over the last 3 years, from one in seven (14 percent) in Term 2 2022 to just under one in ten (9 percent) in Term 2 2025.

Figure 3: Attendance categories Term 2, 2022–2025



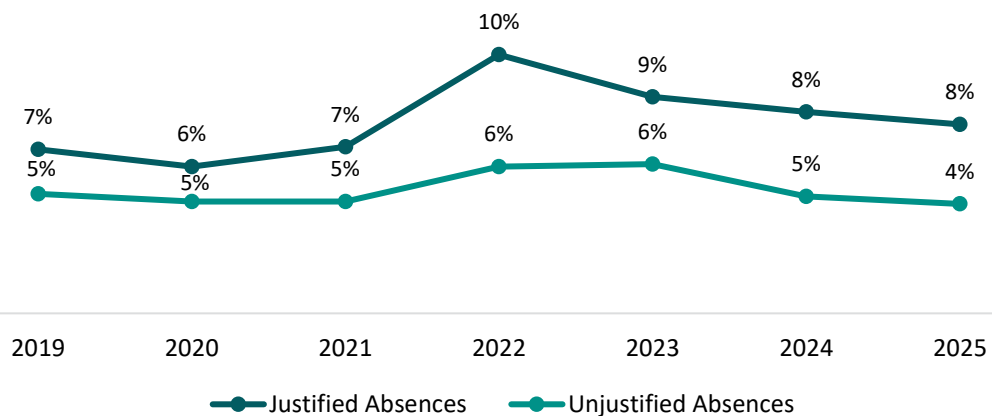
Source: Ministry of Education

b) Justified and unjustified absences

Justified absences are decreasing at a similar rate to unjustified absences.

Encouragingly, both justified and unjustified absences have been decreasing since the Covid-19 peak of 2022. Justified absences have decreased from 10 percent in 2022, to 8 percent in 2025. Unjustified absences also fell, from 6 percent to 4 percent over the same period.

Figure 4: *Percent of term-time marked as Justified and Unjustified Absences Term 2, from 2019 to 2025*



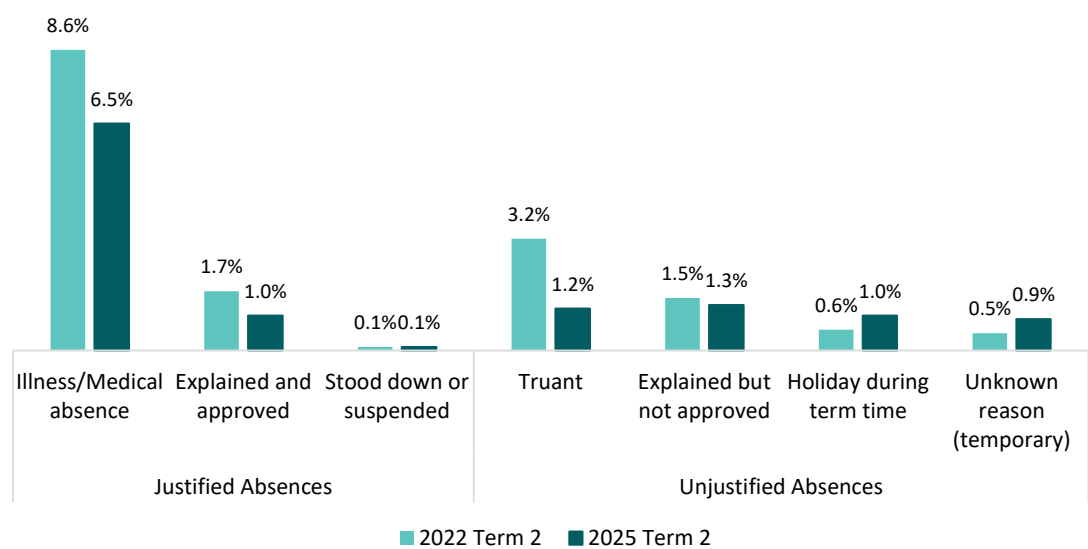
Source: Ministry of Education

Policies and school data systems for monitoring attendance have improved, allowing for better tracking and classification of absences. This may contribute to more accurate reporting and a clearer distinction between justified and unjustified absences.

Absences due to illness and medical reasons have slightly decreased but are still the most common.

As expected, the biggest decline in absences since the Covid-19 peak has come from reduced illness/medical absences. Illness/medical reasons account for just under 7 percent of total class time in Term 2 2025, compared to just under 9 percent of class time in Term 2 2022. But truancy has also decreased slightly – in Term 2 2025 just over 1 percent of class time was recorded as truancy, compared to just over 3 percent in 2022.

Figure 5: Absences as a percentage of term-time in Term 2 2022 and 2025



Source: Ministry of Education

While some parents report mixed messages from school about when to keep their child off school due to sickness, we heard that others are now less likely to keep their child home unnecessarily due to stricter school policies, such as requiring medical certificates after three days of absence. Other parents simply think that daily attendance is important and their child missing a day isn't an option.

“I don't let her just have days off because she wants them off... You have a day off when you need to have a day off.”

PRIMARY PARENT

We explore more about parents' views about their child missing school in Part 5.

2) Which students' attendance has changed?

This section looks at if and how attendance has changed for different groups of students with a focus on ethnicity and gender.

a) Ethnicity

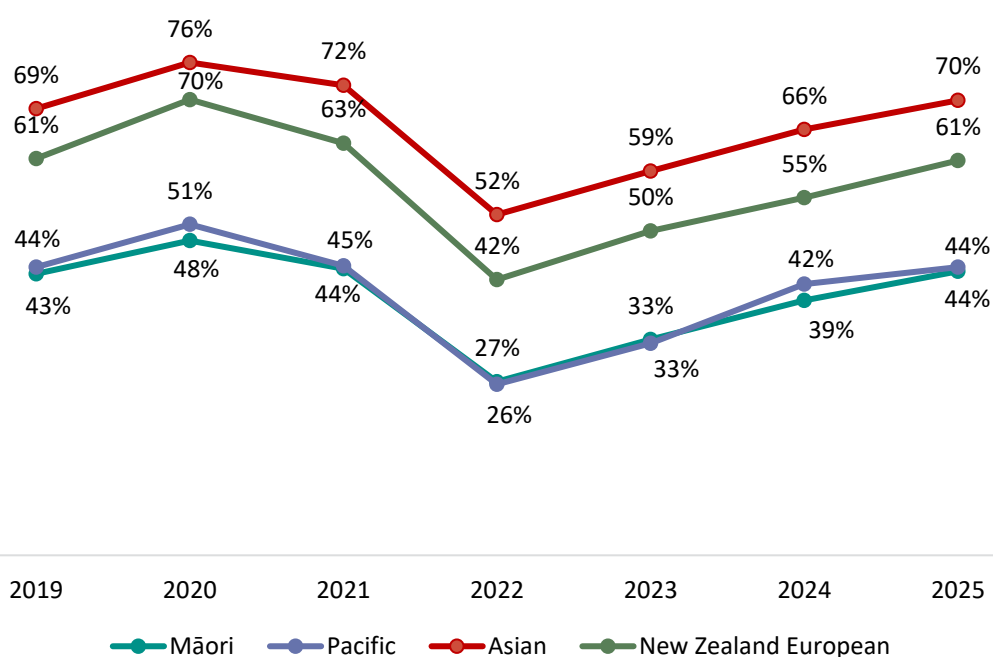
Attendance has improved equally for all ethnicities.

Regular attendance has increased across all ethnicities since 2022. New Zealand European students saw the largest improvement, rising 19 percentage points from 42 percent in 2022 to 61 percent in 2025.

Māori and Pacific students have the lowest regular attendance, with less than half (44 percent) attending regularly in 2025, up 17 and 18 percentage points respectively over 2022 rates.

Asian students still have the highest regular attendance – over two-thirds (70 percent) are attending regularly in 2025, up 18 percentage points from just over a half (52 percent) in 2022.

Figure 6: *Percent of students regularly attending Term 2 from 2019 to 2025, by ethnicity*



Source: Ministry of Education

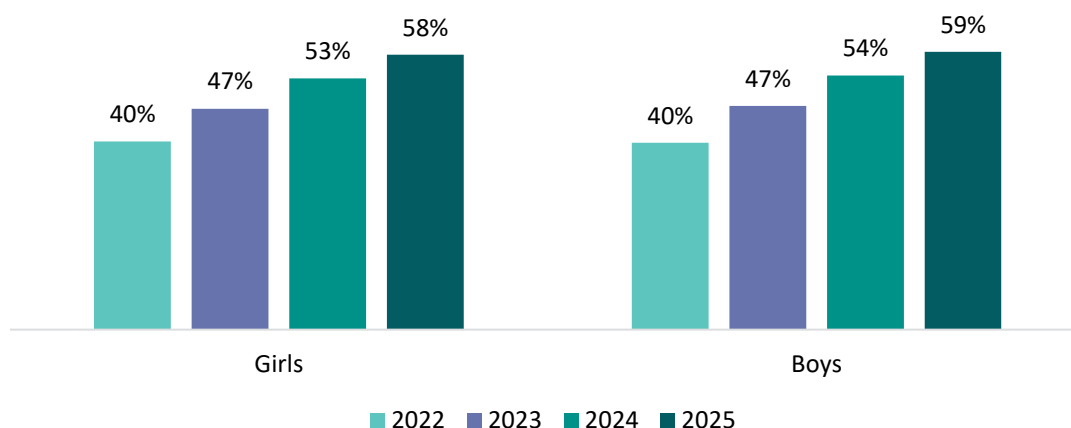
We previously found that Māori and Pacific students can face greater challenges that prevent regular attendance. Māori and Pacific parents report higher rates of keeping children home due to bullying, illness, and mental health concerns. We also found that Māori and Pacific parents are more likely to keep children home for family, cultural, or special events.²¹

b) Gender

Boys and girls have seen similar increases in attendance.

As the impact of Covid-19 reduces both boys' and girls' attendance has improved. In Term 2 2025, 59 percent of boys and 58 percent of girls were attending regularly — up from under half in 2022 (40 percent).

Figure 7: *Percent of students who regularly attend Term 2, 2022 to 2025, by gender*



Source: Ministry of Education

3) Which schools have changed attendance?

This section looks at how regular attendance has changed over time for different types of schools with a focus on the following characteristics:

- a) Primary and secondary
- b) Socio-economic status
- c) Urban and rural
- d) School size.

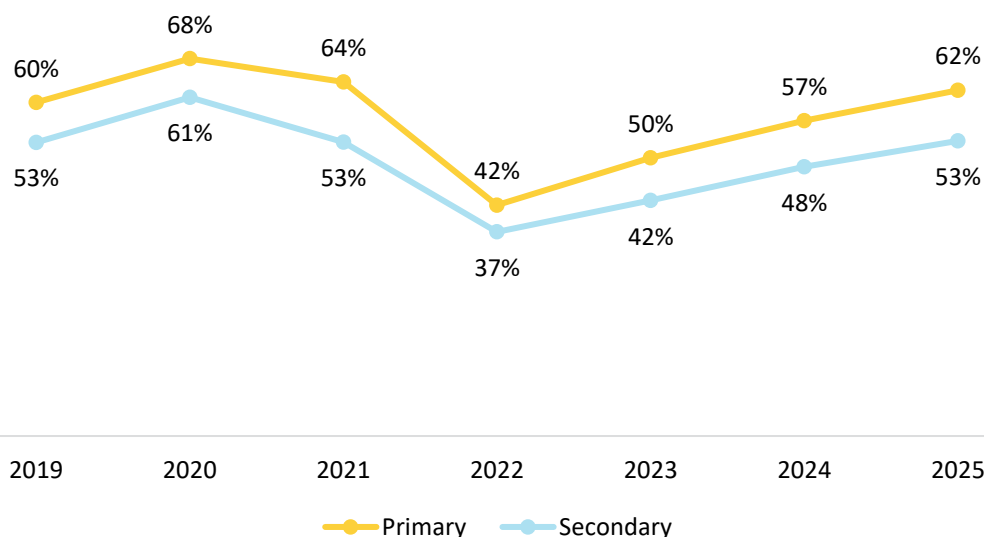
a) Primary and secondary schools

Attendance in primary schools has increased most.

In Term 2 2025, regular attendance was higher in primary schools than in secondary schools^c – 62 percent compared to 53 percent. During the Covid-19 period—especially between 2021 and 2022—attendance in primary schools declined more sharply than in secondary schools. Since then, both have improved, but primary schools have seen a steeper recovery, with regular attendance rising by 20 percentage points over the last three years, compared to a 16-percentage point increase in secondary schools. Both types of schools have returned to, or overtaken, pre-Covid-19 levels of attendance.

^c For the national attendance data – Primary schools include contributing, full primary and intermediate schools and specialist schools. Secondary schools include all secondary and composite schools.

Figure 8: *Percent of students who regularly attend school in Term 2 from 2019 to 2025, by school type*



Source: Ministry of Education

Primary schools have made a strong recovery since 2022, following the significant disruption caused by Covid-19. During the pandemic, attendance in primary schools was particularly affected, as younger children were more likely to be kept home due to illness or as a precaution—especially when parents were uncertain about symptoms or school policies. Parental attitudes may have also played a role: ERO’s previous report found that many parents view regular attendance as less critical in the primary years, despite clear evidence that consistent attendance during this stage strongly influences future engagement and achievement.²² Encouragingly, as Covid-19-related anxieties ease, attendance appears to be improving.

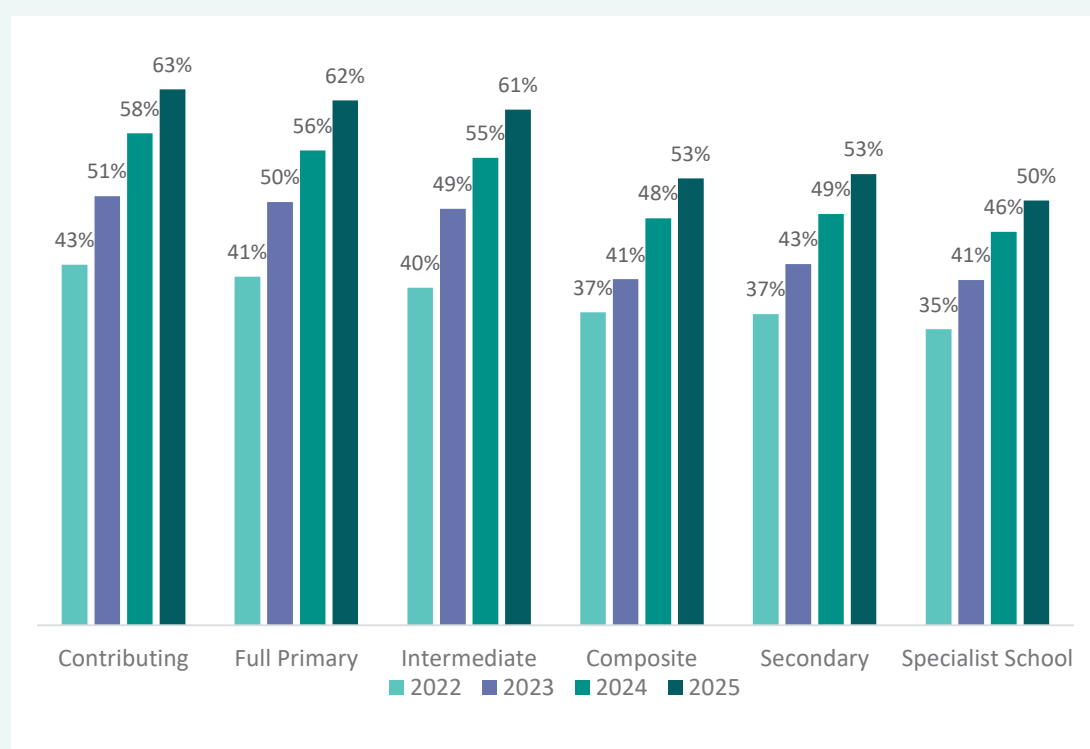
“I have managed to pull myself into check because it’s not good for the kids... we’ve established it’s okay. Covid-19 is okay.”

PARENT OF INTERMEDIATE STUDENT

Regular attendance by school type in more detail

Increases in regular attendance between 2024 and 2025 are broadly similar across all school types (an increase of between 4 to 6 percentage points). However, since 2022, there has been more of an increase for contributing, full primary and intermediate schools (all increased by between 20 and 21 percentage points), now sitting between 63 and 61 percent. There has been less of an increase for composite, secondary and specialist schools (between 15 and 16 percentage points), now sitting between 50 and 53 percent.

Figure 9: *Percent of students who regularly attend school in Term 2 2022 to 2025, by school type*



Source: Ministry of Education

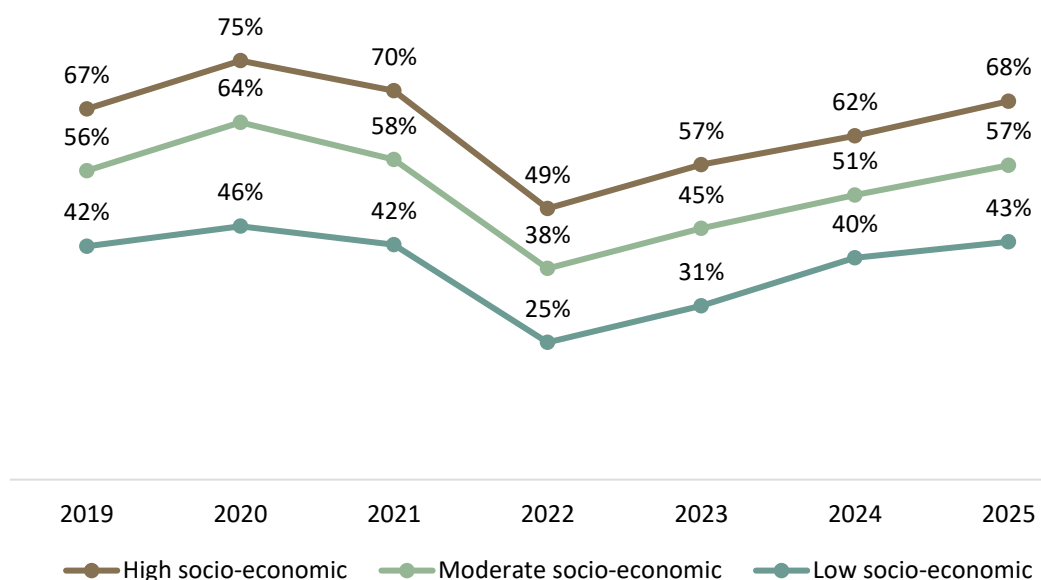
b) Socio-economic status

Attendance has improved for students in all socio-economic communities, but students in low socio-economic communities still have lower attendance.

Schools across all the socio-economic areas are now higher than their pre-Covid-19 attendance levels. Disappointingly, the gap in attendance between low and high socio-economic schools persists.^d

Less than half (43 percent) of students in low socio-economic communities are attending regularly in 2025. This is 25 percentage points lower than students in high socio-economic communities, where just over two-thirds (68 percent) are attending regularly.

Figure 10: *Percent of students who regularly attend school Term 2 2019 to 2025, by socio-economic status*



Source: Ministry of Education

ERO's previous research found that while students in low socio-economic communities may be highly motivated — often seeing education as a pathway to a better future — they are more likely to encounter practical challenges due to lack of transport, inadequate access to school resources, and caregiving responsibilities at home.²³ These students are also more likely to face bullying, disengagement, and feel unsupported, which contributes to absenteeism.²⁴

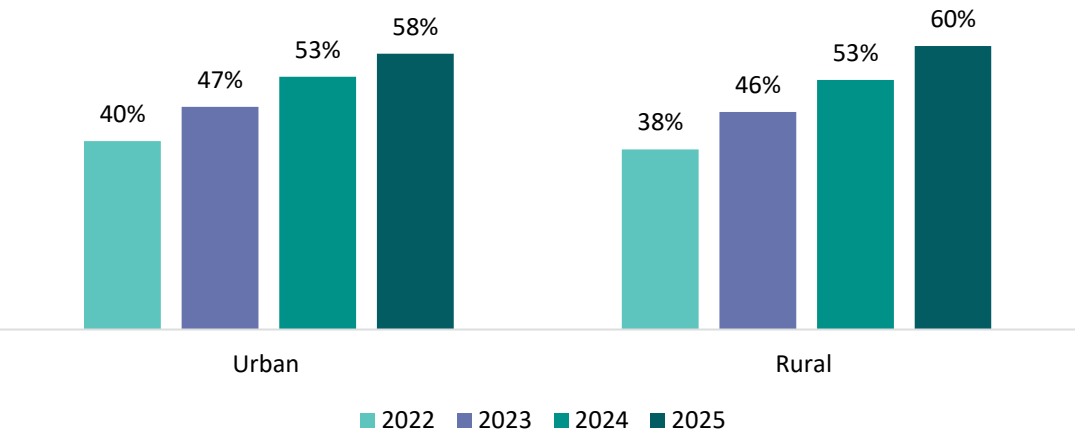
^d Socio-economic level is defined by the Ministry of Education's Equity Index (EQI) – Schools in high socio-economic communities are the schools with fewer barriers. Schools in moderate socio-economic communities are the schools with moderate barriers. Schools in low socio-economic communities are the schools with more barriers. For more information see the Technical Appendix.

c) Urban and rural schools

Attendance in rural schools has improved more.

In 2025, both urban and rural schools^e have a regular attendance rate of over a half (58 and 60 percent). Positively, since 2022, regular attendance has improved for both school types, rising by 18 percentage points (from 40 percent) for urban schools and increasing even more, by 22 percentage points (from 38 percent) for rural schools.

Figure 11: *Percent of students who regularly attend school in Term 2 from 2022 to 2025, by urban and rural schools*



Source: Ministry of Education

Students in remote rural areas often face long travel times and limited transport options, which can make daily attendance difficult. Additionally, rural schools often have fewer resources and poorer access to specialist support (e.g. mental health services, attendance officers), which can make it harder to address absenteeism effectively.²⁵ Therefore, it’s encouraging that regular attendance remains very similar between rural and urban schools. This could be due to the actions taken by rural schools. We will look at school actions later in this report – in Part 6 and Part 7.

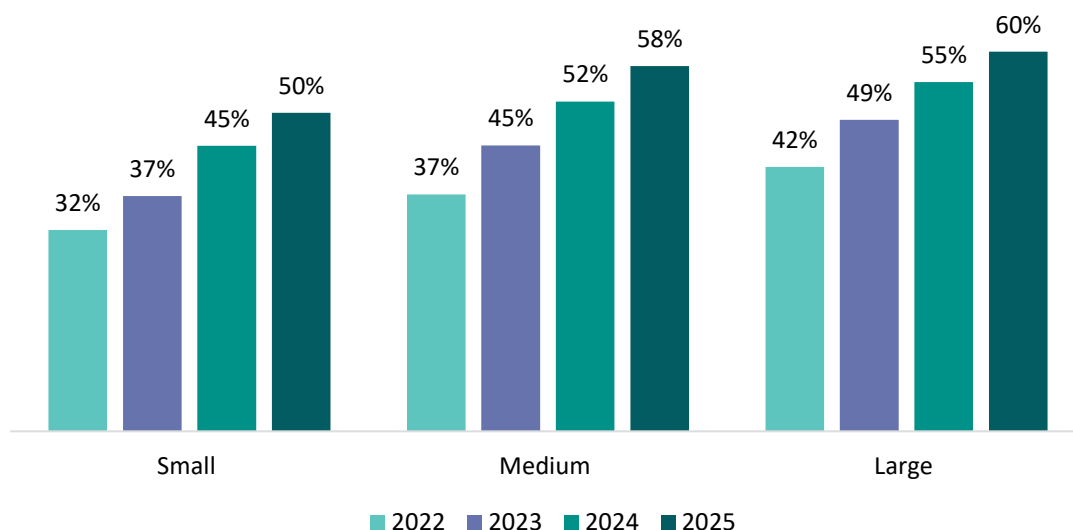
d) School size

Small schools continue to have lower regular attendance than large schools.

Worryingly, in Term 2 2025, regular attendance was lower in small schools (50 percent) than in large schools (60 percent). This 10 percentage point gap has not closed over the past three years.

^e ERO’s definitions of urban and rural schools draw on the Ministry of Education’s categories. Urban is defined as schools include large urban area, major urban area, medium urban area and small urban area. Rural schools include rural settlement and rural other.

Figure 12: *Percent of students who regularly attend school in Term 2, from 2022 to 2025, by school size*



Source: Ministry of Education

Smaller schools can often face greater challenges with attendance due to limited resources and staffing. In our previous report, we found that schools with fewer students may struggle to provide the same breadth of support services, extra-curricular activities, and specialist teaching that larger schools can offer. These limitations can affect student engagement and motivation to attend regularly.²⁶

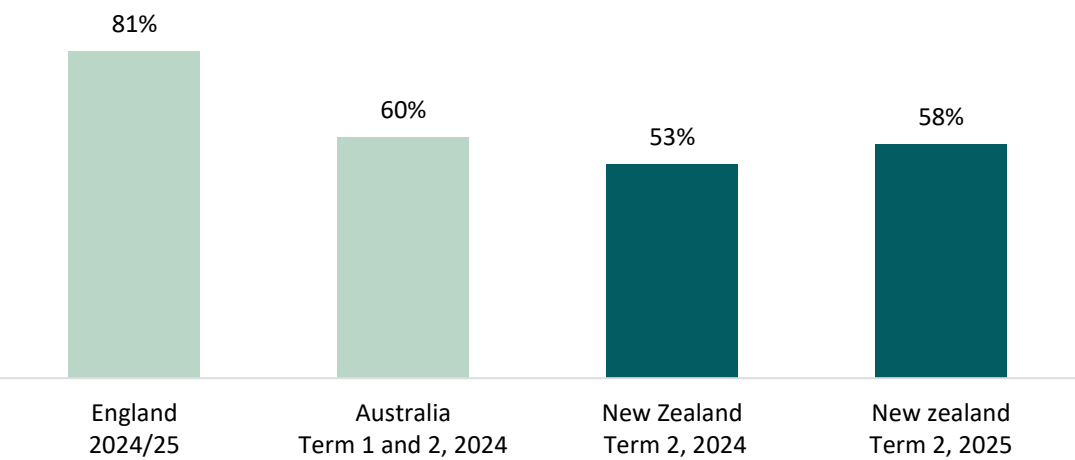
4) How does New Zealand compare to other countries?

New Zealand still has lower regular attendance than other similar countries.

We looked at countries similar to New Zealand to see how our rates of regular attendance compare. We selected countries that use similar definitions of regular attendance and that have published data in the last few years. While there are limitations with the data,^f these comparisons clearly indicate that New Zealand has lower attendance than other similar countries — in 2024/25, England has a significantly higher rate, with more than four in five students attending regularly (81 percent)²⁷ Australia also sits just above New Zealand, with three in five students (60 percent) attending regularly in 2024.²⁸

^f While these international attendance rates are broadly comparable but there are some limitations due to differences in time periods and definitions of regular attendance: (1) attendance rates for England are for the whole academic year and for Australia for Term 1 and 2 of 2024, while New Zealand is Term 2 only; and (2) Australia defines regular attendance as 'at or above 90 percent,' whereas New Zealand and England define it as 'above 90 percent'

Figure 13: *Percent of students who regularly attend school internationally*



Sources: Ministry of Education (New Zealand data); Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (Australian data); GOV.UK (English data)

Conclusion

Regular attendance has increased over the past three years and recovered to pre-Covid-19 levels. Improvements have been seen across a range of student groups and school types, yet New Zealand continues to lag behind other countries in attendance rates. Of key concern is that students in poorer communities, in smaller schools, and Māori and Pacific students continue to struggle more with attendance.

Understanding recent patterns in attendance is a valuable first step toward addressing the issue and identifying where further action is needed. Attitudes toward attendance play a key role in whether students go to school. In Part 4 and Part 5, we explore how these attitudes have shifted over the past three years and how these changes vary across different student groups and school settings.



Part 4: Have student attitudes to attendance changed?

Student attitudes influence behaviour towards attendance. This part of the report looks at how student attitudes have changed since 2022. It also looks at attitudes for students at different types of schools and between different groups of students. Overall, we found positive changes for students.

This part looks at the changes to attitudes to attendance across time. In Part 6, we will look at why these changes are taking place.

What we looked at

In ERO's previous report on attendance,²⁹ we found that attitudes are an important predictor of attendance. We found that both parent and student attitudes are important. This report looks at these attitudes again to see how they have changed. This part of the report looks at student attitudes and if there is variation for different groups of students.

To understand if and how students attitudes have changed over time, we drew on:

- interviews with students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- surveys of students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- site visits to schools.

This section sets out:

- 1) How student attitudes impact attendance
- 2) What has happened to students' attitudes
- 3) What has happened to attitudes for different groups of students.

What we found – an overview

More students now think education is important for their future, think attending daily is important and never want to miss school.

Attitudes drive attendance, students are 1.7 times more likely to attend regularly if they think daily attendance is important.

Three-quarters of students (73 percent) now think daily attendance is important, compared to two-thirds (67 percent) in 2022. Students of all ages tell us that daily attendance is important for keeping up with their learning and to improve their career opportunities and wider life skills.

Eight in ten students (82 percent) now think school is important for their future, an increase of four percentage points since 2022.

Almost a third of students (28 percent) report they never want to miss school – up from 15 percent in 2022. Students tell us they want to attend every day when they do fun and interesting things at school and because they want to see their friends, highlighting the importance of social connectedness.

Encouragingly, students in schools in low socio-economic communities show double the improvement in attitudes to daily attendance (12 percentage point increase compared to six percentage points for students in high socio-economic communities) and now have better attitudes to daily attendance than other students.

Students in low socio-economic communities now think school is just as important for their future as students in high socio-economic communities (82 and 84 percent respectively). Low socio-economic students' attitudes were previously ten percentage points lower than high socio-economic students.

Pacific students continue to have better attitudes to daily attendance than other students (78 percent compared to 71 percent).

Concerningly, Māori students are the only group of students whose attitudes to daily attendance have not improved (only two thirds, 67 percent, see daily attendance as important)

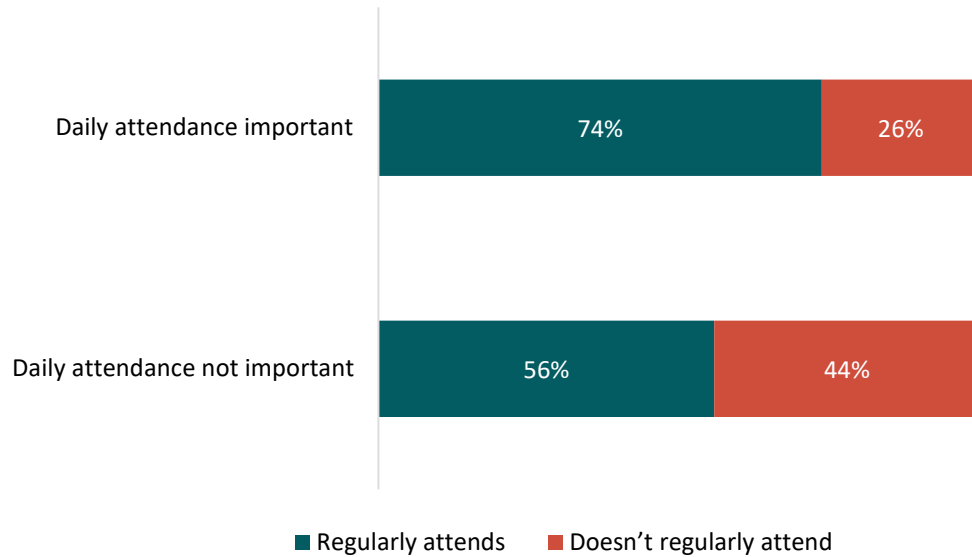
These findings are set out in more detail below.

1) How do student attitudes impact attendance?

Attitudes matter because they influence behaviour, including attending school regularly. For students, we found that views on daily attendance are a driver of attendance – students are 1.7 times more likely to attend regularly if they think daily attendance is important. Students who think daily attendance is important are 18 percentage points more likely to attend regularly than those who don't (74 percent compared to 56 percent).



Figure 14: *Students reporting the importance of daily attendance by whether they regularly attend or not.*

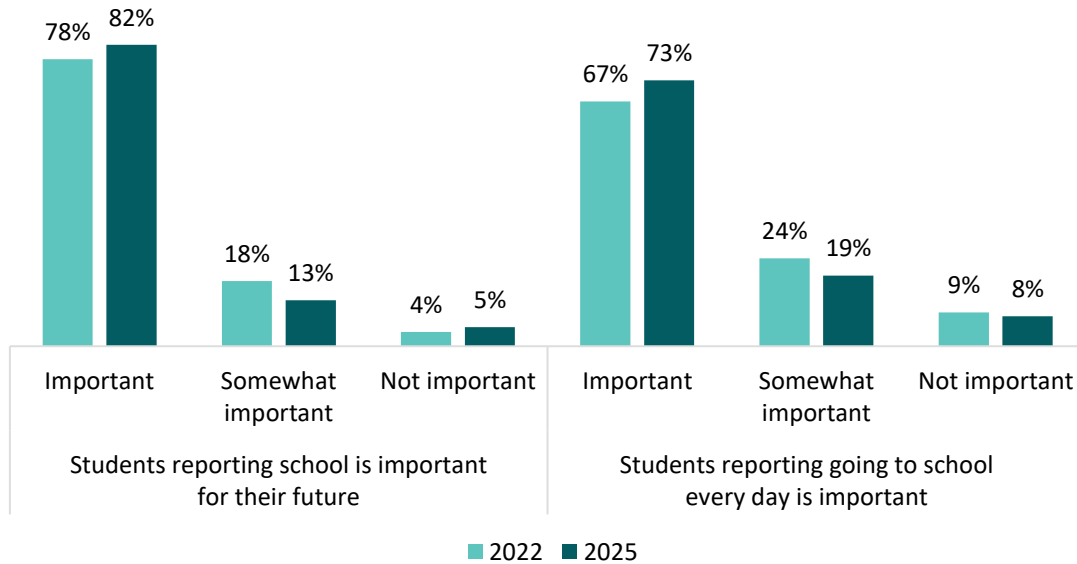


2) What has happened to students' attitudes?

More students now see daily attendance as important and see school as important for their future.

In 2025, just over eight in ten students (82 percent) said school is important for their future, which is a slight increase (4 percentage points from 78 percent) on 2022 responses. Similarly, more than seven in ten (73 percent) now view daily attendance as important, which is also an increase (up 6 percentage points from 67 percent).

Figure 15: *Percent of students who report that school is important for their future and going to school every day is important in 2022 and 2025.*



Students of all ages told us daily attendance is important when they want to keep up with their learning – it is difficult to catch up when they miss school. We also heard from students who are thinking about the value of school for longer-term opportunities, including employment, and wider life skills.

“Later on in life you might need some of the skills that you learn at school... If you want to apply for a job, and if you want to work at a shop, you might have to do subtracting and adding, and [even for] stacking the shelves at a supermarket you need to learn how to read.”

PRIMARY STUDENT

“School is a foundation, and everything goes off the foundation. So, the stronger I can build my foundation, the easier and the more options I can have once I do decide.”

SECONDARY STUDENT

Some primary students also told us that regular attendance helps them gain access to their secondary school of their choice.

“If you’re trying to get into a school that has high standards... if they see you’re not coming to school often then there’s a low chance that you might get into that school... they all want the kids to come to school and not stay at home.”

INTERMEDIATE STUDENT

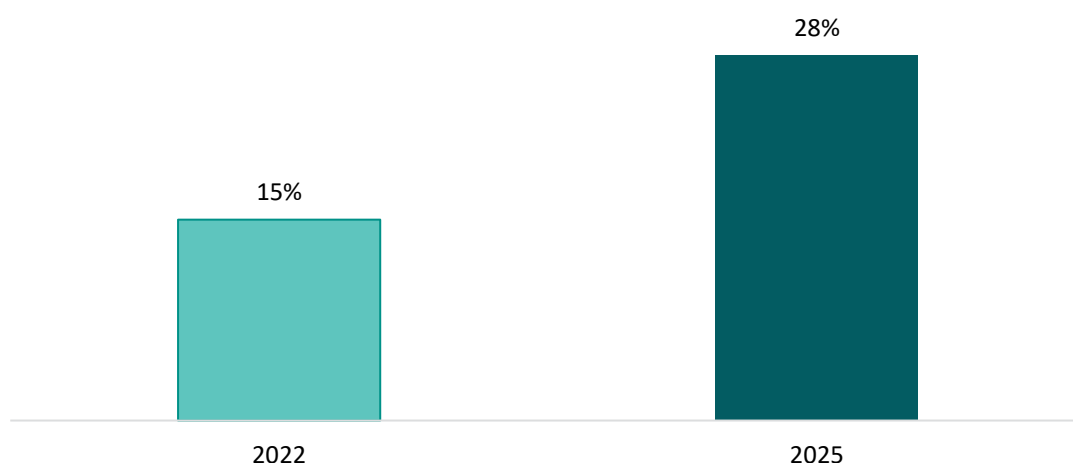
More students report never wanting to miss school.

Encouragingly, the number of students who report that they never feel like missing school has nearly doubled since 2022. When we last asked students, about one in seven (15 percent) told us that they never feel like missing school, and this is now almost two in seven (28 percent – a 13-percentage point increase).

“The reason my attendance is so good is because I just want to be here. I don’t want to miss days of school. Like, if I’m sick, I still want to go.”

SECONDARY STUDENT

Figure 16: *Percent of students who report they never feel like missing school, 2022 and 2025.*



Students willing to miss school to avoid certain activities has remained relatively stable. In 2025, just under one in five students (18 percent) said they would want to miss school to avoid participating in certain activities such as swimming or sports, compared to just over one in five (21 percent) in 2022.

Students told us they want to attend every day when they are doing fun and interesting things at school. Seeing their friends is also a strong motivator, highlighting the importance of social connectedness.

Despite these increases, more than a quarter of students still don't see daily attendance as important.

While attitudes have shifted, they remain concerningly low. Nearly one in five students (18 percent) still don't see the value of school, and more than a quarter of students (27 percent) still don't see daily attendance as important.

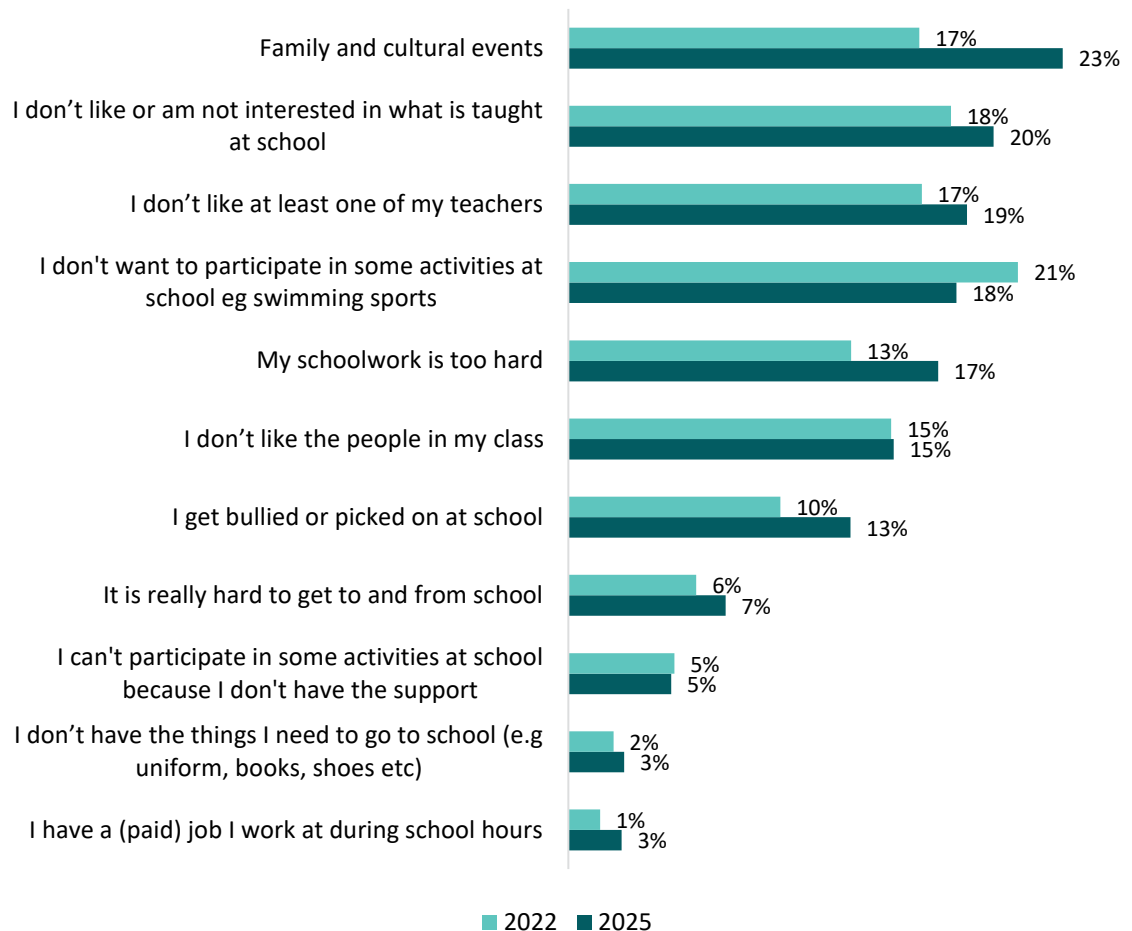
More students are willing to miss school for family and cultural events. Now nearly a quarter of students (23 percent) say they would want to miss school for family and cultural events such as funerals or weddings. This compares to one in six (17 percent) in 2022, which is an increase of six percentage points. This suggests that post Covid-19, students are placing greater importance on family connection, even when it means missing school.

“You want to be able to be included with your family and stuff, and it's good to catch up with people. For example, you want to go away for a family meeting and gathering [or] go camping or something with the family. I feel like it's good because it brings the spirits up.”

SECONDARY STUDENT



Figure 17: *Percent of students wanting to miss school for a variety of reasons, 2022 and 2025.*



About a fifth of students still want to miss school due to academic disengagement.

In our previous report,³⁰ we found that students who find schoolwork too hard or uninteresting are more likely to miss school, and that students who enjoy or are interested in what is taught are more likely to attend regularly. Now, one in six students (17 percent) say they would miss school because their schoolwork is too hard (up just 4 percentage points from 13 percent), and one in five (20 percent) say they would miss school because they don't like or aren't interested in what is being taught (relatively unchanged from 18 percent in 2022).

When we asked about the best thing their school does to keep attendance up, students most commonly referred to learning being interesting and fun. Enjoyment facilitates attention, motivation, and sustained effort and is positively related to academic performance.³¹ We also previously found that students find learning more enjoyable and engaging when the content is relevant to them. This can include content that teaches students about their history, culture, and identity³² and that supports students' preferred career pathways.³³ We heard that students are drawn to a mix of academic subjects like Maths, Art, and Science.

“At my old school, I would go, and I wouldn’t learn anything, so I wouldn’t want to go. But when I come here, I know that I’m going to learn something new every day. So, it makes me want to get up out of bed, put my uniform on, do the travel to school and come and learn.”

SECONDARY STUDENT

We also heard about the role of extra-curricular activities, such as school trips, games, and sports. Many students also referred to non-uniform days, which build a sense of excitement, and are sometimes used as a reward for meeting school attendance thresholds.

“[We] have lots of fun things happen, so you do not want to miss a day.”

PRIMARY STUDENT

We also found that nearly one in five students (19 percent) would miss school because they don’t like at least one of their teachers, similar to 17 percent in 2022. Conversely, feeling understood and cared for by teachers can positively impact attendance, especially for students facing challenging circumstances outside of school.

“The teachers will have one-on-one talks with you if they understand what’s going on... made me feel better. And that made me come to school a bit more.”

SECONDARY STUDENT

Peer relationships continue to be important for attendance.

In our 2022 report,³⁴ we found that bullying and dislike of people in their class made students less likely to attend school. Views haven’t changed much since then, with one in eight students (13 percent) citing bullying, and about one in seven (15 percent) citing dislike of classmates as reasons they would miss school (10 percent and 15 percent in 2022). Students who shared their bullying experiences with us confirmed that it has affected their attendance in the past. Other students have told us that the risk of being bullied makes them not want to come school and they enjoy school less when they do attend.

“I don’t really mind school. I’d rather probably be at home than be at school, because sometimes people bully and stuff.”

PRIMARY STUDENT

Student willingness to miss school for paid work is relatively unchanged – just 3 percent in 2025, similar to one percent in 2022. Wanting to miss school due to not having the things they need also remained fairly stable with 2 percent reporting this in 2022 and 3 percent reporting this in 2025.

3) What has happened to attitudes for different groups of students?

This section sets out how attitudes have changed for the following types of students:

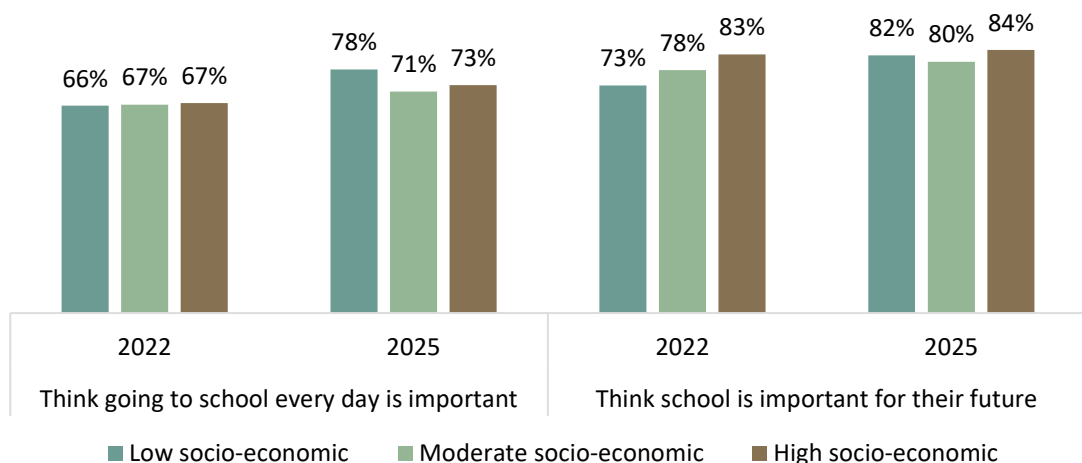
- a) Socio-economic status
- b) Pacific students
- c) Māori students
- d) Primary and secondary students
- e) Gender.

a) Socio-economic status

Students in low socio-economic communities show the greatest improvement in attitudes to attendance.

The attitudes of students in lower socio-economic communities have improved more than other students in some ways. In 2025, more than eight in ten students (82 percent) in low socio-economic communities see school as important in their future, up from just over seven in ten (73 percent) in 2022. This means they have nearly caught up with peers in high socio-economic communities (84 percent).

Figure 18: *Percent of students who think school is important for their future and daily attendance is important, by socio-economic status in 2022 and 2025.*



These students have also improved their attitudes to daily attendance more than students in high socio-economic communities. Now just over three-quarters (78 percent) say it's important to go to school every day, compared to just under three-quarters (73 percent) in high socio-economic communities. Students in both types of communities have increased from two-thirds (66 and 67 percent) in 2022.

The number of students in low socio-economic communities who report they never feel like missing school has more than doubled since 2022. Nearly three in ten students in low socio-economic schools (28 percent) never feel like missing school, up from one in eight (13 percent) in 2022 – a 15-percentage point increase.

“Some of those disadvantaged ones that do show up every day, it's probably what they're finding here, that they're not finding at home, those connections, the opportunities, the lunches.”

TEACHER

Despite these improvements, there are also some concerning shifts in other attitudes for students in low socio-economic schools. These students are now more willing to miss school due to family and cultural events, bullying, and academic pressure than they were in 2022.

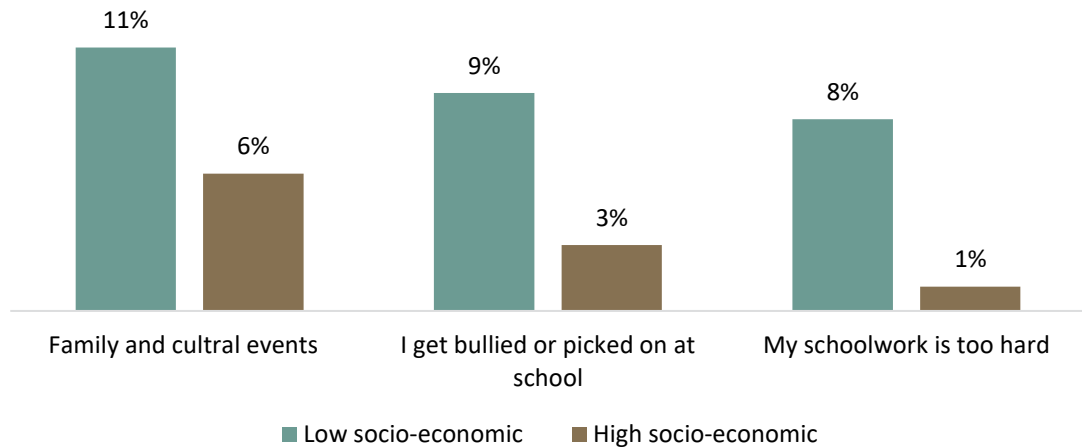
In 2025, more than three in ten students (32 percent) in low socio-economic communities say they want to miss school for family and cultural events – 11-percentage point increase.

The trend is similar for bullying, which has doubled as a reason for low socio-economic students wanting to miss school, with one in six students (17 percent) in low socio-economic communities now saying this (up from only eight percent in 2022). This difference in attitudes between students in high and low socio-economic communities may be explained by their different realities. The international literature shows that students in low socio-economic communities are significantly more likely to be victims and perpetrators of bullying.³⁵

Academic pressure is also a growing concern for students in low socio-economic communities. With nearly two in ten (19 percent) saying they want to miss school because the work is too hard, up from just over one in ten (11 percent) in 2022.

ERO's previous research has found that students in low socio-economic communities can find learning more difficult when they have gaps in foundational learning due to disrupted or less effective learning in earlier years and when they have limited access to supports outside of school, such as from tutoring and parental help.³⁶ Chronic stress from economic hardship can also affect mental health, motivation, and self-efficacy, all of which are critical for learning.³⁷

Figure 19: *Percentage point increase in students reporting reasons they want to miss school between 2022 and 2025, by socio-economic status.*



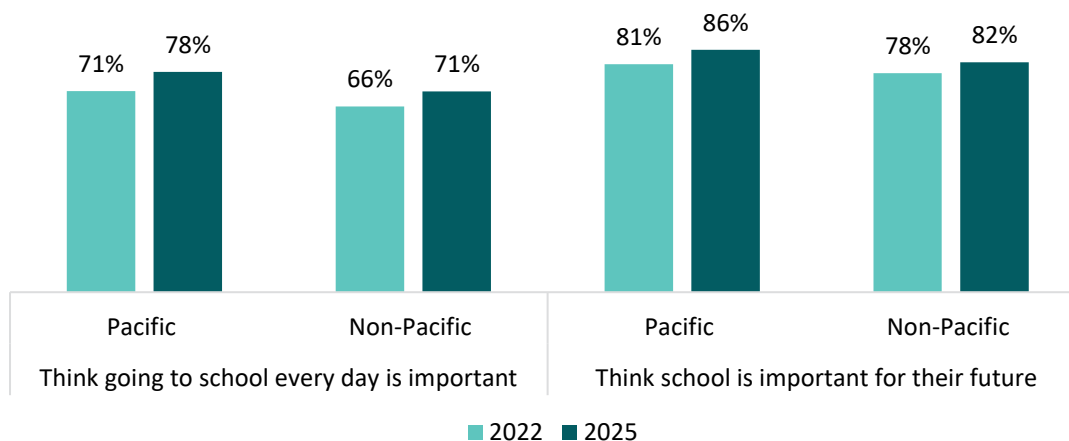
b) Pacific students

Pacific students have shown some of the most positive attitudes toward school.

In 2025, just under nine in ten Pacific students (86 percent) say school is important for their future — up from eight in ten (81 percent) in 2022 and continue to be higher than the just over eight in ten (82 percent) of non-Pacific students.

Their views on daily attendance have also improved significantly: nearly eight in ten (78 percent) now see daily attendance as important, up from just over seven in ten (71 percent), and ahead of non-Pacific students (71 percent). Additionally, three in ten Pacific students (30 percent) say they never want to miss school, up from two in ten (20 percent) from 2022 and slightly higher than the 27 percent of non-Pacific students. These trends suggest a growing sense of purpose and commitment to education among Pacific learners.

Figure 20: *Percent of student reporting the below attitudes towards attendance in 2022 and 2025, by Pacific ethnicity.*



However, Pacific students remain the most likely to want to miss school for family and cultural events.

In 2025, four in ten Pacific students (40 percent) report family and cultural events as a reason for absence — up from just over a quarter (27 percent) in 2022 and nearly double the just over two in ten non-Pacific students (22 percent).

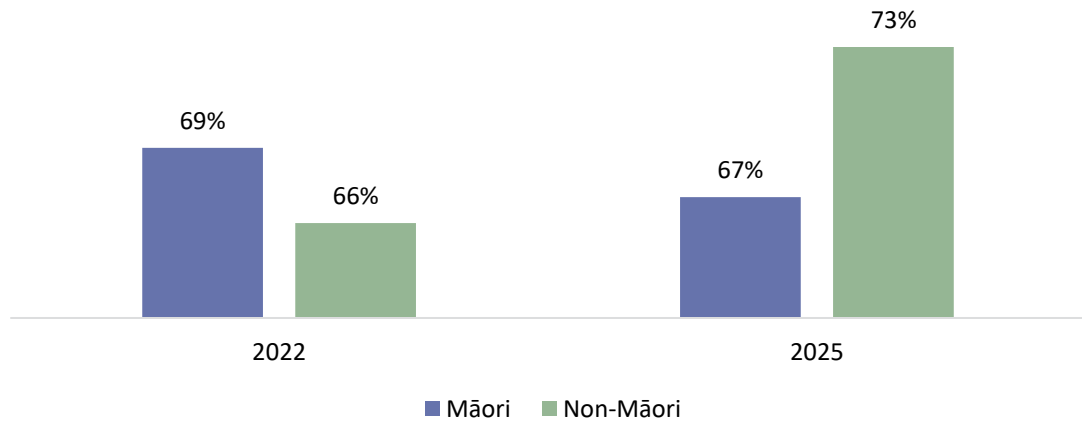
Pacific students are now more likely to report wanting to avoid certain school activities (18 percent, up from 12 percent) miss school to, while the rate among non-Pacific students has declined. These patterns suggest that while Pacific students are increasingly valuing school, some barriers to attendance persist.

c) Māori students

Māori students' attitudes to daily attendance have not improved while other groups have improved.

Action to improve attitudes to attendance has not, so far, worked for Māori students. Māori students now value daily attendance less than non-Māori, which reverses the pattern seen in 2022. In 2025, two-thirds of Māori students (67 percent) see daily attendance as important, which is similar to 2022 (down just 2 percentage points), while three-quarters of non-Māori students (73 percent) see daily attendance as important – an improvement of 7 percentage points.

Figure 21: *Percent of students thinking going to school every day is important in 2022 and 2025, by Māori ethnicity.*



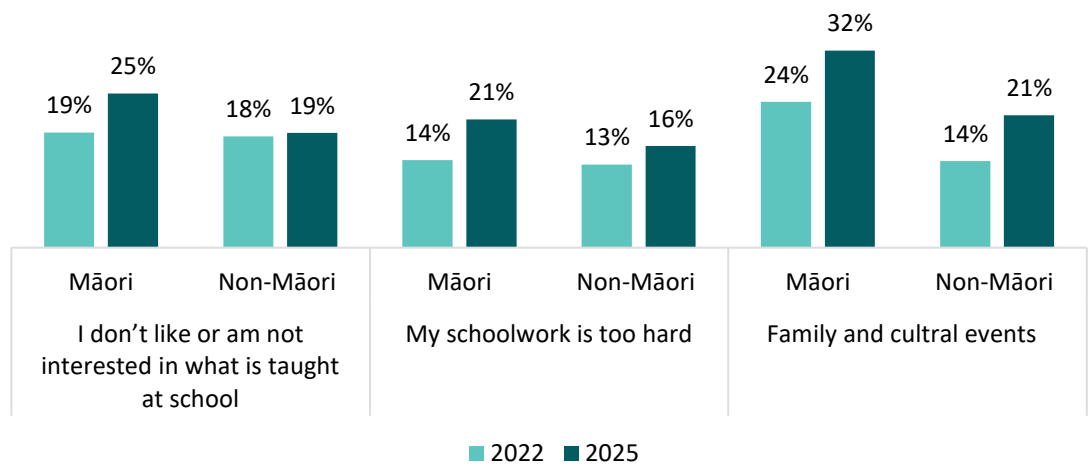
Māori students are more likely to want to miss school because learning is uninteresting or difficult and for family and cultural events. There's a marked rise in the proportion of Māori students wanting to miss school due to lack of interest in lessons (a quarter of Māori students, or 25 percent, say this, up from 19 percent) and because schoolwork is too hard (one in five Māori students say this, or 21 percent, up from 14 percent).

“It's got to be topics of school she's interested in. She likes her music and the drama. Not so much the Maths and the Social Studies and things. So sometimes she'll look through her day and go, 'Oh there's no Tech, there's no PE, I'm going to be stuck just with the boring old books.’”

MĀORI SECONDARY PARENT

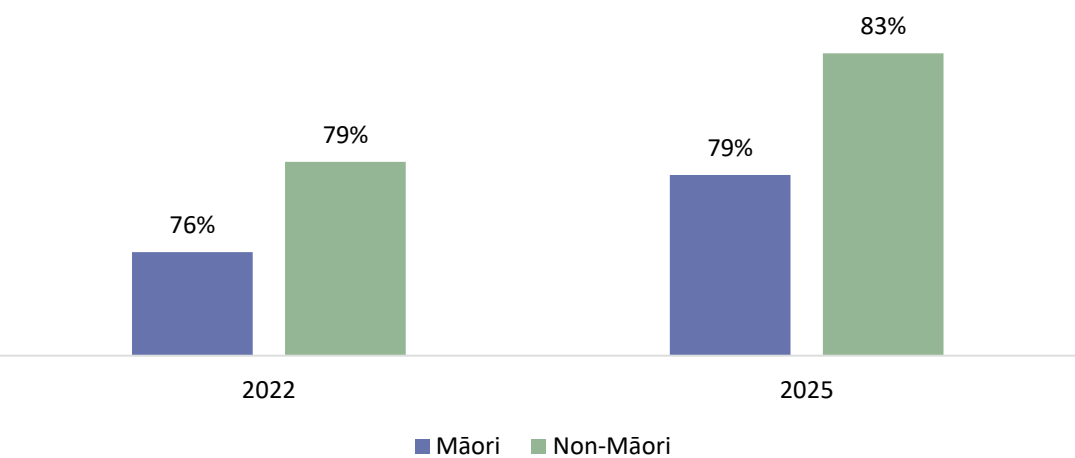
Māori students wanting to miss school for family or cultural events has also increased – about a third say this now (32 percent, up from 24 percent), remaining higher than non-Māori – only one in five non-māori students say this (21 percent).

Figure 22: *Percent of students willing to miss school for a variety of reasons, in 2022 and 2025, by Māori ethnicity.*



However, like other students, Māori students are increasingly recognising the long-term value of school. In 2025, nearly four in five Māori students (79 percent) say school is important for their future, up from three-quarters (76 percent) in 2022. While still slightly lower than non-Māori students (83 percent), this upward trend is encouraging.

Figure 23: *Percentage of students who report school is important for the future in 2022 and 2025, by Māori ethnicity.*



d) Primary and secondary students

Primary students are more likely to see school as important for their future and to never want to miss school.

Primary students continue to show stronger support for school.^g In 2025, primary students remain more likely than secondary students to say school is important for their future — just under nine in ten (86 percent) compared to just over three-quarters (77 percent). Both groups have seen increases since 2022 (up 4 and 3 percentage points respectively).

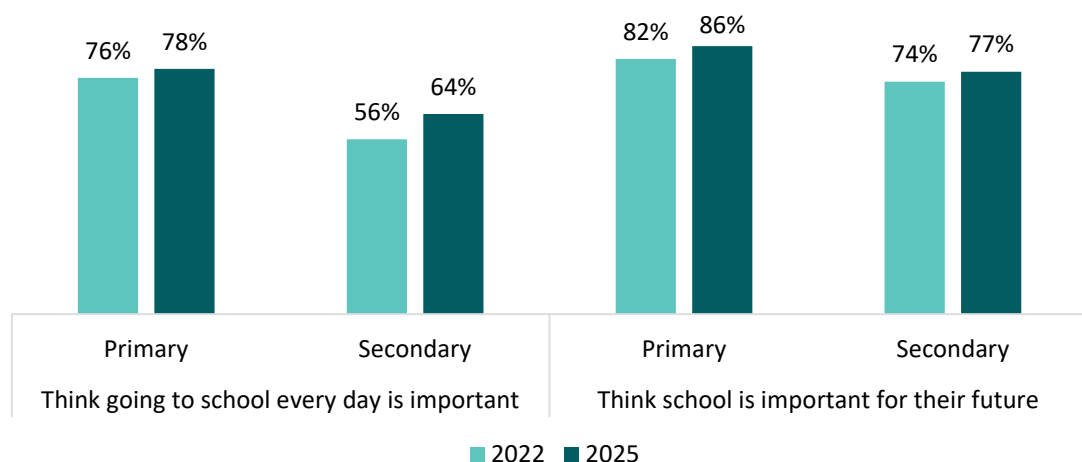
Primary students continue to place greater importance on daily attendance, with just under four in five (78 percent) reporting it's important to go to school every day, compared to just over three in five (64 percent) secondary students. However, secondary students saw a larger improvement (up eight percentage points compared to 2 percentage points).

Engagement is higher among primary students, with nearly a third (32 percent) saying they never feel like missing school — up 11 percentage points since 2022. This compares to just over one in five (21 percent) secondary students, though they also saw a notable increase (up 13 percentage points).

“If students enjoy their schooling and like their teacher then they want to come to school, for the little ones. The older ones need to see the value of schooling.”

PRIMARY TEACHER

Figure 24: *Percent of student reporting attitudes towards attendance in 2022 and 2025, by type of school*



^g For our survey data – Primary students refer to students in contributing, full primary and intermediate schools. Secondary students refer to students in secondary and composite schools.

Primary school students are more likely value daily attendance because they enjoy school more than secondary students due to a combination of developmental, relational, and structural factors. Research shows that the transition to secondary school often leads to declines in engagement, motivation, and wellbeing, partly due to increased academic pressure, fragmented teacher relationships, and reduced opportunities for playful or student-led learning.³⁸ In New Zealand, the evidence highlights that primary students report higher levels of enjoyment and connection, while secondary students face more challenges related to curriculum demands, disengagement, and attendance.³⁹

Willingness to miss school increased more for secondary students, and they are less interested in what is being taught.

Overall, willingness to miss school for family and cultural events increased more for secondary students – up nine percentage points (from 13 percent in 2022) compared to an increase of four percentage points (from 20 percent in 2022) for primary students.

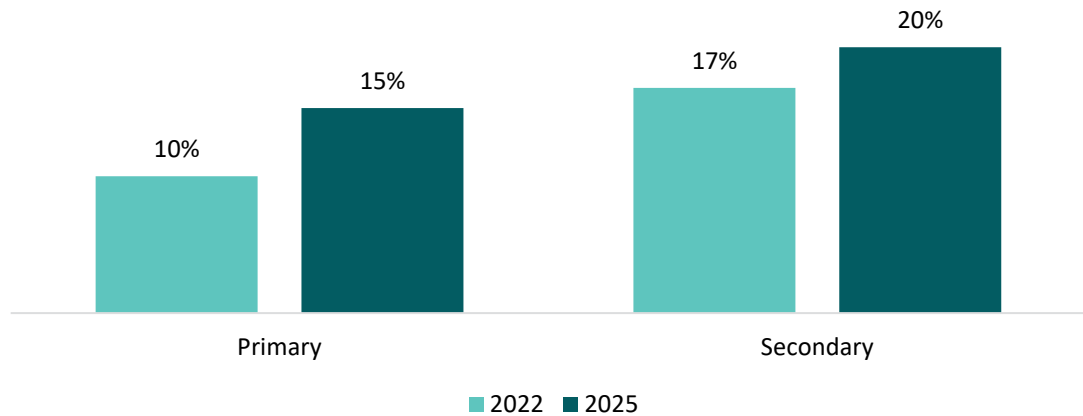
Secondary students continue to report higher levels of disengagement with learning. In 2025, three in ten (30 percent) say they are likely to miss school because they are not interested in what is being taught – more than twice the rate of primary students (13 percent). Secondary students also continue to be more likely to want to avoid certain school activities (24 percent compared to 15 percent).

“Being a Year 10, you get to choose your subjects... so that’s one good thing that I enjoy coming to school for... [but] if you have a really bad timetable, you just feel like waking up at 6am isn’t going to do much... I just can’t be bothered.”

SECONDARY STUDENT

Academic pressure is also more commonly reported by secondary students – one in five (20 percent) say they want to miss school because the work is too hard, up three percentage points (from 17 percent in 2022), compared to about one in seven primary students (15 percent), a rise of five percentage points (from 10 percent in 2022). It is perhaps unsurprising that secondary students feel more academic pressure, because they are experiencing their first external assessments in secondary school. Recent changes to NCEA mean that many are doing assessments earlier – in Year 9 or 10 – which can feel stressful because assessments are externally marked and they often aren’t familiar with the online platform.⁴⁰

Figure 25: *Percent of students reporting they want to miss school because the work is too hard in 2022 and 2025, by school type.*

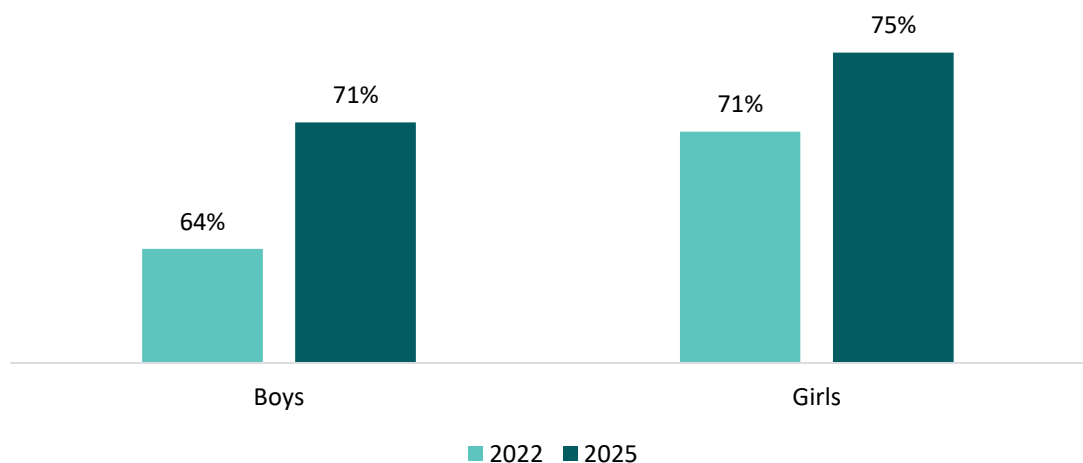


e) Gender

Boys' views have improved but still lag behind female students.

In 2025, just over seven in ten boys (71 percent) say going to school every day is important, up seven percentage points (from 64 percent in 2022). Girls remain slightly more likely to report this, with three-quarters (75 percent) saying daily attendance is important, up four percentage points (from 71 percent in 2022).

Figure 26: *Percent of students who report that going to school every day is important in 2022 and 2025, by gender.*



Boys saw slightly more of an increase in thinking school is important for their future. In 2025, just under nine in ten girls (86 percent) say school is important for their future, up 3 percentage points (from 83 percent in 2022). Boys remain less likely to agree, with just over four in five (79 percent) saying school is important, up five percentage points (from 74 percent in 2022).

We know that boys are generally less engaged in school than girls, due to a mix of academic and social factors. In New Zealand, boys are overrepresented in statistics related to school disengagement, stand-downs, suspensions, and early school leaving.⁴¹ International research shows boys often struggle more with reading and writing, which can affect their confidence and motivation. School environments may not always align with their interests or learning styles, and some boys feel pressure to downplay academic effort to fit in with peer expectations. Traditional ideas about masculinity—like being tough or not asking for help—can also make it harder for boys to stay connected and achieve at school.⁴²

“There’s a big difference with boys and girls in this school... the boys, they’re just not morning people. They’ll come for a basketball game, but they don’t want to come and sit on the mat.”

PRIMARY PARENT

Conclusion

Student attitudes to attendance matter because they influence rates of regular attendance. More students now think that their education is important for their future. More students are also valuing attendance, and report never wanting to miss school. However, they are more willing now to miss school for family and cultural events. Students in low socio-economic schools see the greatest improvement in attitudes to daily attendance and girls’ attitudes are slightly better than boys. Pacific students have better attitudes compared to other students.

Part 6 of the report looks at reasons for these changes in attitudes to attendance.



Part 5: Have parent attitudes to attendance changed?

Parent attitudes are important because they influence behaviour towards attendance. This part of the report looks at how parent attitudes have changed since 2022. It looks at attitudes for parents at different types of schools and between different groups of parents. We found mixed results. Parents' overall attitudes to attendance have improved, but attitudes to daily attendance haven't changed much, and attitudes about 'justified' absences have worsened.

This part looks at the changes to attitudes to attendance across time. We will look at why these changes are taking place in Part 6.

What we looked at

In ERO's previous report on attendance,⁴³ we found that attitudes are an important predictor of attendance. We found that both parent and student attitudes are important. This report looks at these attitudes again to see how they have changed. This part of the report looks at parent attitudes and if there is variation for different groups of parents.

To understand if and how attitudes have changed over time, we drew on:

- interviews with students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- surveys of students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- site visits to schools.

This section sets out:

- 1) How parent attitudes impact attendance
- 2) What has happened to parents' attitudes
- 3) What has happened to attitudes for different groups of parents.

What we found an overview

More parents now understand the importance of their child not missing a lot of school.

Parents' attitudes matter. Parents who are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school are over four times more likely to have a child not attending regularly.

Fewer parents are comfortable keeping their child off school for a week or more. Now only three in ten parents (31 percent) are comfortable with keeping their child off school for a week or more in a term compared to four in ten (41 percent) in 2022.

Parents tell us they are less comfortable with extended absences due to school messaging around the importance of attendance, through newsletters and direct communications with teachers. This messaging is especially impactful when schools refer to the impacts on their child's achievement and lifelong outcomes.

Parents are being firmer on their children going to school rather than staying at home for mental health reasons. Parents willing to keep their child off school for mental health reasons have reduced from almost half (46 percent) in 2022 to around a quarter (28 percent) in 2025. Parents tell us that knowing their child will receive the right supports at school makes a difference.

More parents see the law as a reason to attend school, especially Pacific parents. Around two-thirds of all parents (65 percent), now see the law as a reason to attend school (up from 58 percent in 2022). Seven in ten Pacific parents (70 percent) report the same.

However, parents are not yet taking daily attendance more seriously.

While fewer parents are comfortable with their child missing a week or more, more parents are comfortable with their child missing a couple of days in a school term – up 9 percentage points from half of parents (50 percent) in 2022 to six in ten parents (59 percent) in 2025.

Nearly half of parents (47 percent) are still willing to let their child miss school for family holidays of one or two days (the same as 46 percent in 2022).

Concerningly, Māori parents' attitude to daily attendance have declined the most, 86 percent see daily attendance as important.

Parents are increasingly content for children to miss school for some 'justified' reasons.

Concerningly, more parents are now willing to let their child miss school for family and cultural events (76 percent compared to 67 percent in 2022). Parents are especially likely to prioritise family events over school when relatives live far away.

Worryingly, more parents are also willing to let their child miss school for out-of-school events (e.g. sports) (58 percent compared to 41 percent in 2022).

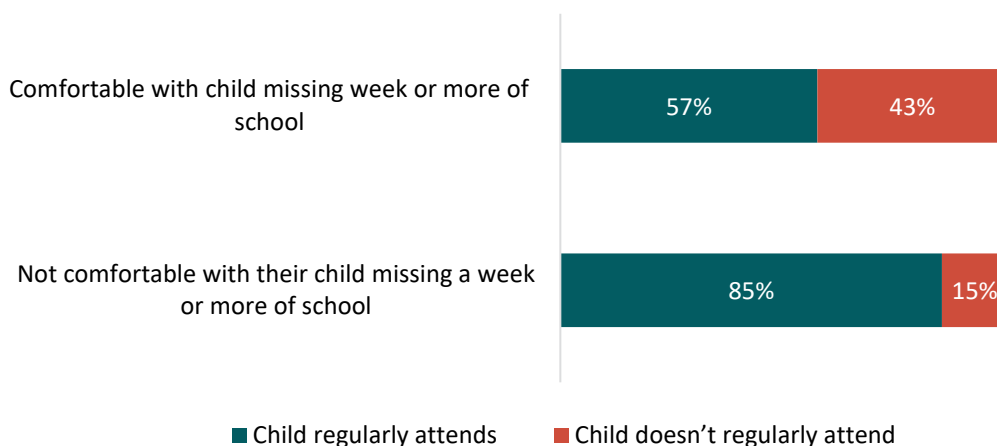
We heard from parents across diverse communities that when they prioritise out-of-school events such as sporting tournaments and cultural celebrations – including kapa haka competitions, Polyfest, and regional sports fixtures – this is because they view them as vital for identity and their child's personal development. Parents do not always understand how missing school can disrupt the habit of attendance and how missing learning can accumulate.

These findings are set out in more detail below.

1) How do parent attitudes impact attendance?

Attitudes matter because they influence behaviour, including attending school. We found that parents' comfort with their child missing a week or more of school is a strong predictor of their child's attendance – they are over four times (4.3) more likely to have a child who doesn't attend regularly.

Figure 27: *Percent of parents reporting their comfort with their child missing a week or more of school, by whether their child attends school regularly or not.*



2) What has happened to parents' attitudes?

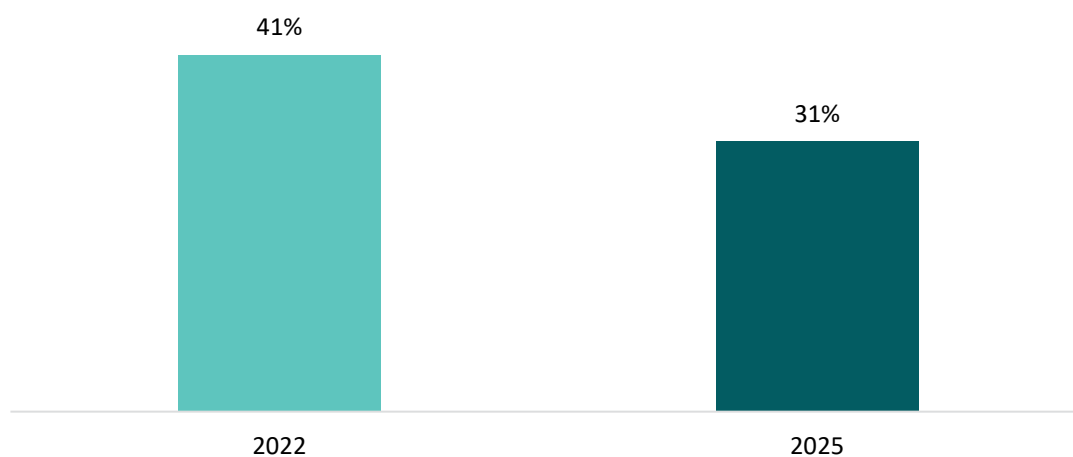
Parents continue to see education as important for their children's future.

Parents' views about the importance of school and daily attendance have remained largely stable over time. In 2025, just over nine in ten parents (93 percent) said school is important for their child's future—similar to 2022 (92 percent).

Parents are now less comfortable keeping their child off school for a week or more.

There has been a more marked shift in how parents view extended absences. In 2025, around a third of parents (31 percent) are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school in a term, down from more than two in five (41 percent) in 2022. Similarly, around three in ten parents (28 percent) are willing to keep their child off school for holidays of a week or more, down from more than a third (35 percent) in 2022. This suggests that parents are becoming less accepting of longer periods of absence.

Figure 28: *Percent of parents reporting on their comfort with their child missing a week or more of school in a term, 2022 and 2025.*



We heard that parents are less comfortable for their child to have extended periods of time off school due to school messaging around the importance of attendance, through newsletters and direct communications from the school. This messaging is especially impactful when schools refer to the impacts on their child's achievement and lifelong outcomes.

However, just under three in ten parents remain comfortable with long holidays in term-time and we heard from schools that term-time holidays remain a main challenge for regular attendance (see more on this in Part 8). Schools with high migrant and multi-ethnic populations are especially impacted when term-time travel is used to connect with family. This can result in multiple weeks off school. Schools tell us that some families are just reconnecting after years of border closures and travel restrictions due to Covid-19.

Travel during school holidays is still relatively expensive,⁴⁴ and families are choosing term-time travel to save money. These absences are not necessarily a reflection of disengagement from education, but rather a reflection of the importance placed on family, cultural identity, and belonging.

“Our family is very spread out, literally across the world... she got to spend that time with her cousins she doesn't see for years on end.”

PRIMARY PARENT



Parental attitudes have improved around birthdays, mental health, and the role of the law.

Willingness to keep their child off school on their birthday has dropped slightly – by three percentage points to 9 percent (from 12 percent in 2022).

Willingness to keep children home for mental health reasons has dropped significantly—from almost half (46 percent) in 2022 to almost less than three in ten (28 percent) in 2025.

“My parents encouraged me to come to come to school ... They understood when I took time off, why I was doing it, because of my mental health, but then they would always be like, ‘What if you go just for part of the day’. They would still try to get me to go even if I didn't stay the whole day.”

SECONDARY STUDENT



Mental health concerns, especially anxiety, can impact students' attendance. We heard that student anxiety may be exacerbated by parent anxiety, and parents can enable absences because they think keeping their child home is what they need. This perhaps highlights the need for schools to work with parents to find workable solutions.

“I don't think [the school] would really care much for mental health days, but I think that they are important. ... sometimes I have to pull up the keys – you know, if I'm not feeling up to working. So, it's only natural that teenagers do sometimes as well.”

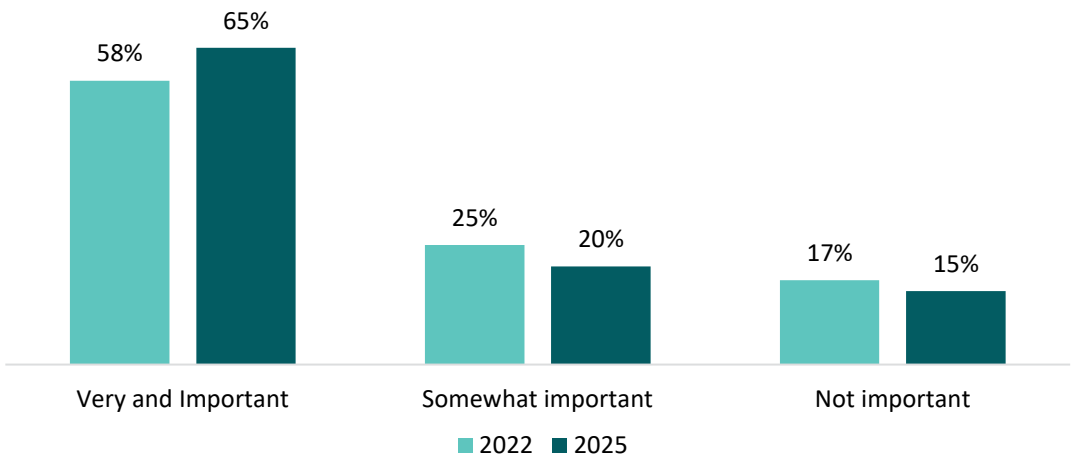
SECONDARY PARENT



We heard that it helps parents and students make the decision to attend if support is on hand at school, which can be through specialist mental health services and caring teachers. We also know that mental health support in New Zealand schools has been expanding. Counselling in Schools (Awhi Mai Awhi Atu) rolled out in schools from 2021 and has been linked to better attendance, engagement, and learning progress.⁴⁵ Other initiatives, like Pause Breathe Smile (a mindfulness programme in schools for 5–12-year-olds) and Mana Ake, which expanded from 2022, have also broadened access to age-appropriate support.

Importantly, more parents now recognise the law as a reason to send their child to school. Nearly two-thirds of parents (65 percent) say this in 2025, up from just under three in five (58 percent) in 2022. These changes reflect a growing prioritisation of school attendance and a stronger alignment with legal and educational expectations.

Figure 29: *Percent of parents reporting they recognise the law as a reason to send their child to school, 2022 and 2025.*



But parents are not yet taking daily attendance more seriously. Almost half are now willing to let their child miss school for short holidays.

Just under nine in ten (89 percent parents) view daily attendance as important, but this has not increased (in 2022 it was 92 percent). While fewer parents are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school, just under three in five (59 percent) are still comfortable with missing a couple of days (up from 50 percent in 2022). Almost a half (47 percent of parents) are willing to let their child miss school for family holidays of one or two days (the same as 46 percent in 2022).

“Well, my parents think that you learn more on holiday than in school, and I did learn a lot.”

PRIMARY STUDENT



Figure 30: *Percent of parents who report daily attendance is important, 2022 and 2025.*

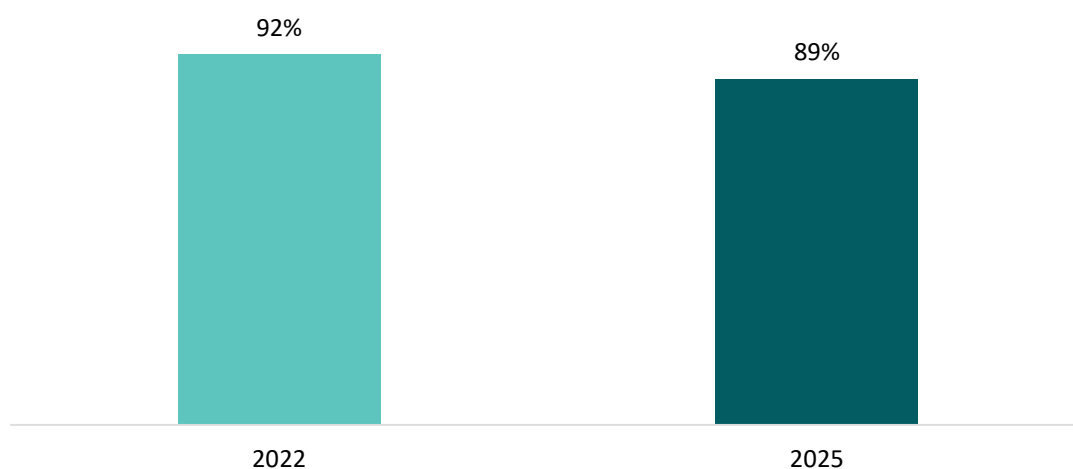
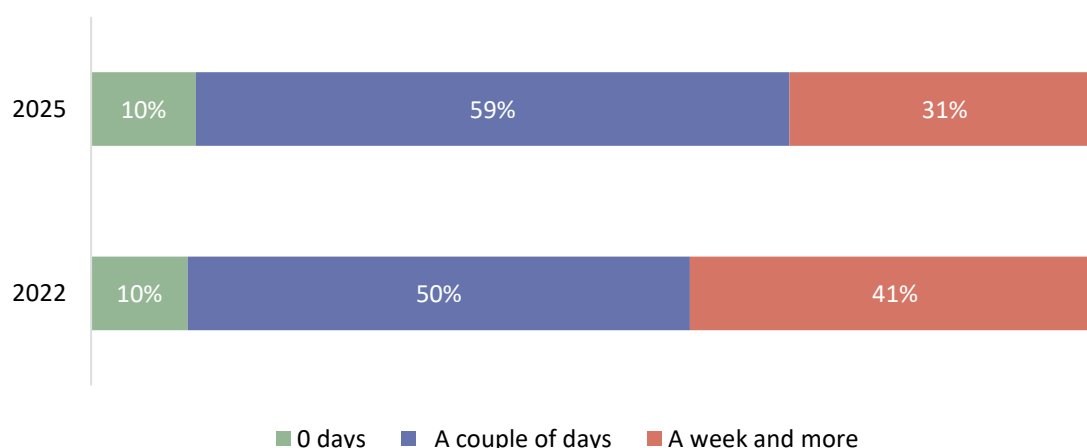


Figure 31: *Percent of parents reporting the amount of school time they are comfortable with their child missing per term, 2022 and 2025.*

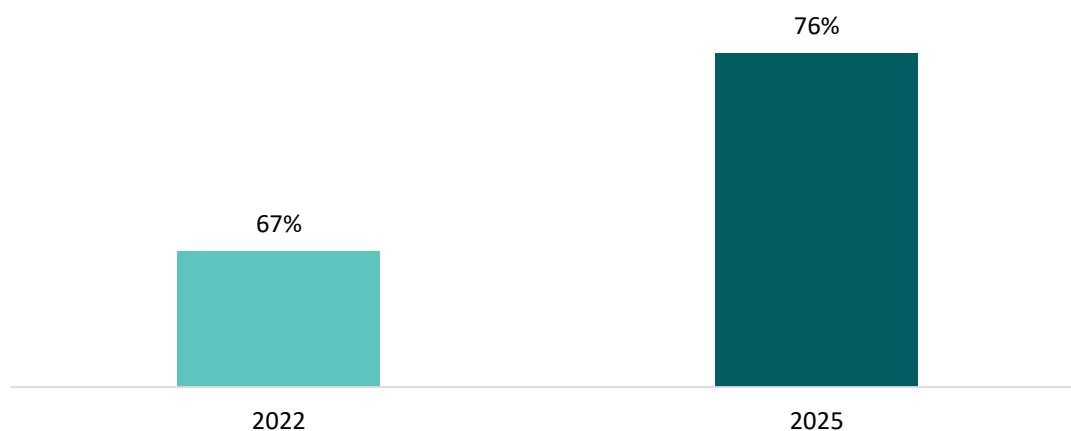


Parents are increasingly content for their children to miss school for some 'justified' reasons.

As explained in Part 3, some absences are classified as 'justified'. We found that parents are now more willing for their child to miss school for some of these reasons, including some family and out-of-school events.

More parents are now willing to keep their child home for family and cultural events. In 2025, more than three-quarters (76 percent) said they would do so, up from two-thirds (67 percent) in 2022. In addition, more parents are willing for their child to miss school for out-of-school sporting or cultural events. In 2025, just under three in five (58 percent of parents) are willing to keep them out of school for this reason, which is an increase of 17 percentage points from 41 percent in 2022. While these events are important, this trend can be a challenge for regular attendance.

Figure 32: *Percent of parents willing to keep their child home for family and cultural events, 2022 and 2025.*



We heard from parents across diverse communities that when they prioritise out-of-school events such as sporting tournaments and cultural celebrations — including kapa haka competitions, Polyfest, and regional sports fixtures — this is because they view them as vital for identity, wellbeing, and personal development. Also, for some students, participation in these activities is a key motivator for attending school.

“Getting marked absent when the child is out of school for a school related event e.g., representing school in a sports competition is quite unfair. It discourages kids from [doing] things to get a perfect attendance score, and these sort of events are very good for their learning and development also.”

PARENT

Some views have changed little over time.

In 2025, over a third of parents (35 percent) said they would keep their child home from school if they were being bullied, only slightly down from 38 percent in 2022. Similarly, just 4 percent of parents said they would keep their child home for paid work, a decrease from 7 percent in 2022.

Keeping children home due to practical barriers to attendance, such as lack of uniform or transport, has also remained fairly stable across time. In 2025, one in six parents (17 percent) are likely to keep their child home because of this, only slightly up from 13 percent reporting the same in 2022.

3) What has happened to attitudes for different groups of parents?

This section sets out what has happened to attitudes for parents with different characteristics:

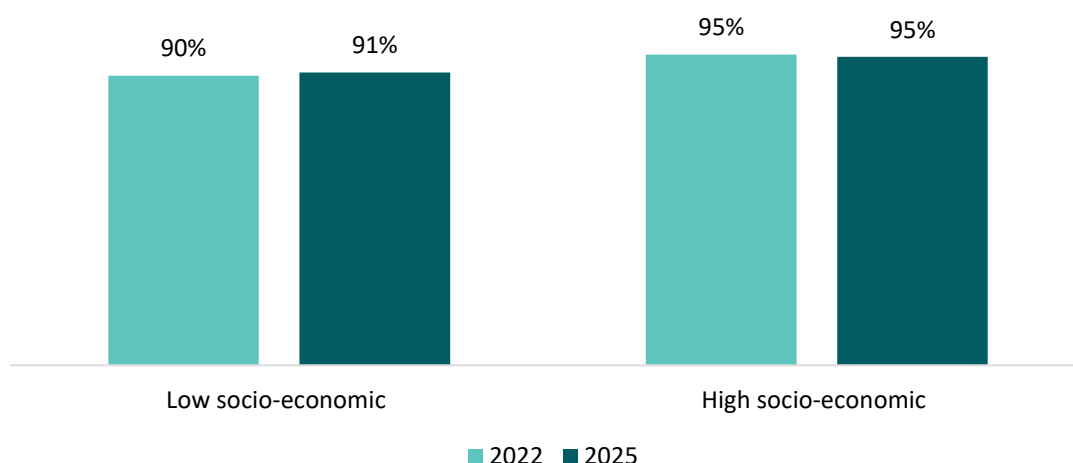
- a) Socio-economic status
- b) Pacific parents
- c) Māori parents
- d) Parents of primary and secondary students.

a) Socio-economic status

Parents in low socio-economic communities remain less convinced about school's importance and are less likely to view daily attendance as important.

In 2025, just over nine in ten parents (91 percent) in low socio-economic communities agree that school is important for their child's future, compared to 95 percent in high socio-economic communities — a gap that has not closed since 2022.

Figure 33: *Percent of parents reporting that school is important for their child's future, by socio-economic status, 2022 and 2025.*



Concerningly, views on daily attendance have worsened more sharply among parents in low socio-economic communities. Less than nine in ten parents in low socio-economic communities (88 percent) now say daily attendance is important, down six percentage points from 2022. This compares to a smaller drop (of three percentage points) among parents at high socio-economic communities with 90 percent saying that daily attendance is important. This widening gap suggests that daily attendance is becoming a more pressing concern to parents in lower socio-economic contexts. This contrasts with students in low socio-economic communities.

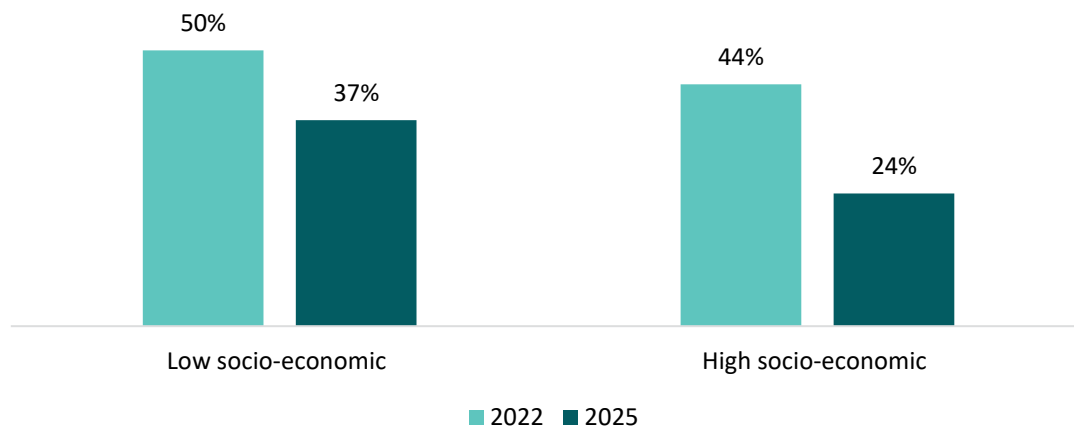
Parents in high socio-economic communities show stronger shifts in wanting to comply with the law and reduced comfort with absences.

Seeing the law as a reason for attending school has grown more among parents in high socio-economic communities rising 6 percentage points to 67 percent in 2025, compared to a four percentage points increase to 61 percent among parents in low socio-economic communities.

At the same time, comfort with children missing a week or more of school has declined more sharply among parents in high socio-economic communities — down 14 percentage points to 30 percent, compared to 10 percentage points drop to 29 percent among parents in low socio-economic communities.

When it comes to wellbeing-related absences, parents in high socio-economic communities are much less likely to keep students home for mental health reasons — down 20 percentage points to just 24 percent. Parents in low socio-economic communities remain the most likely to keep their child home for mental health reasons (37 percent). They have also seen the biggest decline (from 50 percent to 30 percent) in willingness to keep children home due to bullying.

Figure 34: *Percent of parents reporting they are likely to keep their child home for mental health reasons, by socio-economic status, 2022 and 2025.*



b) Pacific parents

Views of Pacific parents about the value of school and daily attendance have strengthened.

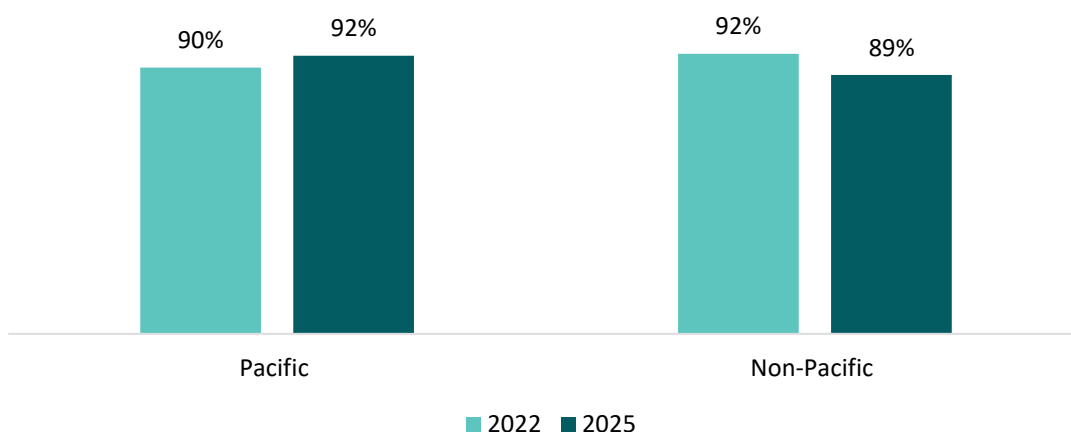
Pacific parents are now slightly more likely than non-Pacific parents to view school as important for their child's future — 94 percent in 2025, up 2 percentage points since 2022. This aligns with previous research, highlighting that Pacific parents highly value education as a pathway to success and economic security.⁴⁶ Many Pacific families have migrated to New Zealand for a better life and perceive education as an important tool for gaining economic prosperity.⁴⁷ Pacific parents also have high expectations⁴⁸ and are keen to be involved in their children's learning.⁴⁹

“Attendance is obligatory and my rule – if you are not sick then you must go to school.”

PACIFIC PARENT

The views of Pacific parents about daily attendance have also strengthened, rising 2 percentage points to 92 percent, while non-Pacific parents declined slightly. Comfort with missing a week or more of school has dropped sharply among Pacific parents — down 21 percentage points to just over a quarter (26 percent), the largest decline across all groups. Pacific parents' willingness to keep their child home due to mental health challenges has declined significantly — down 27 percentage points to a third (33 percent) — and willingness to excuse absences due to bullying has dropped by 11 percentage points to 42 percent.

Figure 35: *Percent of parents viewing daily attendance as important by Pacific ethnicity, 2022 and 2025.*

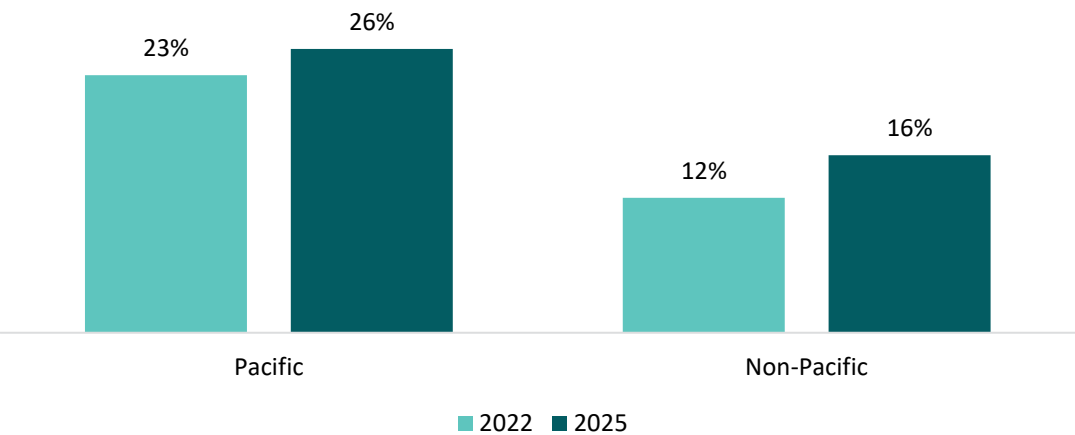


Pacific parents are especially seeing complying with the law as an important reason for their child to attend school.

Pacific parents show the largest increase in seeing the law is an important reason to attend school — up 13 percentage points to 70 percent, compared to a 6 percentage points increase among non-Pacific parents, to 64 percent in 2025.

Pacific parents have also become less comfortable with their child missing school for paid work (7 percent, down 4 percentage points), now similar to non-Pacific parents (4 percent). However, the number of Pacific parents willing to let their child stay home due to practical barriers to attendance have risen slightly (up three percentage points to 26 percent) and remains higher than that of non-Pacific parents (16 percent).

Figure 36: *Percent of parents willing to let their child stay home due to practical barriers to attendance, by Pacific ethnicity, 2022 and 2025.*

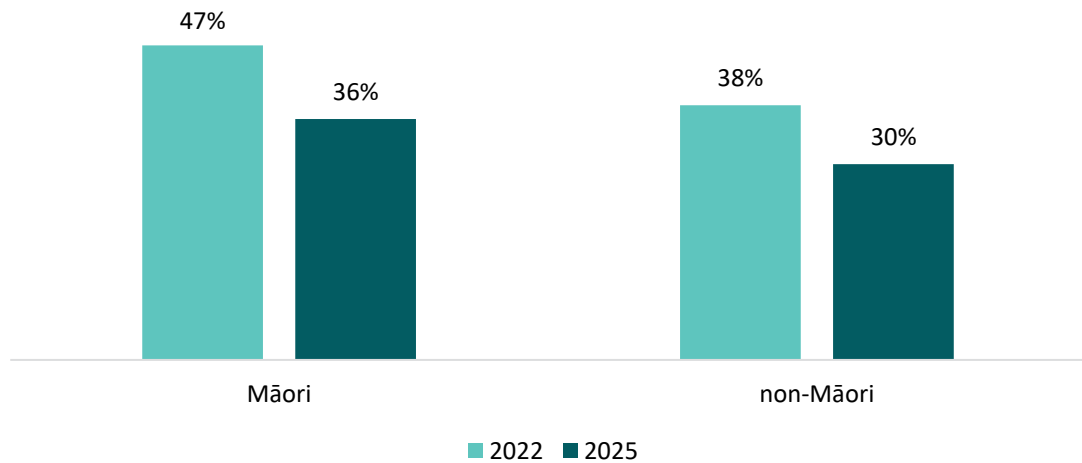


c) Māori parents

Māori parents are now less comfortable with absences for extended periods and for wellbeing reasons.

Māori parents are less comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school per term — down 11 percentage points to 36 percent in 2025. Similarly, Māori parents are now less comfortable with absences due to mental health challenges, declining by 15 percentage points to 38 percent. Comfort with absences due to bullying has also declined slightly (down five percentage points to 44 percent).

Figure 37: *Percent of parents comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school per term, by Māori ethnicity, 2022 and 2025.*



However, fewer Māori parents view daily attendance as important and are more comfortable with their child missing school for family and out-of-school events.

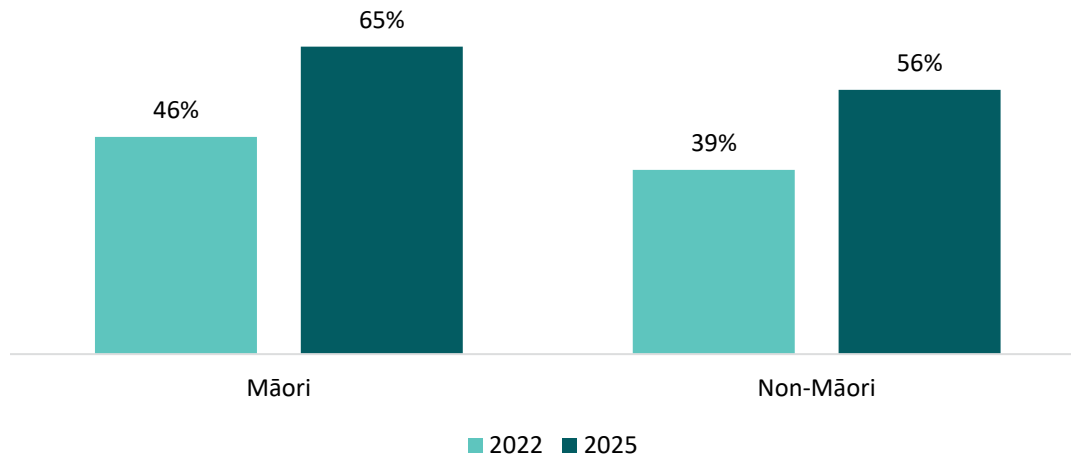
The importance of daily attendance has declined more among Māori parents than other groups — down 5 percentage points to 86 percent, compared to a 2 percentage point drop for other parents. Māori parents are also more comfortable with their child missing school for out-of-school events, such as sports and cultural activities, with nearly two-thirds (65 percent) reporting this in 2025 — a significant 19-percentage point increase since 2022, when fewer than half said this (46 percent).

“He really enjoys school... is quite active in Māori Kaupapa there and a lot of cultural activity. ... For instance, in the first term of the year, there’s a lot of prep for Polyfest... days here and there and then maybe up to a week off in preparation for things like that.”

MĀORI SECONDARY PARENT



Figure 38: *Percent of parents willing to let their child miss school for out-of-school events, by ethnicity, 2022 and 2025.*



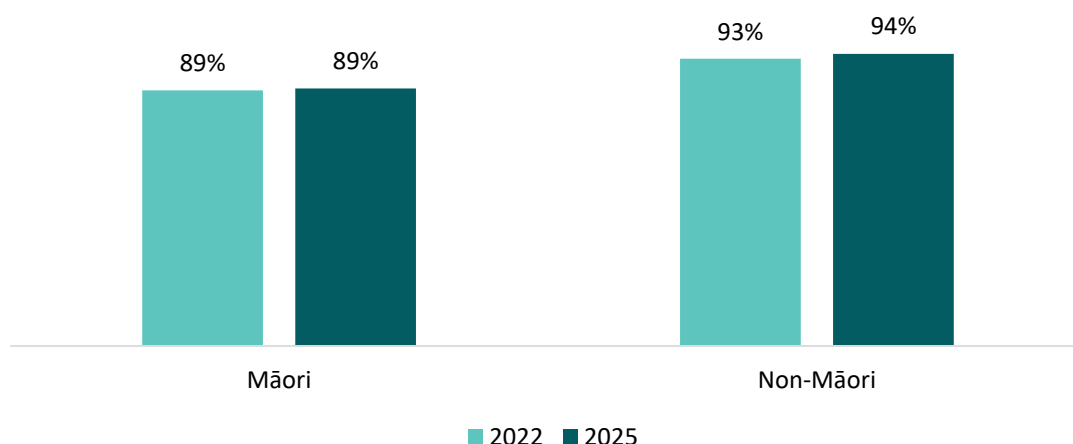
There has also been a modest rise in willingness to allow their child to miss school for family and cultural events such as tangihanga or weddings, up 3 percentage points to 84 percent. Māori parents spoke to us about the importance of connection with family, family land, and attending family and cultural events, like tangihanga (funerals) or celebrations because these things are important learning experiences in their own right.

“I also am really big on her being back on her whenua and with our whānau who are not in [our home city] ... I’m all for life skills and things that she will learn on the marae or with our whānau that aren’t taught [at school].”

MĀORI PRIMARY PARENT

Views of Māori parents on school’s importance and legal obligations have remained relatively stable. Māori parents’ views on the importance of school for their child’s future have also remained stable. Nearly nine in ten Māori parents (89 percent) report school is important for their child’s future both now and in 2022, continuing to be lower than non-Māori parents (94 percent).

Figure 39: *Percent of parents reporting school is important for their child's future, by Māori ethnicity 2022 and 2025.*



We heard from some Māori parents who said their attitudes to attendance had changed. The reasons we heard are less about what the school is doing or national messaging, but more about what is happening within their families. They noted reasons for becoming 'stricter' around attendance being because their child is getting older and doing assessments now, or due to their own work commitments.

“I feel like I’ve gotten a lot stricter over the last couple of years, pretty much just because of my work, not because of anything that they’re doing. It’s just because of the other side of life that I’m seeing through my mahi.”

MĀORI SECONDARY PARENT

Similarly, seeing the law as a reason to attend school has seen only a small increase – up 3 percentage points to over half (55 percent) – and remains lower than for non-Māori parents, of which more than two-thirds say this (67 percent). Māori parents are also the only group to show an increase in willingness to keep children home for paid work, with one in ten Māori parents now saying this (10 percent), up slightly from 8 percent in 2022. While still a small proportion, this trend may reflect economic pressures or limited access to alternative support. Māori parents also report the largest increase in practical barriers to attendance – up 9 percentage points to 26 percent.

d) Parents of primary and secondary students

Parents of primary and secondary students share similar views on the importance of school for the future and daily attendance, with little change over time.

Both primary and secondary parents continue to strongly value school as important for their child's future, with more than nine in ten parents (93 percent) saying this for both groups — unchanged since 2022. Primary and secondary parents' views about daily attendance have slightly worsened, by the same amount. In 2025, 89 percent of primary parents and 90 percent of secondary parents say daily attendance is important, both down 3 percentage points from 2022.

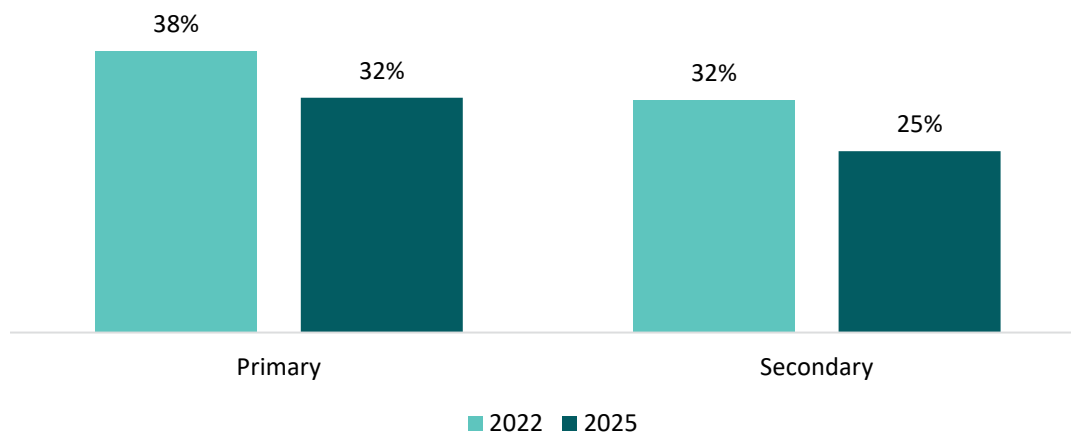
Comfort with their child missing a week or more of school per term has declined across both groups, but slightly more so for primary parents. In 2025, three in ten primary and secondary parents (31 and 30 percent respectively) report being comfortable with this, down 12 percentage points for primary parents (from 43 percent) and eight for secondary parents (from 38 percent).

Despite this, primary parents remain more likely than secondary parents to keep their child off school for holidays of a week or more — almost a third of primary parents say this (32 percent) compared to a quarter of secondary school parents (25 percent) — though both figures have declined since 2022.

“I believe that parents should have some discretion to take primary age children out of school for family holidays so long as these are not frequent and they have otherwise good attendance and academic performance. A family holiday is a learning experience for a child; giving them access to a range of new experience.”

PRIMARY PARENT

Figure 40: *Percent of parents reporting they would keep their child off school for holidays of a week or more, by school type, 2022 and 2025.*

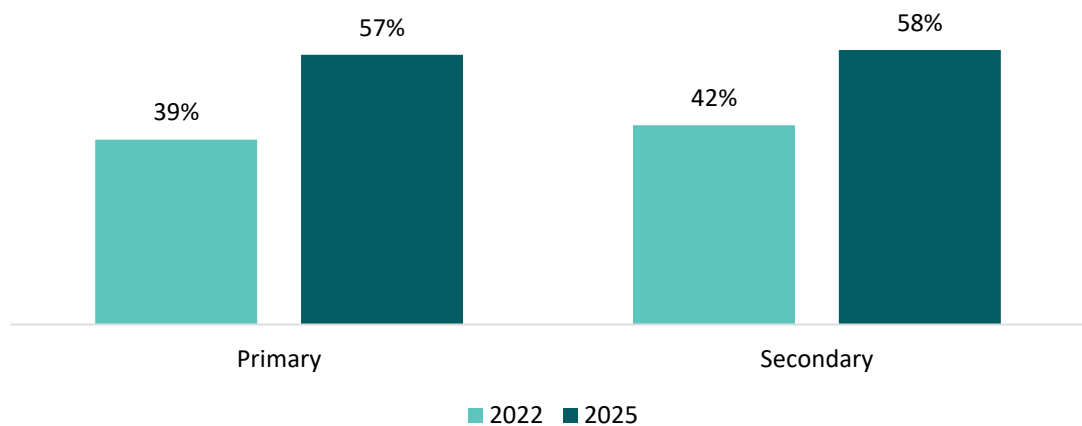


Legal reasons for daily attendance have gained more traction among secondary parents.

While just under two-thirds of primary (64 percent) and secondary (65 percent) parents now cite the law as a key reason for their child to attend school, the increase has been more pronounced among secondary parents. Since 2022, seeing the law as a motivator has risen four percentage points among primary parents (from 60 percent) and 9 percentage points among secondary parents (from 56 percent), suggesting a growing emphasis on formal obligations in the secondary school context.

Secondary parents are more willing for their child to miss school for family and cultural events, but parents from both types of schools are now more comfortable with absences for family and cultural events such as funerals, tangihanga, or weddings, with secondary parents showing a slightly larger increase. In 2025, three-quarters of primary parents and secondary parents (75 and 76 percent respectively) report being likely to keep their child home for such events — up 6 and 10 percentage points respectively. Attitudes toward out-of-school events have also shifted similarly, with almost three in five primary and secondary parents (57 and 58 percent, respectively) now willing to let their child miss school for these, both up significantly since 2022.

Figure 41: *Percent of parents who report they are willing to let their child miss school for out-of-school events, by type of school, 2022 and 2025.*



Secondary parents show greater decline in willingness to miss school due to wellbeing concerns.

Comfort with absences due to mental health or bullying has declined more among secondary parents. In 2025, just over a quarter of primary parents (26 percent) say they would keep their child home for mental health reasons, down 15 percentage points from 2022. Among secondary parents, the figure is slightly higher at 30 percent, but the decline is steeper — down 19 percentage points. For bullying-related absences, primary parents' views have remained stable (34 percent), while secondary parents are now less comfortable with such absences (36 percent, down five percentage points).

Conclusion

Parent attitudes to attendance matter because they influence rates of regular attendance. We found that parents continue to see education as important to their children's future, and their attitudes to daily attendance remain stable. Parents are taking overall attendance more seriously, with fewer parents comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school. Belief in the law as a reason for their child to attend school has increased for all parents, and most of all for parents at schools in high socio-economic communities and for Pacific parents. However, parents are not yet taking daily attendance seriously and are more willing for children to miss school for family and cultural events or for 'justified' reasons. Māori parents are the most willing to let their child miss school for family and out-of-school events.

Part 6 of the report looks at reasons for changes in attitudes and attendance.



Part 6: Why have attendance and attitudes changed?

We found an overall positive change in attitudes to attendance over the past three years, with more students reporting wanting to miss school. We looked at the reasons for changes in attitudes and attendance. This part of the report sets out what we found – the school can influence change by helping students feel connected to school, setting clear expectations about regular attendance, following up on absences, and using positive reinforcements.

What we looked at

Part 3 looked at changes in attendance and Parts 4 and 5 looked at changes in students' and parents' attitudes to attendance over time. In this part of the report, we look at the reasons for these changes, with a focus on the role of schools in achieving these changes with the range of attendance actions they have been using. We drew on:

- interviews with students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- surveys of students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- site visits to schools.

This section sets out:

- 1) What we already know about key drivers of attendance
- 2) What is driving attendance and attitudes
- 3) How routine opening makes a difference.

What we found: an overview

Schools are making students feel connected to school, and this has the biggest impact on attendance and student attitudes to attendance. Roles and responsibilities can help with this.

Students are five times more likely to think daily attendance is important if they feel they belong at school. Three-quarters of students (73 percent) feel they belong.

Students are twice as likely to think daily attendance is important if they have a role or responsibility at school. Half of students (52 percent) report they have one.

Schools are setting clearer expectations which helps students see daily attendance as important and helps parents see the value of school.

Students are twice as likely to think daily attendance is important if the school is setting clear expectations.

Schools setting clear expectations about attendance is the most important factor for parents reporting that school is important for their child's future – parents are twice as likely to report school is important if the school is setting clear expectations.

Schools are providing practical supports, and this has a positive impact on both attendance and parent and student attitudes to daily attendance.

Students are twice as likely to think daily attendance is important if the school is providing practical supports and parents are 1.4 times more likely to report their attitudes to daily attendance have improved in the last year if the school is providing practical supports.

Schools are providing rewards that help both parents and students see daily attendance as important.

Parents are 1.8 times more likely to think daily attendance is important if the school is using rewards. Students are 1.4 times more likely to think daily attendance is important if the school is using rewards.

ERO found that consequences have a positive influence on parent attitudes, but a negative impact on students' attitudes to daily attendance. Students who report their school uses consequences are a third less likely to report they attend school regularly; they reported being demotivated by consequences they think are unfair.

Schools' patterns of closures also matters, as they can impact parent and student attitudes to attendance.

Although school size, location, and socio-economic levels are stronger predictors of attendance, there is a link between how often schools are closed and regular attendance for primary schools.

These findings are set out in more detail below.

1) What we already know about drivers of attendance?

How regularly students go to school depends on a range of factors including – society's expectations, parent and student attitudes, barriers students can face to attendance, and a range of school factors.

a) Society expectations

Attitudes toward school attendance don't form in isolation—they're shaped by the social norms and expectations that surround children and families. These norms are the unwritten rules about what's considered 'normal' or acceptable in a community. If most families in a school community treat regular attendance as important, others are more likely to follow suit. Children also pick up cues from their peers: when going to school is seen as the usual thing to do, it becomes part of their routine.

Teachers and leaders play a role too, by reinforcing positive behaviours and creating environments where students feel they belong. Over time, these shared expectations influence how children and parents think about attendance—not just as a rule, but as something that’s valued and expected.

b) Parent and student attitudes and expectations

Students’ and parents’ attitudes impact on attendance, as described in ERO’s previous report on attendance⁵⁰ and in Parts 4 and 5 of this report. For example, parents who are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school are over 4 times more likely to have a child not attending regularly, and students are 1.7 times more likely to attend regularly if they think daily attendance is important. The wider literature also points to the role of parental expectations on their children’s outcomes. By setting high expectations, parents influence their children to set high expectations for themselves.⁵¹ In turn, their children receive high grades and stay in school longer.⁵²

c) Barriers to attendance

Barriers to school attendance are complex and interconnected, spanning student, family, and community dimensions. Students’ attendance is shaped by whether their basic needs are met, their physical and mental health, their sense of safety and belonging at school, and their belief in the value of education. Emotional and behavioural challenges are strongly linked to truancy, with New Zealand youth experiencing some of the highest rates of mental health issues and bullying in the OECD.

Family factors such as attitudes toward education, home stability, material hardship, and the ability to support learning also play a critical role. Māori, Pacific, single-parent, and larger families are disproportionately affected. Community-level barriers include geographic isolation, limited transport, housing affordability, and competing cultural or religious obligations. Economic conditions — such as high youth employment and a relatively low financial return on education — can also make work more appealing than school.

d) School factors

School-related factors also play a significant role in attendance. A positive school climate — where students feel safe, supported, and connected — has the greatest impact. Inclusive teaching that responds to individual needs, along with well-maintained physical environments, supports engagement. However, issues like racism and bullying, particularly affecting Māori and Pacific students, remain serious barriers. Nearly half of primary and a third of secondary students in New Zealand have reported being bullied, underscoring the need for schools to foster safer, more inclusive environments.⁵³

The following section will look at what is currently impacting attendance and attitudes to attendance for students and parents, with a focus on what actions are being used in New Zealand’s schools to lift and maintain attendance.

2) What is driving attendance and attitudes?

Controlling for student, parent, and school characteristics, we looked at what drives regular attendance in New Zealand, along with what drives attitudes to attendance. We focus on school actions aimed at lifting and maintaining attendance.

This section sets out:

- a) What drives attendance and attitudes for students
- b) What drives attendance and attitudes for parents.

Attitudes are important for attendance

As discussed previously in this report, attitudes to attendance are important because they influence behaviour — students' attitudes influence whether they attend school regularly, and parents' attitudes influence whether their child does. We found that students are 1.7 times more likely to attend regularly if they think daily attendance is important and that parents who are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school are over four times more likely to have a child not attending regularly compared to parents who aren't comfortable.

This relationship between parental attitudes and their child's attendance is even more pronounced for primary parents — they are five times more likely to have a child not attending regularly, compared to four times more likely for secondary parents. It is perhaps unsurprising that parental attitudes are more important at primary level — because primary parents often have a more active role in getting their child to school and when they miss school, for example, to attend family events, and out-of-school events.

School Actions impact attendance

Schools do a range of things to lift and maintain attendance. We looked at how these school actions impact both attendance and attitudes, including the following:

- setting clear expectations about attendance with students and parents
- using attendance data to identify patterns of attendance that can help schools intervene early
- using rewards and consequences to motivate students
- providing supports to overcome practical barriers to attendance (e.g. transport, uniform, and food)
- providing opportunities for roles and responsibilities that help build student pride and connection
- patterns of being open for instruction.

In this part of the report we will look at how these actions impact attendance and both students' and parents' attitudes to attendance. Part 7 of this report describes what these actions look like in New Zealand's schools, how much they are being used, and which types of schools are using them the most.

We also looked at whether parents' belief in the law impacts attendance. As reported in Part 5, the law is now a more important reason for parents to send their children to school. However, we found that belief in the law is not (yet) influencing attendance.

a) What drives attendance and attitudes for students?

In this section we report how a range of school actions impact on student attendance and attitudes about the importance of daily attendance and the importance of school for their future, as well as what has driven improvements in student attitudes to daily attendance in the last year. The table below summarises these impacts.

Table 1: *School actions impacting students' self-reported attendance and attitudes to attendance – predictive odd ratios based on logistic regression modelling.*

	Self-reported attendance – likelihood of being a regular attender (vs not a regular attender)	Importance of daily attendance – likelihood of this view (vs view it isn't important)	Improved views about importance of daily attendance – likelihood (vs no improvement)	Importance of school for the future – likelihood of this view (vs view it isn't important)
Belonging	–	5.0	2.0	5.1
Roles and responsibilities	1.4	2.0	1.4	1.9
Clear expectations	–	2.2	–	2.4
Providing support	1.3	2.1	1.6	2.1
Consequences	0.7	0.7	–	–
Rewards	–	1.4	1.5	1.4

Feeling a sense of belonging to school has the biggest impact on student attitudes to daily attendance and makes it more likely that students will see the value of school for their future.

Students can feel a sense of belonging at school for a range of reasons, including relationships with other students, with teachers and with broader faculty members, or through links to the school community through participating in group or collective activities.

Students feeling they belong at school is the most important factor impacting students' attitudes towards daily attendance. Students are over five times more likely to report that daily attendance is important if they feel they belong. Three-quarters of students (73 percent) report that they feel they belong at school. Primary students are more likely to report they belong — almost eight in ten (78 percent) compared to almost seven in ten secondary students (67 percent).

Belonging is also the most important factor impacting students' improved attitudes towards daily attendance. Students are twice as likely to report improved attitudes to daily attendance if they feel they belong.

Of all factors tested, belonging also has the biggest impact on student attitudes towards the importance of school for their future. Students are over five times more likely to report school is important for their future if they feel they belong.

Students often refer to friendships, peer interactions, and social opportunities as motivators for attending school. Being able to see friends and participate in group activities is a common factor. We heard of schools using the Zones of Regulation framework to help students recognise and manage their emotions, which in turn reduces behavioural incidents and supports positive peer relationships.⁵⁴ Teachers explained that “we’re explicitly teaching interpersonal skills, reflections on how we’re feeling and how our responses impact others and ourselves,” and that “kids are learning...they’re all using the same language, they’re all using the same terminology.”

“Having a strong community helps you want to be part of it. And when you want to be part of it, you’re going to be there, you’re going to show up, you’re going to do the right things. It’s just mostly what pushes me forward is the community and having small form groups where we all know each other quite well.”

STUDENT

We also heard that students worry about missing school because they are worried about the impacts on achievement. This is especially concerning for students who are striving for grades that are part of their career plan — they know that it can be difficult to catch up after absences. We heard from secondary parents about their child insisting on going to school even when they are “too sick” because they don’t want to fall behind — sometimes resulting in the student being sent home by concerned teachers.

Secondary students are likely to attend regularly if they feel they belong at school.

Connectedness is especially important at secondary school — secondary students are almost twice as likely to report they attend regularly if they feel they belong at school.

ERO's previous research found that relationships are one of the strongest motivators for students to go to school, with many students saying they attend to spend time with friends or because they like at least one of their teachers.⁵⁵ A decreased sense of belonging is linked to lower motivation, increased anxiety, and early school dropout.⁵⁶ International studies confirm that when students feel part of a school community, they are more likely to show up, engage, and succeed.⁵⁷ In particular, for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, a sense of belonging is one of the stronger predictors of attendance.⁵⁸

We heard that secondary students particularly need to feel they belong, because this is a time when they are actively forming their identity and social place. One parent noted that her daughter was “still finding her friend groups, hierarchies, and things,” and that this process was a key incentive to attend school — to “find your place as fast as possible.” Alternatively, we heard that it can be lonely at breaktimes without friends, and some students told us they will skip school when their friends aren't there.

“The bros, that's what usually keeps me coming to school. Usually if the bros text me saying they're not coming to school, then I'm usually not going to school either... [if I came without them] it would be a boring day, not talking to anyone.”

SECONDARY STUDENT

We also heard about the role of teachers in building connectedness and how this impacts attendance. Students are sensitive to how they are treated by teachers. We heard from parents about their children refusing to attend some classes after conflict with a teacher — the lack of respect and understanding disrupted their sense of belonging.

Having a role or responsibility at school is associated with better attendance and improves student attitudes towards attendance.

One way that students can feel connected to their school is by having a role or responsibility that they need to be there to do. This can include holding leadership roles like prefect or head student, or responsibilities such as road patrol or showing visitors around the school.

Having a role or responsibility that requires them to be at school to perform is the most impactful of the school actions for regular attendance. Students who report they have a role or responsibility are almost one-and-a-half times more likely to report they are attending school regularly.

We found that students with roles and responsibilities want to attend school because they feel pride in fulfilling their duties — they don't want to let anyone down. For example, we heard from a student with previously poor attendance, who was motivated to attend when she became a school prefect.

“I was given a lot of leadership responsibilities, people started coming up to me to ask me for help, and now I am a prefect, and I don’t want to be a prefect that doesn’t come to school.”

STUDENT

This relationship can also go both ways – students who have good attendance might be more likely to be chosen for roles. Leadership roles that require attendance thresholds can be motivating for students who want them.

“You need to have had a lot of days at school so you could become a leader, and people would know you, and you’ve also got to help out. So, that’s why I’m at school, because I’ve got to do these on a roster, and I’ve got to help the school out, to record all their house points from every class and put up flags, set up the hall for assembly, pack it up, lock doors and do announcements.”

PRIMARY STUDENT

Students are also almost twice as likely to think daily attendance is important if they have a role or responsibility. Students are also more likely to report that their attitudes towards daily attendance have improved in the last year if they have a role or responsibility – almost one-and-a-half times more likely. The impact of roles and responsibilities on improvements in attitudes to daily attendance is more pronounced for primary than secondary students.

Students are also nearly twice as likely to think school is important for their future if they have a role or responsibility. The impact on valuing school is more pronounced for secondary students.

When schools set clear expectations about regular attendance, students are more than twice as likely to view daily attendance as important, and to see school as important for their future.

Students who feel like their school expects them to attend regularly, and whose schools are clear about their expectations for attendance, are more likely to have better attitudes to attendance. Students are more than twice as likely to report that daily attendance is important if their school is setting clear expectations about attendance. This is true for students across different school levels.

Clear expectations about attendance are also important for how students value school. Students are almost two-and-a-half times more likely to think school is important for their future if their school is setting clear expectations. The impact is most pronounced for primary students.

We found that students in schools that set clear targets and expectations for daily attendance were more aware of their own and the schools' attendance patterns. Students were more positively impacted by messaging about attendance expectations when the 'why' was explained to them — when the school was clear on the benefits of attending regularly and made students aware of the negative implications of absences, both on achievement and lifelong outcomes. As discussed in Part 7, schools that are out-performing are setting clear expectations with students even before they join the school, getting them to sign up to attendance 'rules' as a member of the school community.

When schools provide practical supports, students are more likely to attend regularly and more than twice as likely to think daily attendance is important.

Students' attendance and attitudes towards attendance are better when schools take action to reduce barriers. These supports include helping students with transport, uniforms, and meals.

Students are one-and-a-third times more likely to report they have regular attendance if their school provides practical supports. The 'shame factor' from financial hardship can be a barrier to attending school.⁵⁹ Providing supports in ways that don't draw attention to this hardship works best for students, explaining why some teachers go out of their way to drop off uniform at home. Breakfast clubs work well in schools with high levels of need because no student is embarrassed by being singled out.

When schools provide these supports, students are also more than twice as likely to think daily attendance is important and to think school is important for their future.

Students are also over one-and-a-half times more likely to report that their attitudes to daily attendance have improved in the last year if their school is providing practical supports. This impact on improved attitudes is more pronounced for secondary, than primary students.

Schools providing practical supports can build and reinforce a sense of belonging, which we already know is an important factor for attendance and attitudes. Support with uniforms helps students feel included, as well as reducing stress or embarrassment. Providing food can motivate students to attend school regularly, especially when the food is enjoyable — we heard a lot about "hot chip lunches" and "pizza day" being incentives to attend. Providing food can also make school feel more welcoming — food is perceived to be nurturing as part of a wider system of care. Helping students get to school — either with the help of a school van or school bus — is especially important for secondary students who typically have to make their own way there. As with food, transport isn't just a 'practical' support — it makes students feel cared for.

"The teacher just really makes sure [students] come to school... there's one student, she didn't have a ride home or a ride to school, so she would pick them up."

STUDENT



School use of rewards has a positive impact on attendance and is especially impactful for primary students.

Rewards can vary, with some being targeted at individual students and others being more broadly targeted, with things like celebrations, house points or prizes.

If their school uses rewards, students are nearly one-and-a-half times more likely to think daily attendance is important. Students are also almost one-and-a-half times more likely to have improved their attitudes to daily attendance in the last year if the school uses rewards. These impacts are more pronounced for primary students than secondary students.

If the school uses rewards, students are also more likely to think school is important for their future — one-and-a-half times more likely than if the school doesn't use rewards.

Students value rewards because they recognise and affirm their efforts. Rewards also reinforce expectations, as students track their progress against attendance targets in pursuit of these incentives. Collective rewards can further strengthen belonging, motivating students to attend so they can contribute to something larger than themselves. Group-based recognition (e.g., best class attendance, year group, or a school-wide target) is particularly powerful: students are driven by not wanting to let their peers down, and the team aspect adds a sense of fun. In schools using collective rewards, students described messaging their 'teammates' in the morning to check they would attend and said this made them think twice about staying home — even when sick. There is, however, some mixed evidence on how effective rewards are for attendance.⁶⁰

School use of consequences has a negative impact on student attendance and their attitudes to attendance.

Consequences for non-attendance include detentions or not being able to participate in school activities.

School use of consequences has a negative impact on regular attendance for students. Students who report their school uses consequences are a third less likely to report they attend school regularly.

Students who report their school uses consequences are also a third less likely to think daily attendance is important. The negative impact of consequences is more pronounced for secondary students. This may be because primary schools use them less (as detailed in Part 7). We heard that primary schools use them less because staff often feel that lateness and poor attendance are outside the control of younger students. For example, students may sometimes be late or absent because parents were running their siblings to school, not sufficiently organised, or transport was unreliable. In these cases, teachers feel consequences negatively impact on students and add stress to families who are already struggling.

Consequences can reinforce expectations, and we know that setting clear expectations about attendance can positively impact student attitudes. We also heard that consequences can be motivating for students when they are perceived to be fair and proportionate. For example, a short detention for skipping class can feel like a fair response and usefully act as a deterrent. However, restrictions on participating in academic opportunities seem unfair, especially to parents. Restrictions on sports and cultural events can also feel unfair when the student has been training and practising all year. Thresholds need to feel achievable.

“Putting this target of 90 percent is a pressure for people to attend more. And it can help to increase attendance, but the price we pay for it is just more stress. And I think it shouldn’t be like that, it should be the opposite. I think the school should make us feel good and proud of ourselves... for coming to school.”

SECONDARY STUDENT

Many parents and students talked about being excluded from the end-of-year school ball as a deterrent not to miss too many days of school. However, the attendance threshold for the ball needs to be realistic for all students. Parents of students with chronic health conditions, including anxiety, reported that attendance thresholds could be unfair for their child, making them feel excluded. This shows how negative responses to consequences can make them think negatively about the school overall.

b) What drives attendance and attitudes for parents?

Parent attitudes have a strong influence on student attitudes.

We know that parental attitudes to attending school impact how their child feels about attending school.⁶¹ We heard from students who tell us they attend school to avoid disappointing their parents or because their parents monitor their attendance. This means that understanding how school actions impact on parental views is as important as understanding how they impact on students.

To understand which school actions play a stronger role in shifting parental attitudes to attendance, we asked parents about some of the same school actions that we asked students about, and about some additional actions more targeted to parents. The table below summarises our findings.

Table 2: School actions impacting parent reporting their child's attendance and their own attitudes to attendance – predictive odds ratios based on logistic regression modelling.

School actions	Parent reported attendance rates for their child – likelihood of being a regular attender vs not a regular attender)	Importance of daily attendance – likelihood of this view (vs view it isn't important)	Improved views about importance of daily attendance – likelihood (vs no improvement)	Importance of school for the future – likelihood of this view (vs view school isn't important)
Keeping parents informed	2.0 [primary parents only]	1.5	-	1.6
Clear expectations	2.4 [secondary parents only]	-	-	2.0
Providing support		-	1.4	-
Consequences	1.7 [secondary parents only]	1.4	-	-
Rewards		1.8	1.8	-

Keeping parents informed of their child's attendance patterns is associated with better attendance and better attitudes about daily attendance and the value of school, especially for primary parents.

Primary parents are twice as likely to report their child attends school regularly if the school contacts them on any day their child is absent, and the school doesn't know why. Primary parents, in particular, told us how the anticipation of a call from school staff if their child is absent can make them think twice about absences, especially if they have a good relationship with the school. We also heard that following up on absences highlights to parents that the school cares about their child, especially if the conversations are focused on what the student or family needs to improve attendance.

“There were a couple of times that he went to school but didn't go to class... and I didn't know about it until we had the parent-teacher conference... the biggest shock was sitting there and finding out... I don't even know.”

PARENT OF SECONDARY STUDENT

Parents are one-and-a-half times more likely to report that daily attendance is important if their school is keeping them informed about their child's attendance patterns. Parents are also over one-and-a-half times more likely to view school as important for their child's future if their school keeps them informed about their child's absences. These impacts are also more pronounced for primary than secondary parents.

Parents appreciate early and proactive communication when attendance issues arise. Parents of secondary students might not know when their child has missed classes. The information reduces guesswork and helps parents have informed conversations with their child. Some parents still respond most to formal letters from the school, while others said the regular attendance reports, regardless of concerns, helped them understand patterns and avoid surprises. Detailed weekly reports create accountability and help parents be proactive — seeing a drop in their child's attendance before a letter arrives gives them a chance to address it early. Attendance apps can provide daily updates, which some parents will check while they are at work. However, inaccurate attendance data can have negative impacts — parents can become frustrated and lose faith in the school.

“My daughter, this year has been inclined to miss a class or two. That's why we're cracking down quite hard, and why I'm pleased that the school is so proactive in letting us know if she is late for anything or not attending.”

PARENT

Setting clear expectations is associated with secondary parents reporting better attendance for their child and with better attitudes towards school for all parents.

Secondary parents are almost two-and-a-half times more likely to report that their child has regular attendance if their school has clear expectations about attendance. Parents value clear and consistent messaging from schools about attendance expectations. Some parents want clearer guidance on what warrants a 'sick day' — they report conflicting messages on whether a runny nose is a sufficient reason. Out-performing schools have clearer messaging, backed up with a system of calling parents if their child is too sick to be at school, which reassures parents they can send their child to school if they aren't sure.

Schools setting clear expectations about attendance is the most important factor for parents reporting that school is important for their child's future — parents are twice as likely to report this if the school is setting clear expectations, compared to if it isn't. Interestingly, while school expectations make a difference, there is no clear link between parents thinking the law is important and their child's attendance.

Expectations are most effective when they are explained as part of a broader purpose (e.g. preparing students for work, contributing to a team or school attendance goal) and with evidence about the impact of absences on lifelong outcomes. This approach to setting expectations specifically highlights the importance of school for their child's future.

“There is relatively good communication with us about attendance (and achievement/learning success) and strong links between attending school and achievement success are regularly reinforced, through newsletters and social media. I believe that the school is doing everything possible to encourage positive attendance patterns.”

PARENT

Use of practical supports positively impacts parental attitudes to attendance, with wider impacts for secondary parents.

Parents are almost one-and-a-half times more likely to report improved attitudes to daily attendance if their child's school is providing practical supports, with more pronounced improvements for primary, than secondary parents.

Practical supports have wider impacts for secondary parents — secondary parents are almost twice as likely to view daily attendance as important if the school is providing practical supports (compared to not providing practical supports).

We heard that parents deeply appreciate practical support, especially in lower socio-economic contexts. These supports are often critical enablers of attendance, especially for families facing hardship. Parents see these supports as evidence that the school cares, which strengthens trust and partnership. Secondary students are most impacted by the 'shame' of practical barriers to attendance due to the role of peer pressure for adolescents. This likely explains why positive impacts are wider for secondary parents, who experience this pressure indirectly.

“I think the difference [that improved attendance at my child's school] is that they're so whānau centred, so community centred. Not everyone's equipped with what they need to get to school or to do well at school, so bringing it back to how we can help within the family system makes a real change.”

PARENT

Rewarding attendance makes the biggest difference to attitudes for primary parents.

Parents are almost twice as likely to view daily attendance as important if the school rewards good attendance. This is more pronounced for primary parents, who are more than twice as likely to view daily attendance as important if the school is using rewards.

Use of rewards is also driving self-reported improvements in attitudes to daily attendance for primary and secondary parents — overall, parents are almost twice as likely to report their views about daily attendance have improved in the last year if the school is using rewards, compared to not using them.

Parents value rewards because they provide tangible recognition of the student's and family's efforts to achieve and maintain regular attendance. Parents told us that rewards can provide a meaningful nudge for children who might otherwise struggle with attendance. Parents think rewards are especially motivating for younger children because they make attendance feel like a fun challenge and align well with how younger children respond to playful, goal-oriented systems.

We heard from some secondary parents that their child could be embarrassed receiving individual rewards in front of their peers but secretly liked the recognition. This highlights why collective rewards can work better — they minimise individual pressure and at the same time leverage peer group dynamics with students encouraging each other to attend.

“My son, much to his embarrassment, got presented with an award at Year 9 and 10 in front of his peers for near perfect attendance... they acknowledge it, they recognise it... But like I said, he’s nearly 16, he’s not so keen on that kind of recognition anymore.”

PARENT



Use of consequences is associated with secondary parents reporting better attendance for their child and more positive attitudes for all parents, despite negative impacts on student attitudes.

Interestingly, while consequences have a negative impact on students (as reported above), they have a positive impact on parents.

Secondary parents are more than one-and-a-half times as likely to report their child has regular attendance if the school uses consequences.

In addition, parents are nearly one-and-a-half times more likely to report that daily attendance is important if their child’s school is using consequences, compared to not being used. The impact of consequences is more pronounced for primary parents, who are twice as likely to report their attitudes to daily attendance have improved in the last year if their child’s school is using consequences, compared to if the school isn’t using consequences.

Parents can value the use of consequences because they reinforce the students responsibility for themselves. Especially for older students, parents described a shift in their role — from managing attendance directly to letting students experience the impact of their choices. Parents see consequences as a learning opportunity, helping children understand that actions have outcomes, which builds resilience and responsibility. The school’s use of consequences, similar to rewards, also provides a tangible outcome for parents to refer to when encouraging their child to attend school.

“[My son] just gets the detention if he’s late... Sometimes I’ll do something for him, but other times I know he’s stuffed around in the morning and I’ll say, ‘Well, that’ll do you well, mate—just go and serve it.’”

SECONDARY PARENT



Parents are more likely to support consequences for poor attendance or lateness if these consequences are clearly explained and fair. Parents can see how these kinds of consequences help their child feel responsible for themselves and their learning. Parents are less supportive of consequences that restrict their child’s participation in academic and extra-curricular activities.

Parents are also more likely to support the use of consequences when they are deemed fair and proportionate. Exclusions from academic opportunities, like fieldtrips and vocational pathways, can be disengaging for both students and parents. The different types of consequences used in primary and secondary schools may help explain why primary parents are more positive about their use.

Consequences at secondary schools more often involve loss of privileges and restricting participation in academic and extra-curricular activities, which parents are generally less supportive of. In primary schools, consequences tend to focus on supportive, proactive, and relational approaches, which parents are generally more supportive of. Consequences may be limited to sign-in systems and requirements to provide medical notes, or for their parents to meet with teachers. Although some parents worry about the cost of providing medical notes, many parents like being engaged by the school to address attendance issues.

3) How does routine opening make a difference?

We looked at how the number of days as school is open for instruction relates to attendance rates.⁶² We also asked parents and students about patterns of school closures and whether they impact attendance or attitudes to attendance.

School patterns of being open for instruction can impact attendance and attitudes to attendance.

We found that while school size, location, and socio-economic levels are stronger predictors of attendance, the number of days a school is open for instruction does matter for primary schools. There is no relationship for secondary schools, possibly because the data available on days open for instruction is more difficult to collect for secondary schools due to staggered start dates for different year groups, and variable approaches to study and exam leave.⁶³

We found that frequent or poorly timed closures can encourage absenteeism. Closures on Thursdays or Tuesdays can lead to extended weekends. Similarly, half-day closures can result in full-day absences due to practical incentives, such as saving on transport costs and easier household arrangements. More notice about school closures can help students and families plan around them to avoid absences.

“A lot of students stay home on half days... driving to school and back home, it’s not really worth it for them because it’s not a full day... it would only be a couple hours being there, and then it would take two hours longer getting there and back.”

SECONDARY PARENT



“The last day of term was a half day, so [my wife] just left him at home because it’s too much work to go and pick him up and drop him off in the middle of the day.”

PRIMARY PARENT

Frequent or poorly timed closures can also reinforce a more casual attitude toward attendance. Students don’t directly say closures affect their views on daily attendance, but their comments highlight a break in routine – some “like the day off” and others “miss seeing friends.” While parents understand the importance of school closures for teacher training, some worry that the disruption to student routines may break the habit and expectation of daily school attendance.

“The cherry on top was the professional development, students didn’t have to be in until 9:30. It broke her routine, and it was her first absence... If it wasn’t for that she probably would have actually gone to school.”

PARENT

Parents want schools to be more strategic about closures. They prefer closures to be tagged onto existing term breaks because this is less disruptive to routines and provides extra holiday time. For other closures, it makes sense to tag them onto the start or end of the week, which allows families to plan for a long weekend.

“Our daughter’s school does seem to schedule them strategically up against other holidays... Like Easter, I think they took the Thursday as a teacher-only.”

SECONDARY PARENT

Conclusion

Attendance patterns and the attitudes underlying them have started to shift. When schools set clear expectations, keep parents informed of their child’s attendance patterns, give parents relevant information and practical supports, attendance is likely to improve. Similarly, students are more likely to attend regularly when they feel that they belong, they have roles and responsibilities at school, and they receive some type of reward for attending. Understanding the reasons behind attitudes and behaviour is central to achieving consistent change. Part 7 of this report looks specifically at what schools are doing to make a difference.



Part 7: How much are schools doing the things that make the biggest difference?

In Part 6, we outlined the things that make the biggest difference to lifting and maintaining attendance. With this knowledge, we looked at to what degree schools in New Zealand are doing these things. We found that to make the biggest difference, a whole-school approach is needed. This approach should be underpinned by good leadership, aspiration, clarity, and consistency. And schools should provide an environment where students feel safe, connected, and supported to achieve. This part of the report steps through aspects of this approach and includes four case studies.

What we looked at

In the previous section, we discussed the actions that schools can take that have the biggest impact on student and parent attitudes towards attendance. This shows that, while there are some attendance challenges facing families that are beyond what schools can address and require broader responses, there are many things that schools can do to make a difference for attendance levels. This section looks at how often schools in New Zealand are doing the things that make a difference for regular attendance.

To understand which school actions are making the biggest difference, we drew on:

- interviews with students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- surveys of students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- site visits to schools.

This section sets out findings on:

- 1) What attendance actions are being used by schools
- 2) What out-performing schools are doing
- 3) What real-life examples of out-performing schools look like.

What we found: an overview

Almost all schools are setting clear expectations, analysing their attendance data for patterns, and following up on absences, with variation between different types of schools.

Primary schools report doing less to set clear expectations with students — 63 percent of primary teachers and leaders report setting clear expectations to a great extent compared to 73 percent in secondary schools. We heard this was because they think parents play a stronger role in getting younger students to school. We found that primary schools are more likely to be analysing attendance data to a great extent, but secondary schools are more likely to be keeping parents informed of attendance patterns to a great extent.

Rewards and consequences are used less than other actions, and much less by schools in high socio-economic communities.

Around half of schools report using rewards. Schools in low socio-economic communities are three times more likely to be using them than schools in high socio-economic communities (79 percent compared to 24 percent). Collective rewards can be especially motivating because students like the ‘team’ element and don’t want to let their peers down.

Consequences are used less than other actions and least by primary schools. Consequences are also less likely to be used by schools in high socio-economic communities – three in ten teachers and leaders (30 percent) report their school uses them, ranging between 24 percent in high socio-economic communities and 31 percent in schools in low socio-economic communities.

Schools are increasingly using practical supports to help students to attend. They are more likely to be used by primary schools and schools in low socio-economic communities.

Three-quarters (74 percent) of teachers and leaders report their schools are providing practical supports to help students and families to overcome barriers to attendance, and over a third (36 percent) are using these more than a year ago. Over nine in 10 teachers and leaders (93 percent) at schools in low socio-economic communities are using them compared to 60 percent of teachers and leaders in high socio-economic communities. Primary schools are also more likely to be providing practical supports than secondary schools (77 percent compared to 71 percent).

Around three in ten parents and students report their school isn’t routinely open. Short notice closures are not uncommon and can undermine the message that every day matters.

Around three in ten parents (35 percent) and students (27 percent) report their school is sometimes or often closed on days they think it should be open. Just under half of parents (47 percent) and almost three in five students (59 percent) report these closures – when they think school should be open – sometimes or often happen at short notice. While parents understand the importance of school closures for teacher training, some worry that the disruption to student routines break the habit and the expectation of daily school attendance.

Schools that are successful in raising and maintaining attendance (even in challenging circumstances) have an ‘end-to-end’ approach. They are aspirational, with leadership that drives a strong culture of attendance. They stay relentlessly focused on improvement, work in clearly defined roles, apply practices consistently, and partner with parents and whānau.

High expectations are maintained even in the face of challenges. High-performing schools have a strong commitment to and belief in improving attendance rates for all students. Leaders make raising attendance a priority by establishing targets and plans for improvement that they monitor for effectiveness. Staff have specific roles in improving attendance and do them well. Having a lead for attendance can help drive things forward. Schools develop solutions with parents, setting out clear roles and responsibilities for the school, the parents, and the student.

These findings are set out in more detail below.

1) What attendance actions are being used by schools?

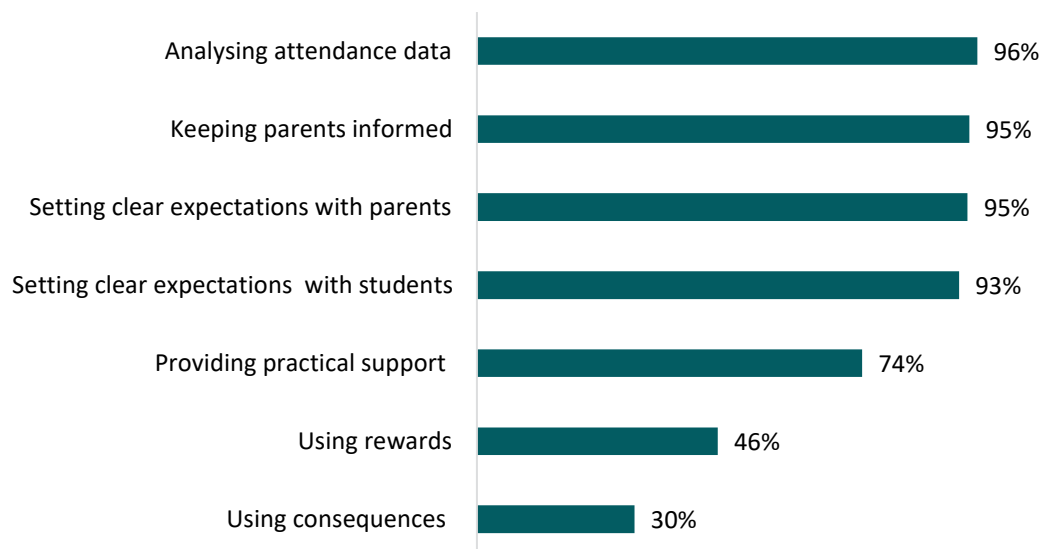
We looked at school actions to help keep attendance up and the extent to which different types of schools are using them. These actions include:

- a) setting clear expectations with students
- b) setting clear expectations with parents
- c) using attendance data and following up on absences
- d) using rewards
- e) using consequences
- f) providing practical supports
- g) providing opportunities for roles and responsibilities
- h) regular opening.

The previous section outlines which of these actions are having the most impact on student and parent attitudes to attendance and self-reported rates of attendance, and the evidence backing these actions.

This section looks at how frequently these actions are used.

Figure 42: *Percent of teachers and leaders reporting the actions their school uses to a great or moderate extent.*



a) Setting clear expectations with students

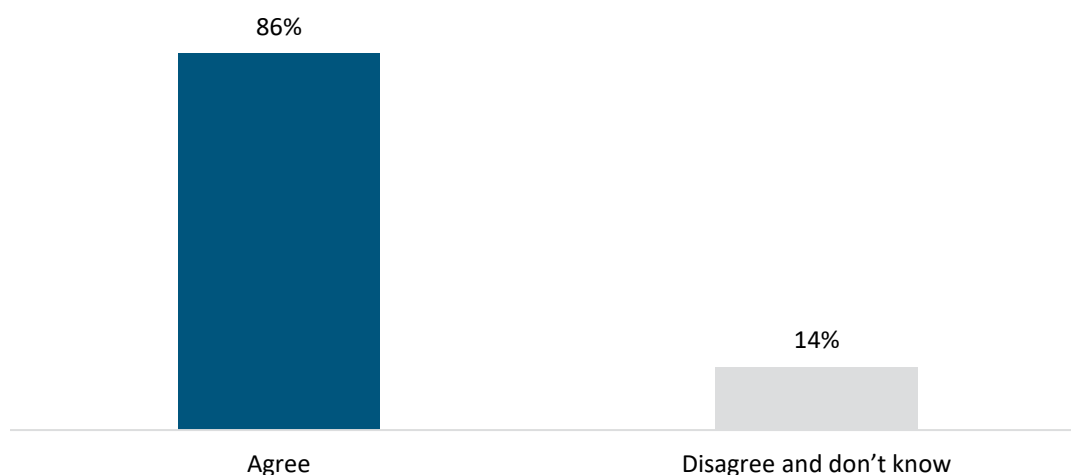
Almost all schools report setting clear expectations with students, but to varying degrees.

In the previous section, we found that schools setting clear expectations has an important impact on both student and parent attitudes to attendance. Establishing clear expectations aligns with broader evidence that structured environments and consistent messaging support student engagement and attendance.⁶⁴

Almost all teachers and leaders (93 percent) report their school sets clear expectations about attendance with students. Three in five (57 percent) are doing this more than a year ago. Over two-thirds (68 percent) are now setting clear expectations to a great extent. However, 7 percent report still only doing it to small extent or not at all.

Most students (86 percent) also report their school sets clear expectations about attendance. However, 14 percent of students report their school isn't doing this or don't know.

Figure 43: *Percent of students who report their school has clear expectations about attendance.*



Schools set expectations with students in a range of ways, through whole school assemblies, focused lessons on attendance, and everyday messaging from teachers.

Students told us how learning about how occasional absences can add up and impact lifelong outcomes has helped them see the importance of daily attendance. Simply focusing on thresholds, without these wider conversations, seems to be less effective.

“One time it was a lesson about why we should come to school, tells you... if you miss one week of school each year it adds up to significant numbers... I didn't think it would be that many days... [makes me think] there's not really a point to take a day off school just because I'm tired.”

INTERMEDIATE STUDENT

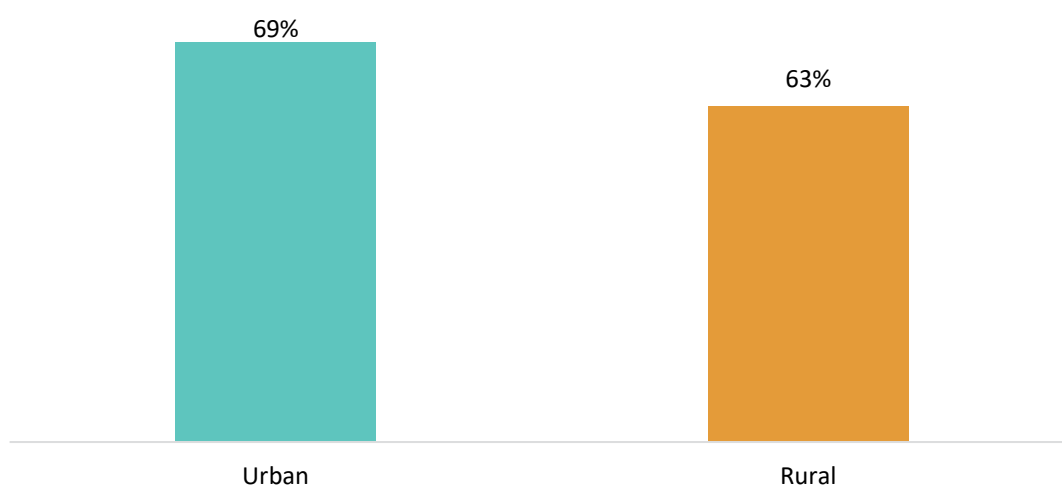
We saw an example of schools formally setting expectations with a contract signed by both students and parents before school starts. The contract is a mutual agreement and becomes a mechanism for accountability. Schools talked about having a long meeting with prospective students, and their parents, to make sure they know what they are signing up to and the consequences of not meeting expectations.

Schools most likely to be setting clear expectations with students are secondary schools in urban, low socio-economic communities.

Setting clear expectations with students is happening more at secondary schools. Almost three-quarters of secondary teachers and leaders (73 percent) report they are doing this to a great extent compared to less than two-thirds of primary teachers and leaders (63 percent).

Setting expectations with students is also happening more at urban schools than at rural schools. Just over three in five teachers and leaders (63 percent) in rural schools compared to just over two-thirds (69 percent) of teachers and leaders in urban schools report they are doing this to a great extent.

Figure 44: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that they set clear expectations about attendance with students to a great extent, by urban and rural schools.*



This action is also happening more in low socio-economic communities with four in five teachers and leaders (80 percent) in schools in low socio-economic communities reporting they are doing this to a great extent compared to just over three in five teachers and leaders in schools in high socio-economic communities (62 percent).

We heard that teachers may not prioritise talking to younger students about attendance because they think parents play a stronger role in getting younger students to school. This overlooks the evidence that students who develop irregular attendance habits early are more likely to continue those patterns into later schooling.⁶⁵ Schools in low socio-economic communities tend to face greater challenges with attendance and are more likely to be trying all the actions that can help, including setting clear expectations.

b) Setting clear expectations with parents

Schools are also setting clear expectations with parents much more than before.

Almost all teachers and leaders (95 percent) report their school sets clear expectations about attendance with parents. Just over three in five (63 percent) report that their school is now doing more to set clear expectations with parents compared to a year ago. However, just under two in five (37 percent report) report no change. Over two-thirds (67 percent) are now doing this to a great extent, while only 5 percent are only doing it to a small extent or not at all.

Like teachers and leaders, nearly all parents (95 percent) report their child's school sets clear expectations about attendance. Only 5 percent say this doesn't happen or they don't know if the school does this.

Figure 45: *Percent of parents who agree, disagree, and don't know that their child's school has clear expectations about attendance.*



Schools set expectations with parents through messaging on the school webpage, through school apps, newsletters, and social media. Messages may include information about attendance targets, how to make decisions about when to keep children home from school, how to report absences, along with why punctuality and daily attendance is important.

“We receive on Friday after school, an attendance and academic report. I’ve never received them at other schools... so interesting and new. And they have attendance down to lateness, and they break that up with absences from home class and home groups... even to each subject.”

SECONDARY PARENT

Another way is through direct and targeted engagement with parents such as discussions or meetings, which has strong evidence of improving attendance.⁶⁶ Conversations about expectations can naturally happen when schools follow-up on absences. The value of these conversations can depend on who is doing the follow-up and whether they have the time and pre-existing relationships for meaningful engagement. Primary school teachers try to have regular conversations with parents at drop-off and pick-up times. As discussed above, clear expectations can also be set through formal contracts with students and parents.

c) Using attendance data and following up on absences

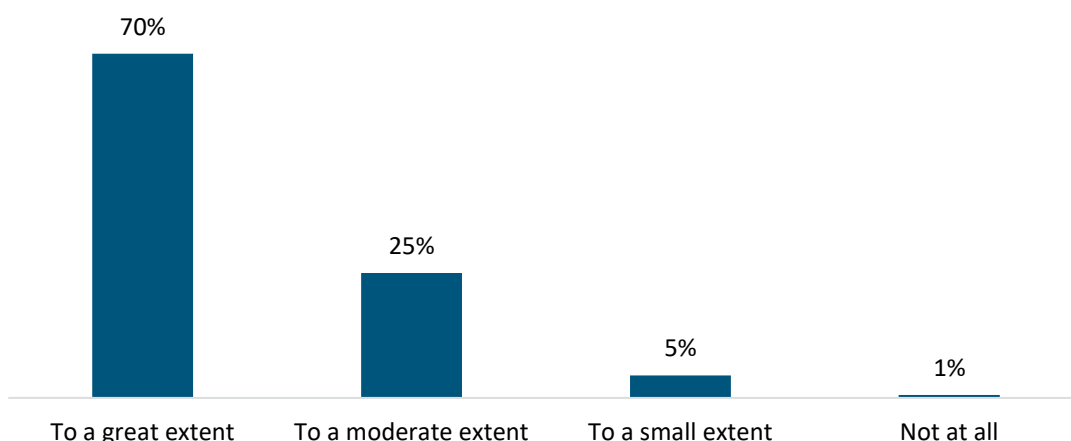
Almost all schools are using attendance data and following up on absences, and they are doing these things more than a year ago.

In the previous section we found that keeping parents informed about their child's attendance and following up when students don't attend positively impact parent attitudes to attendance. The wider evidence highlights that responsive approaches that use data to identify and address individual barriers to attendance show promising results, particularly when follow-up is timely and tailored.⁶⁷

Almost all teachers and leaders (96 percent) report their school analyses attendance data to identify concerning patterns for individuals or groups, and just over three-quarters (77 percent) do this to a great extent. Two-thirds (67 percent) report they are doing this more than a year ago, while a third (33 percent) report no change or they are doing it less. Only 4 percent do this to a small extent or not at all.

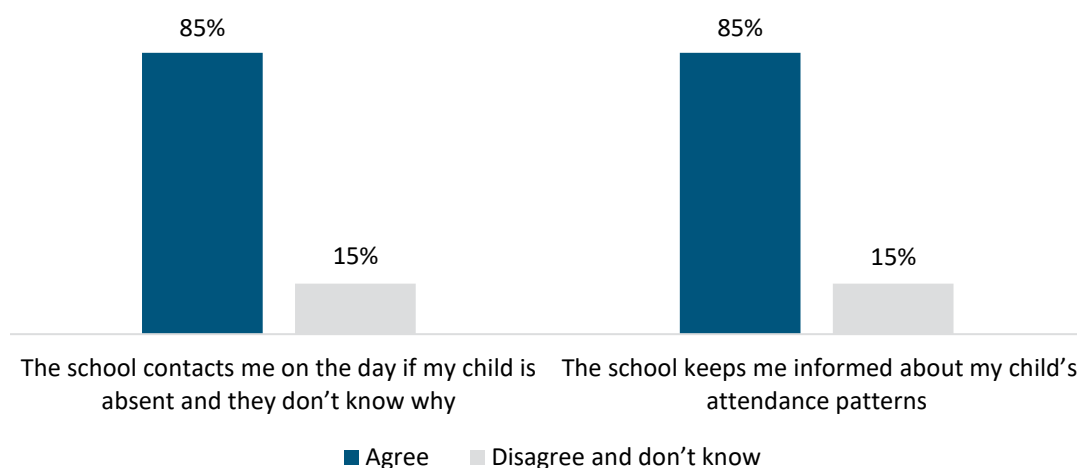
Nearly all teachers and leaders (95 percent) report that the school keeps parents informed about their child's attendance patterns. However, just seven in ten (70 percent) report that the school does this to a great extent. Almost two-thirds (62 percent) report that they keep parents informed more than a year ago, while around two in five (37 percent) report no change.

Figure 46: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that their school keeps parents informed about their child's attendance patterns.*



Marginally fewer parents (85 percent) report the school keeps them informed about their child's attendance patterns and contacts them on the day if their child is absent (also 85 percent). Even fewer students report this – 72 percent of students report the school follows up on absences (28 percent disagree or don't know).

Figure 47: *Percent of parents who agree, disagree, and don't know that their child's school contacts them and keeps them informed about their child's attendance.*



It's unsurprising that schools are using attendance data more than a year ago. This is because schools are now required to submit their roll data to the Ministry of Education on a daily basis, and this has put greater spotlight on the role of data in lifting attendance.

We heard about a range of communication tools, such as school apps (e.g. Hero, School Loop), which allow parents to monitor attendance in real time and receive immediate alerts for unexplained absences. These systems have created a feedback loop that reinforces parental responsibility and encourages prompt action. As one parent explained, "It's so easy to see... justified and unjustified absences," while another described how seeing their child's attendance percentage made it a measurable priority.

"It's made me think like, oh, I don't want their number to drop down below where it should be."

PRIMARY PARENT

We heard that the regularity of updates helps keep attendance front of mind. Visual formats can also be especially impactful. For example, a school in Queensland, has been using a traffic light system to show when attendance is within a certain range. The colour-coding makes it easy for parents and students to see when attendance levels are on track or concerning.⁶⁸

Administrative staff often play a central role in tracking and following up on absences after student rolls have been taken. This makes sense because often administrative staff are the ones receiving calls from parents when their child is going to be absent for sickness or other reasons. If the school doesn't know why a student is absent, they call home to find out. Out-performing schools also follow-up on reasons for lateness – signalling zero tolerance on missing any school.

“The kids have to call in if they're going to be late or absent, but if it's absent, a parent has to confirm it... if we don't know what happened with a kid by 9:00, [the office admin] will contact the parent and go 'hey what's going on?'”

SCHOOL LEADER

Individual teachers can also follow up on absences, which can be helpful if they know the student and family the best and can use the opportunity to understand and address any barriers to attendance, such as anxiety or bullying. Parents usually like the direct follow up from teachers because it signals the school cares and views parents as partners, working together to support their child.

“Instead of sending standard texts now [the office admin] is ringing everyone that is away... rather than just sending a blanket text saying, 'your child's not here.'”

SCHOOL LEADER

We heard it can be challenging when disengaged parents don't respond to phone calls or block the school number. We also heard that some families may not have a phone or sufficient phone credit to make or receive calls or texts. The school must decide whether to invest in a home visit, which is typically reserved for chronic absenteeism. A more negative outcome is that teachers in these schools become less consistent in following up on absences.

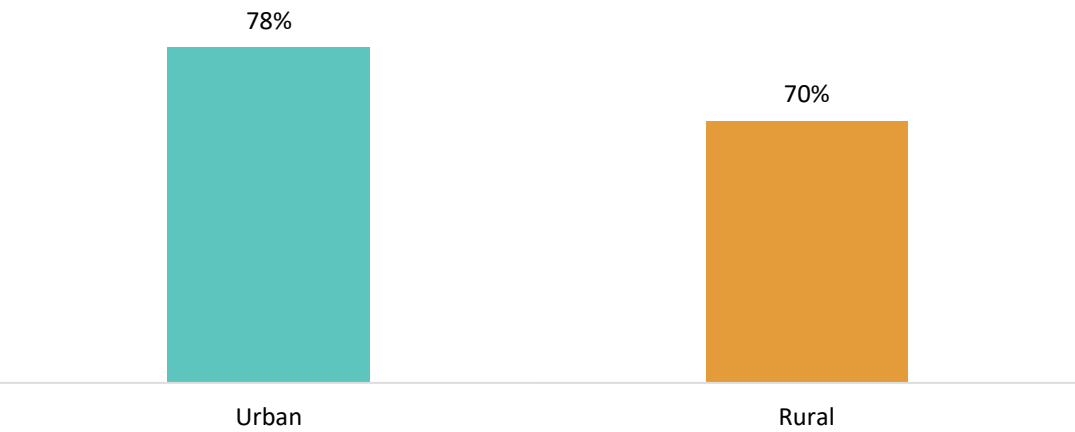
“There were some parents that I would try to catch, but it's often the ones that don't come near the school physically. And also, there are some... their phones would be blocked... some parents are really hard to get a hold of.”

TEACHER

Schools most likely to be following up on absences are large schools in urban and low socio-economic communities.

Urban schools are more likely to both be analysing attendance data and keeping parents informed about their child’s attendance patterns. Just under four in five teachers and leaders in urban schools (78 percent) report they are analysing attendance data to a great extent, compared to seven in ten teachers and leaders in rural schools (70 percent). Just over seven in ten teachers and leaders in urban schools (71 percent) report they are keeping parents informed to a great extent, compared to six in ten teachers and leaders in rural schools (62 percent).

Figure 48: *Percent teachers and leaders who report that they are analysing attendance data to a great extent, by urban and rural schools.*



Schools in low socio-economic communities are also more likely to both be analysing attendance data and keeping parents informed about their child’s attendance patterns. Just over four in five teachers and leaders (82 percent) in schools in low socio-economic communities report they are analysing attendance data to a great extent, compared to three-quarters (75 percent) of teachers and leaders at schools in high socio-economic communities. This is similar to just over seven in ten (72 percent) of teachers and leaders in schools in high socio-economic communities reporting they are keeping parents informed to a great extent compared to two-thirds (67 percent) of teachers and leaders schools in low socio-economic communities

Large schools are also doing both of these actions more than smaller schools. Four in five teachers and leaders (80 percent) in large schools are analysing attendance data and just under three-quarters (74 percent) are keeping parents informed. In comparison, just under three-quarters (74 percent) of teachers and leaders in small schools report analysing attendance data to identify patterns and just under two-thirds (66 percent) are keeping parents informed.

In the small schools we visited, leaders talked about how they knew each of their student's attendance patterns. Leaders in small schools often have teaching loads, including principals, which can help explain their first-hand knowledge of students' attendance patterns. This makes small schools less dependent on the data but may mean they also overlook the role it can play in spotting patterns over time for individuals and groups of students. Another challenge for schools making the best use of data is that schools don't always have staff with the right expertise to do complex analysis, which is more likely in smaller schools with fewer staff.

Primary schools are more likely to be analysing attendance data to a great extent, but secondary schools are more likely to be keeping parents informed of attendance patterns to a great extent. Just under four in five teachers and leaders in primary schools (79 percent) report their school analyses attendance data to a great extent, compared to three-quarters in secondary schools (75 percent). Three-quarters of secondary teachers and leaders (75 percent) are keeping parents informed about their child's attendance patterns compared to just under two-thirds of primary teachers and leaders (66 percent).

Secondary schools are more likely to be informing parents about patterns of attendance because secondary parents are less likely to know about their child's attendance patterns. Secondary students have greater agency about when they attend and miss school than primary school students, who are often dropped off and picked up by their parents.

“Shifting parental practices is actually the hardest thing to do. And it's probably the thing as a primary school you're most dependent on for attendance.”

SCHOOL LEADER



d) Using rewards

Around half of schools report using rewards for attendance, but fewer parents and students agree.

As described in earlier parts of this report, schools using rewards has a positive impact on both on students' and parents' attitudes to attendance. The wider evidence shows that rewards may only lead to short-term improvements in attendance, depending on how they are used, and that ethical implications require careful consideration.⁶⁹

Less than half (46 percent) of teachers and leaders report their schools use rewards for attendance, including just over a quarter (26 percent) that use them to a great extent. Just under three in ten teachers and leaders (29 percent) report using rewards more than a year ago. Just 7 percent report they are using them less.

Figure 49: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report their school uses rewards for attendance.*

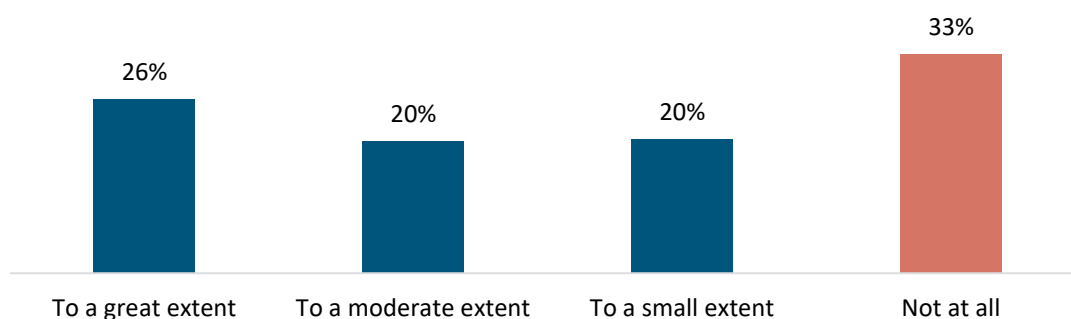
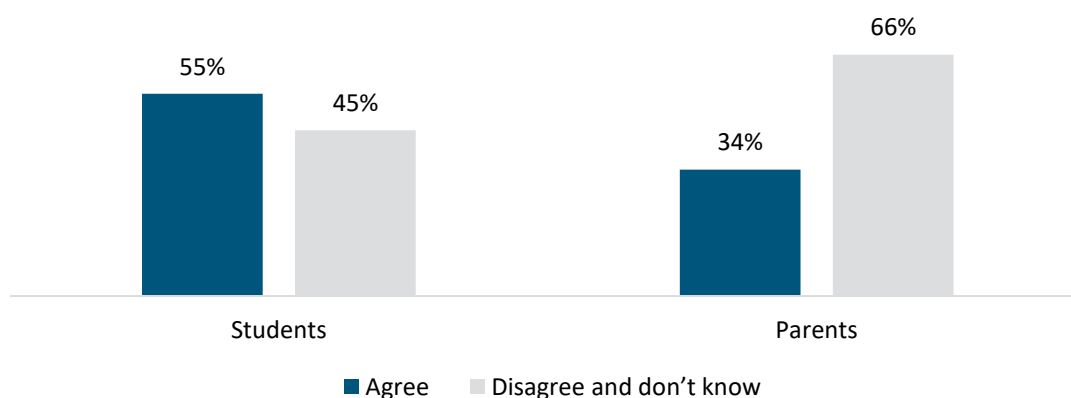


Figure 50: *Percent of students and parents who agree, disagree, and don't know if their school uses rewards.*



Just over a third of parents (34 percent) report their child's school uses rewards. Just over one in five (23 percent) report their school isn't using them and a further two in five (43 percent) don't know. More students than parents — just over half (55 percent) — report their school uses rewards. Just over a third (33 percent) say their school isn't using rewards and 12 percent don't know.

Rewards are wide-ranging in New Zealand's schools. They can be for individuals or groups who have either improved attendance or achieved a target or threshold. Groups can be forms, houses, or year levels. Group rewards are motivating because students feel part of a team. Teamwork helps build connection and students don't want to let their peers down. We heard examples of students messaging their peers to make sure they were on their way to school and bringing in uniform if that was a barrier for anyone (see Case study 1, below). Students like their efforts around attendance being recognised in school-wide celebrations, which also reinforce messaging to the other students that attendance matters.

“[My school] gives certificates to students [with high attendance], which everybody wants so they come to school every day.”

STUDENT

Rewards can include recognition, such as being named in class, in assembly or in the school newsletter. Students value the recognition, but some can feel embarrassed by the attention and may even have a demotivating effect because it highlights that recipients are attending more than their peers.⁷⁰ Rewards can be more tangible such as certificates or prizes, including expensive items such as sports shoes or an iPad. Students can find prizes like these de-motivating if they are unlikely to win them. Group celebrations and prizes are especially liked by students, including a visit from the ice-cream truck, pizza days, or fun days.

In some schools, they shifted from rewarding 100 percent attendance, to rewarding improved or 90 percent attendance. This was to recognise that some students face significant challenges, and realistic targets are more motivating.

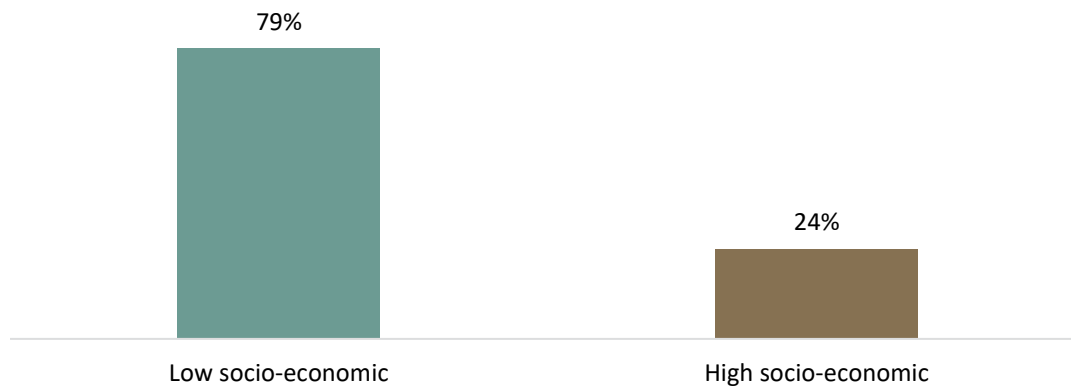
“We did trips for kids that are 100 percent attendance... we thought, actually that’s not fair because kids that are sick, we don’t actually want them at school, [and] that was penalising them.”

SCHOOL LEADER

Small schools in low socio-economic communities use rewards the most.

Rewards are used more in schools in low socio-economic communities – around four in five teachers and leaders in schools in low socio-economic communities (79 percent) report using them to a great or moderate extent, compared to around one in four in high schools in socio-economic communities (24 percent). Rewards are also used more in small schools compared to large schools – over half of teachers and leaders report using them in small schools (55 percent), compared to under a half in large schools (44 percent).

Figure 51: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report using rewards for good attendance to a great or moderate extent, by socio-economic status.*



Teachers at schools in low socio-economic communities talked about how using rewards such as vouchers for the canteen, prizes or excursions provides additional benefits for children who may miss out on treats due to family financial constraints or haven't been able to access some experiences within their families. Such experiences as school fun days, trips to the beach or local places of interest also act to enrich the curriculum and strengthen relationships and connection to the school, especially with families who may avoid contact with school.

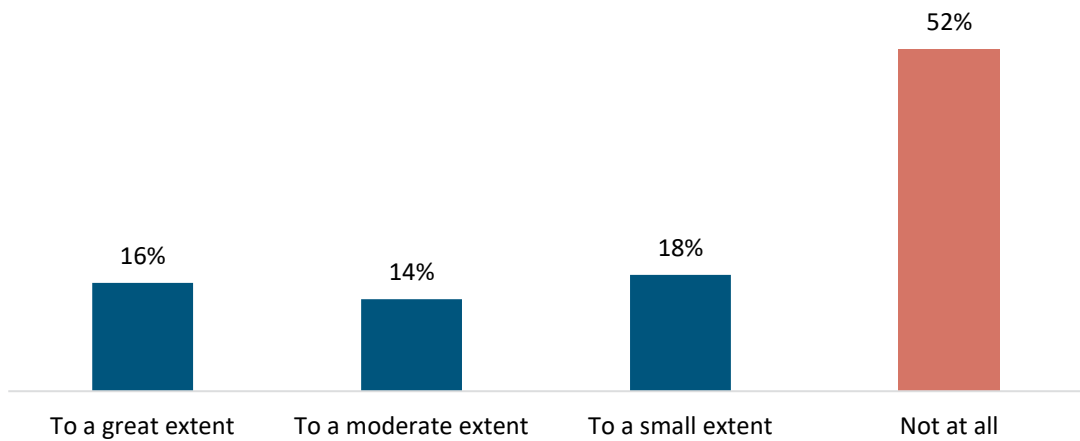
e) Using consequences

Schools use consequences less than other actions to address attendance. While they have a positive influence on parent attitudes, they negatively impact student attitudes.

In the previous section we found that, while consequences have a positive impact on parent attitudes towards attendance, they have a negative impact on student attitudes. This aligns with other reviews, which have found limited and mixed evidence that consequences work.⁷¹ Consequences are generally found to be less effective because punitive approaches may risk disengagement.

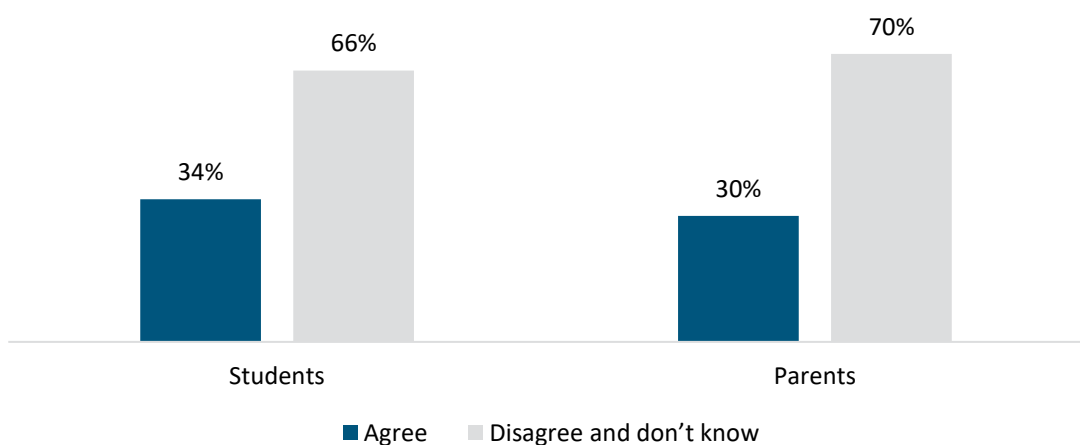
We found that almost a third of teachers and leaders (30 percent) report their school uses consequences, and one in five (19 percent report) report using them more than a year ago. However, just under a fifth (18 percent) report only using consequences to a small extent, and more than half (52 percent) don't use them at all. Thirteen percent report using them less than a year ago.

Figure 52: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report their school uses consequences for poor attendance.*



Like teachers and leaders, three in ten parents (30 percent) report their child's school uses consequences, just over a fifth (21 percent) report that consequences are not happening and just under half (49 percent) report that they don't know if consequences are used or not. Just over a third of students (34 percent) agree that consequences are used at their school with just under half reporting that they aren't used (48 percent) and just under one in five (18 percent) are unsure if they are being used or not.

Figure 53: *Percent of students and parents who agree, disagree, and don't know that their school uses consequences for poor attendance.*



Consequences cover a range of things, including exclusions from sports, cultural events, and the end of year school ball. Exclusions like these can be effective for students who are keen on sports. Alternatively, exclusions can be demotivating for students who see the thresholds as unachievable and can promote negative attitudes towards the school.

“One of their conditions for being able to play each week is you need to uphold 80 percent attendance, and that’s what’s kept him going to school each week, because he doesn’t want to be benched. That is the only reason in his head, other than having friends. Sports is a big motivator for him.”

SECONDARY PARENT

Consequences work best when parents and students view them as fair and proportionate. Parents tend not to support their child being excluded from academic opportunities, such as field trips and vocational pathways. Being excluded from a sporting event can also be problematic if sport is a key motivator for that student to be at school in their senior years. It is important that thresholds for exclusions are realistic and take account of students’ health issues.

“[Extra-curricular activities] used to be the only reason I came to school, but once my attendance slipped, I couldn’t access them anymore so therefore I would just stop coming to school because they weren’t here for me.”

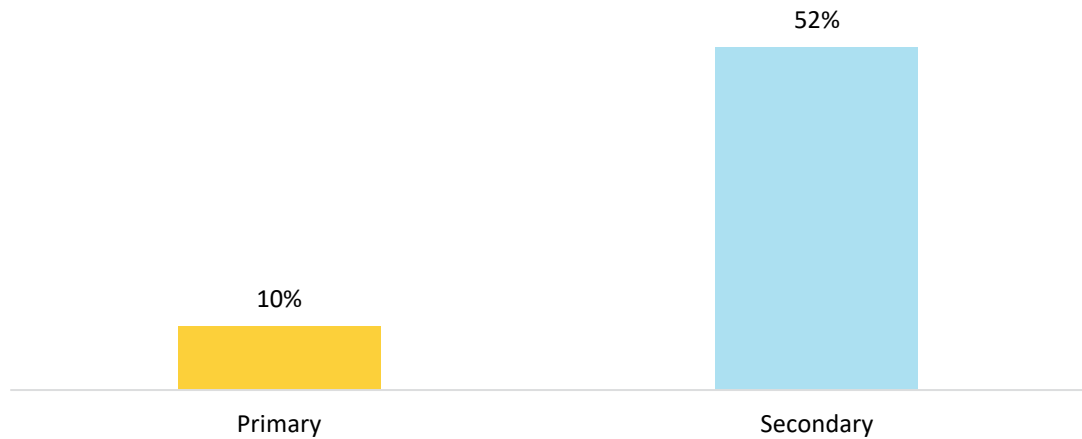
SENIOR STUDENT

Large, urban, secondary schools use consequences the most and schools in high socio-economic communities use them the least.

Large schools are also more likely to be using consequences — over a third of teachers and leaders in large schools (36 percent) report using consequences, compared to less than a third of teachers and leaders in small schools (31 percent). Urban schools also use consequences more than at rural schools — one third (33 percent) of teachers and leaders in urban schools report using them, while only one in eight (13 percent) of teachers and leaders in rural schools report the same.

Secondary schools use consequences more than primary schools — half of teachers and leaders (52 percent) in secondary schools report using consequences while only one in ten (10 percent) of teachers and leaders in primary schools report the same.

Figure 54: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that they use consequences for poor attendance to a great or moderate extent by school type.*



Schools in high socio-economic communities use consequences less than schools in moderate and low socio-economic communities — just under a quarter (24 percent) compared to around third (35 and 31 percent respectively). As discussed above, schools facing more attendance challenges are trying more actions, which is a reason that schools in low and moderate socio-economic communities are using consequences more than those in high socio-economic communities.

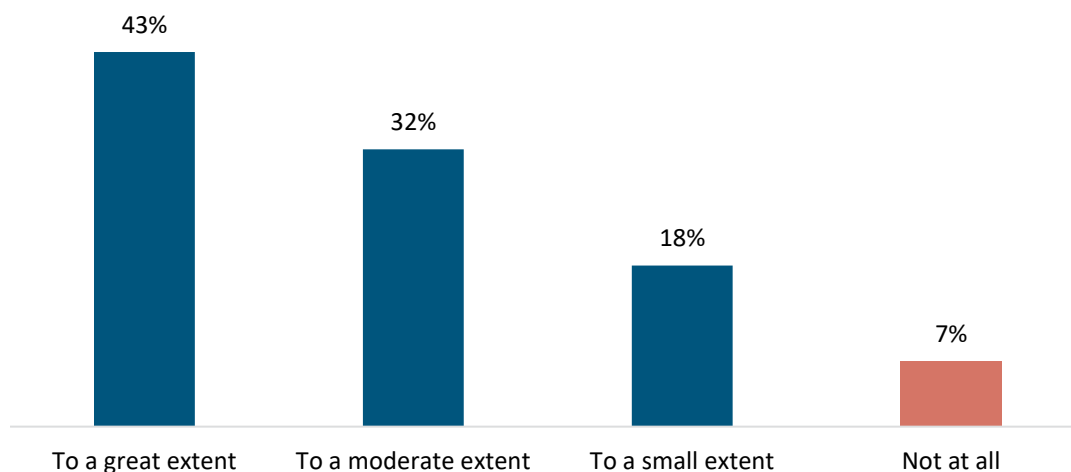
f) Providing practical supports

Schools are increasingly using practical supports to help students to attend.

In the previous section we found that using practical supports that reduce barriers to attendance mean that both parents and students are around twice as likely to think daily attendance is important. This aligns with the wider evidence on practical supports, such as addressing transport, food, or clothing needs, which finds they are most effective when part of a responsive, multi-strategy approach tailored to individual needs.⁷²

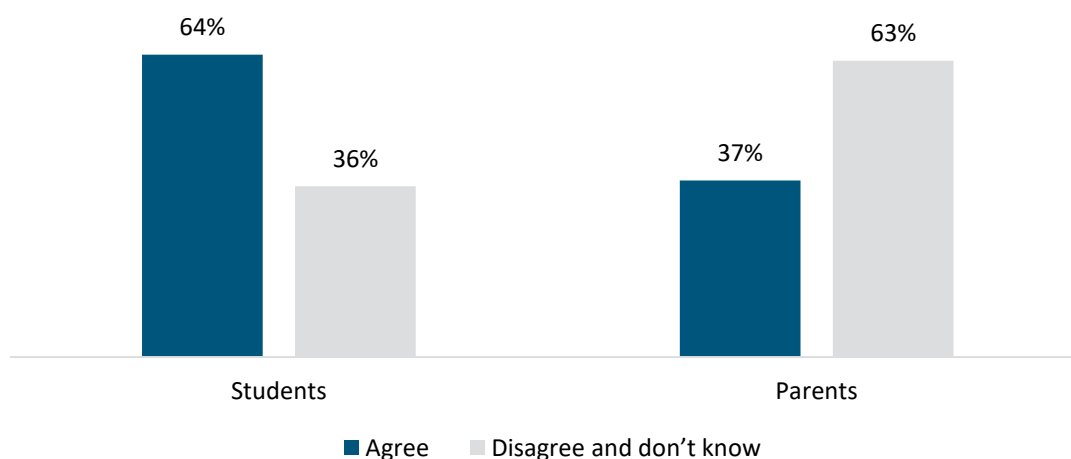
Three-quarters of leaders and teachers (74 percent) report their schools are providing practical supports to help students and families to overcome barriers to attendance. Just over two in five (43 percent) report their school does this to a great extent. Over a third (36 percent) say they are providing practical supports more than a year ago, and only 2 percent are doing it less. Just 7 percent report their school doesn't provide practical supports at all.

Figure 55: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that their school provides practical supports to help students and families overcome barriers to attendance.*



Parents are less likely than teachers or students to report the school is providing practical supports – almost two-thirds of students (64 percent) compared to just around a third of parents (37 percent). This may be because parents aren't always aware when the school provides supports directly to their child.

Figure 56: *Percent of students and parents who agree, disagree, and don't know that their school provides practical support.*



The most common practical supports provided by schools are transport, uniform and food, which can all be barriers to attendance. Some schools have vans that are used to help transport students to school. Some primary schools arrange walking buses, which can be especially helpful for working parents and families with siblings at different schools. We also heard that staff sometimes pick up students in their cars to get them to school. This is especially important for students who live further away and who struggle with routine or whose parents are unavailable due to work.

“They actually have a neighbourhood school bus... definitely helps with the families that struggle with accessibility.”

PRIMARY PARENT

Uniforms can be expensive, and it is unsurprising that practical supports are provided more by schools in low socio-economic communities. The KidsCan programme also helps provide coats and shoes. However, these are black and unbranded and not appealing for older students, which means that the weather is sometimes a reason they don't attend. There's a clear understanding that lack of uniform shouldn't prevent a student from coming to school and some teachers physically go to students' homes with uniforms to reduce this barrier. Some schools have fundraising events or partner with local charities to help families with uniforms.

“We are lucky that we have [a local charity] who give us donations, money. So, what we do is buy a whole bunch of uniform, and then I just discreetly go, ‘Come and try this on, take it home.’”

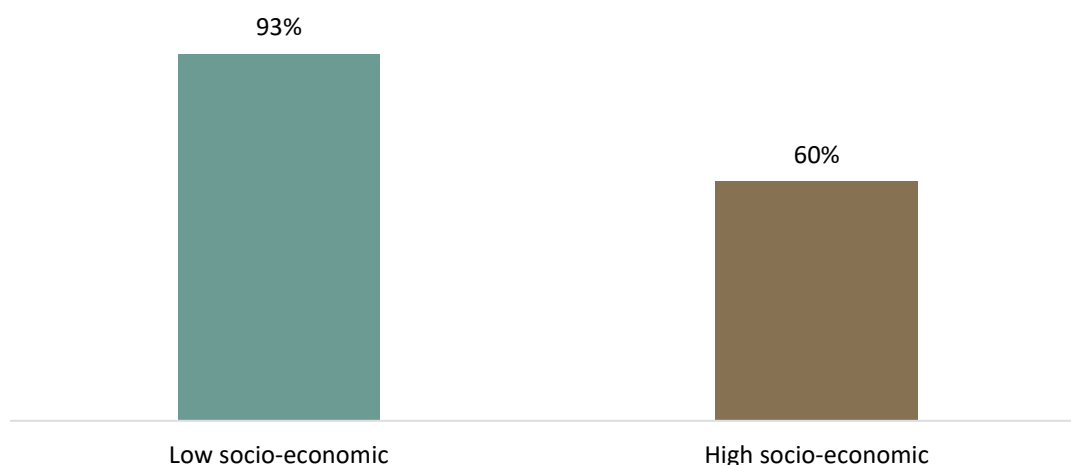
SCHOOL LEADER

Breakfast clubs are well-received by students and families because they are non-embarrassing and inclusive. However, we heard that funding for the breakfast clubs is harder to access now, and schools are keen to bring them back (see more on this in Part 8). Food is sometimes provided directly by teachers, who bring in food in for students who are struggling.

Primary schools and schools in low socio-economic communities are most likely to be providing practical supports.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, schools in low socio-economic communities are most likely to be providing practical supports to help students to attend school — over nine in ten teachers and leaders in schools in low socio-economic communities (93 percent) report they provide practical supports to a great or moderate extent, compared to six in ten (60 percent) in high socio-economic communities. Primary schools are also more likely to be providing practical supports than secondary schools — 77 percent compared to 71 percent.

Figure 57: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report they provide practical supports to a great or moderate extent, by socio-economic status.*



Schools in low socio-economic areas often serve communities with high levels of transience and complex family dynamics, increasing the need for reliable transport, medical care, food and suitable clothing. In primary schools, staff are often in closer contact with their families, especially if they have multiple siblings attending, which means they may be more aware of their situation and are able to build the relationship to offer practical help in respectful ways.

“My school provides support to help me attend school such as uniform, transport, and meals.”

PRIMARY STUDENT

g) Providing opportunities for roles and responsibilities

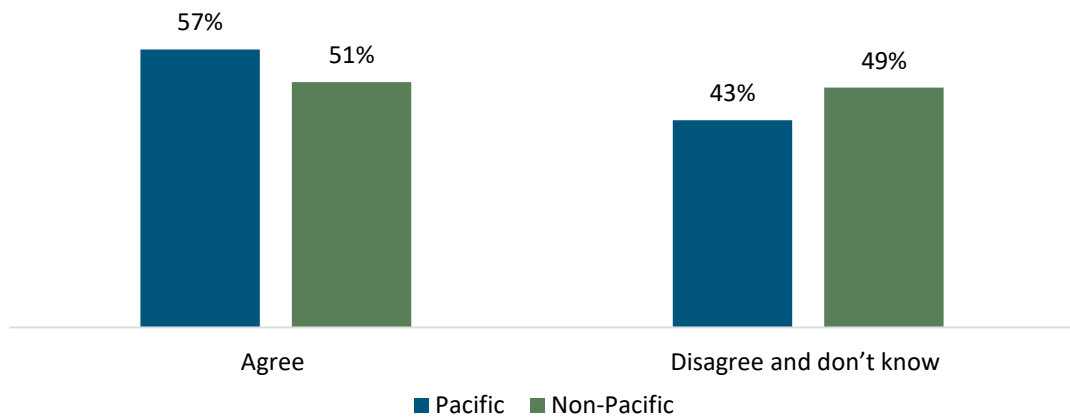
Around half of students have a role or responsibility, with Pacific students most likely to have one.

In the previous section, we found that both having a sense of belonging to school and having roles and responsibilities at school make the biggest difference to student attitudes to daily attendance.

Just over half of students (52 percent) report they have a role or responsibility that they need to be at school to do.

Pacific students are more likely to report this than other students (57 percent, compared to 51 percent), and Māori are less likely than other students (48 percent, compared to 52 percent). There is no real difference between boys and girls.

Figure 58: *Percent of students who report that they have a role or responsibility they need to be at school to do, by Pacific ethnicity.*

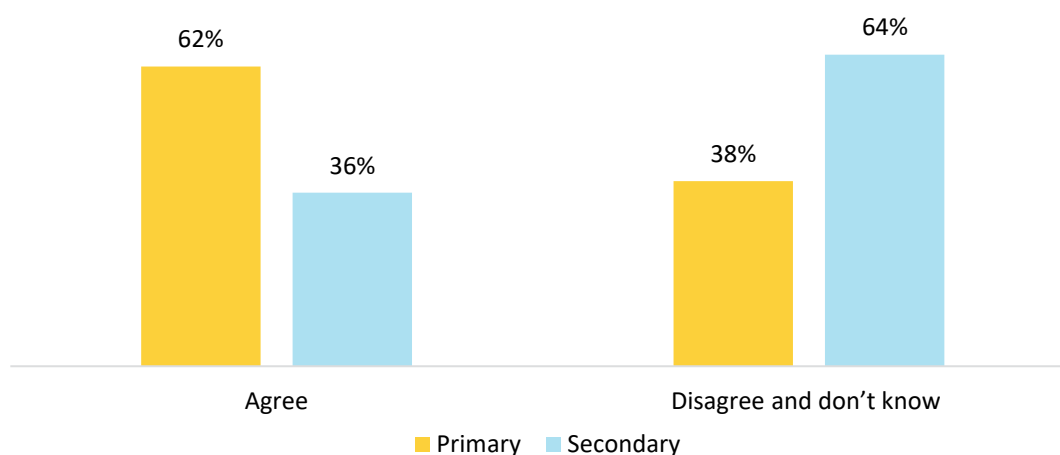


Providing roles and responsibilities that students need to be at school to perform isn't typically done with the intention of increasing regular attendance, but it has this effect because they build a connection to school, support a sense of belonging, and students turn up because they don't want to let anyone down. Leaders tend to be selected for exemplary behaviours, including attendance, and can have an influence on their peers through their role. Roles and responsibilities are varied. They can be leadership roles, including prefects, sports and cultural roles, road monitors, and key holders for the arts room or sports store.

Schools in low socio-economic communities and primary schools are most likely to provide opportunities for roles and responsibilities.

More primary than secondary school students report they have a role or responsibility that they need to be at school to do – over three in five (62 percent) compared to just over a third (36 percent). More students in schools in low socio-economic communities report they have a role or responsibility than students in moderate and high socio-economic communities – 61 percent, compared to 49 percent and 51 percent respectively.

Figure 59: *Percent of students who report that they have a role or responsibility they need to be at school to do, by school type.*



We found that teachers are deliberately providing a wide range of tasks or responsibilities to help build commitment and a sense of belonging, which can be more challenging in schools in low socio-economic communities. This is because students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to feel like outsiders, awkward, or lonely at school.⁷³ They experience systemic pressures, such as poverty, housing instability, and discrimination, which contribute to reduced belonging.⁷⁴

“It’s linked to responsibility [being lunch monitor]... when you’re responsible for lunches, you’re responsible for a whole lot of other kids that you take care of, make sure they eat... he’ll ask someone to do karakia, he will do the dietary requirements first and call out the name... he’s real into it.”

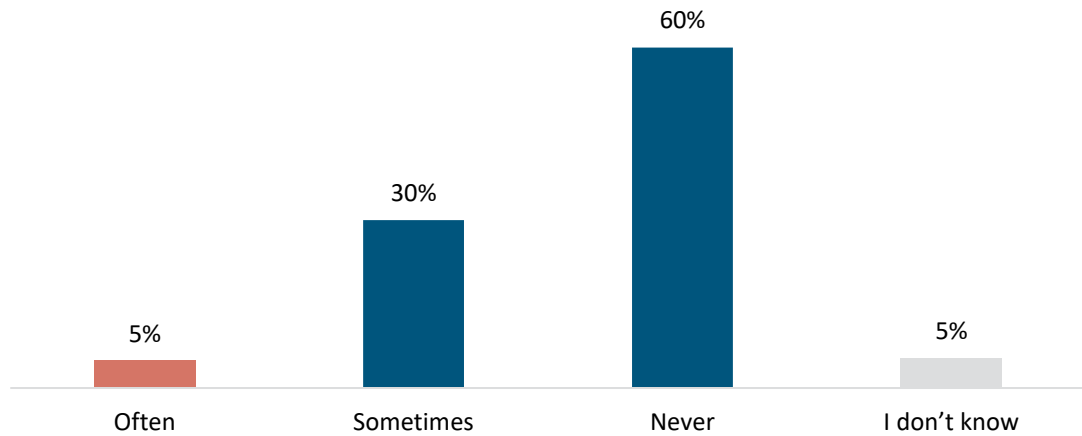
TEACHER

h) Regular opening

Around three in ten parents and students report their school isn’t routinely open.

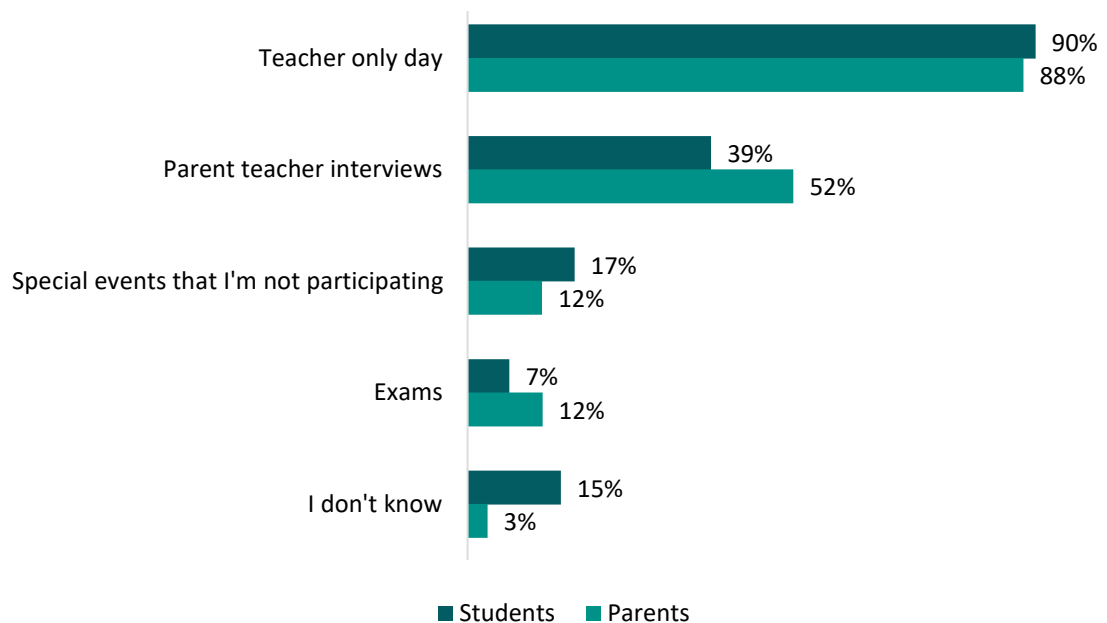
Around three in ten parents (35 percent) and students (27 percent) report their school is sometimes or often closed on days they think it should be open. Three in five parents (60 percent) report school is never closed on days they think it should be open (another 5 percent don’t know). Slightly fewer, just over half (55 percent) of students report the same (18 percent don’t know).

Figure 60: *Percent of parents who report their child's school closes on days when they think it should be open.*



Parents and students most commonly identify teacher-only-days as the reason for these school closures, followed by parent-teacher interviews, special events that the student isn't participating in, and then exams. Additionally, parents and students report weather events, infrastructure problems (water, power, sewerage), other emergencies, special events, teacher meetings and industrial action. Some parents are worried there are too many closures, which limits learning time.

Figure 61: *Percent of students and parents reporting reasons for school closures.*

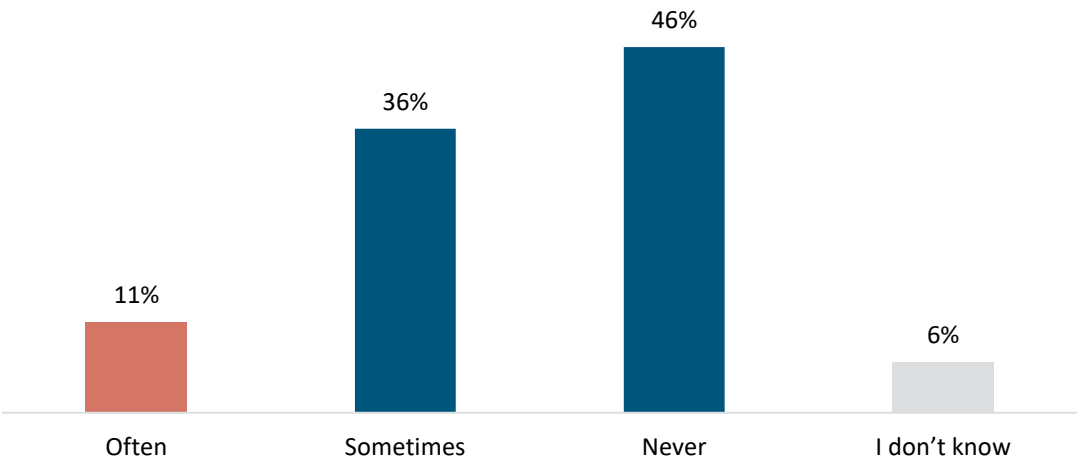


Other' reasons for closures reported by parents and students
Teacher meetings (inc. union meetings)
Work from home days / flexible learning days
Open days (for prospective students)
Staggered term-starts (i.e. different years starting on different days)
Insufficient teaching staff (e.g. due to illness and/or lack of relievers)
School trips and field days
Weather (inc. bad weather and major weather events)
Infrastructure problems (e.g. water, power, sewerage)
Emergencies (e.g. bomb threats, weapons on site, dangerous events in the community)
Unplanned maintenance (e.g. burst pipes, broken toilets)
Deaths and funerals (of students or staff)
Religious events
IT problems (inc. internet and WIFI down)
On-site construction
Working bee
Volunteer in the community days

Short notice closures can undermine the message that every day matters.

Just under half of parents (47 percent) and almost three in five students (59 percent) report these closures — when they think school should be open — sometimes or often happen at short notice.

Figure 62: *Percent of parents who report that their child’s school gives them short notice about the school closures.*



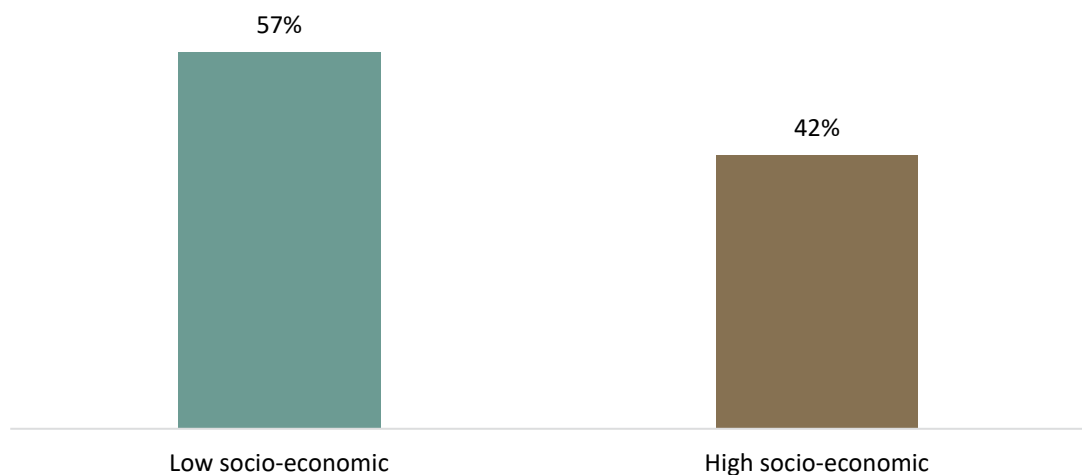
Parents are most concerned about short notice closures. Weather events are an obvious reason for short notice closures. Parents are most concerned about other reasons that seem avoidable, like parent-teacher interviews, and even infrastructure problems. Parents want notice so they can plan for closures, especially working parents who have to arrange last-minute childcare or take time off work. Parents also voiced concern about the impact of short notice closures on their child – these closures break routines and undermine the message that ‘every day matters’.

As detailed in Part 6, parents want schools to be more strategic around the timing of closures to minimise disruption to student and family routines.

Parents in primary and high socio-economic schools are more likely to report non-routine closures.

More parents in high socio-economic communities report their child’s school is closed when they think they should be open – 37 percent compared to 30 percent in low socio-economic schools. However, these closures are less likely to be short notice in high socio-economic schools – just over two in five (42 percent) of parents report closures are sometimes or often short notice, compared to just under three in five (57 percent) of parents in high socio-economic communities.

Figure 63: *Percent of parents who report that their child’s school gives them short notice about the school closures often and sometimes, by socio-economic status.*



This pattern is reversed for students – more students in low socio-economic communities report non-routine closures – just over a third (34 percent), compared to around a quarter (24 percent) in high socio-economic communities.

Primary students are also more likely to report non-routine closures than secondary students – almost a third (32 percent), compared to less than a fifth (18 percent) of secondary students – but only slightly more likely to report these closures are sometimes or often short notice (60 percent compared to 57 percent).

Primary schools often have smaller staff teams than secondary schools, which makes them more vulnerable to staffing shortages that can trigger closures.⁷⁵ Similarly, schools in low socio-economic communities often face higher staff turnover and difficulty securing relief teachers. Therefore, when multiple staff are absent (due to illness or personal reasons), these schools are more likely to close classrooms or entire schools due to lack of cover.⁷⁶

“We don’t have consistency. The teachers who we have good relationships with are leaving because they have big opportunities. [Students] are automatically not going to like them as much because they have these expectations of a teacher who they’ve built a really good relationship with ... and with relievers we’re learning different things.”

STUDENT, SECONDARY SCHOOL IN LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

2) What are out-performing schools are doing?

We looked at how out-performing schools are lifting and sustaining attendance.

Out-performing schools are those with higher attendance rates than expected, given the level of socio-economic challenge in their communities. This approach recognises that lower socio-economic communities face more barriers to regular attendance—such as housing instability, health issues, or limited access to transport, which schools alone cannot solve.

We found that out-performing schools aren’t simply implementing isolated activities. As detailed below, they are taking a whole-school approach underpinned by good leadership, aspiration, clarity, and consistency and environments where students feel safe, connected and supported to achieve.

Relentless, aspirational leadership drives a culture of attendance.

Schools that out-perform are aspirational in their approach and maintain a deliberate, relentless focus on improving attendance. Leadership sets the tone by prioritising attendance as a core part of the school culture. This includes establishing visible, schoolwide targets, consistently reinforcing the value of regular attendance, and celebrating progress to maintain momentum. In schools facing significant attendance challenges, leaders foster belief and aspiration among staff and whānau, setting realistic yet ambitious thresholds that grow with progress and avoid demotivating expectations.

“It’s not just about coming to school [for the sake of it]. We want our kids to be amazing adults and actually letting them get away with poor attendance is limiting their ability to have a good life.”

SCHOOL LEADER



Collective ownership and clarity of roles make attendance everyone’s business.

Teachers and leaders in out-performing schools collectively own the challenge. Attendance isn’t left solely to a dedicated role, although having a champion who is accountable for progress makes sure it remains a priority amid competing demands. Teachers and leaders operate with clearly defined responsibilities and a shared commitment to improving attendance. Everyone is involved, and the approach is embedded across the school, creating a culture where attendance is everyone’s business and not just an administrative task.

Evidence-informed practice and messaging sets schools up for success.

Out-performing schools use data not just to monitor thresholds but to identify early patterns of concern and act swiftly. They track individual and group trends to prevent persistent absence from taking hold. Messaging to parents is informed by credible evidence, including ERO’s own reports, highlighting the links between attendance, achievement, and lifelong outcomes. This evidence-based approach strengthens the rationale for regular attendance and supports targeted interventions.

Trusting relationships with parents unlock solutions and sustain engagement.

We found that strong relationships with parents are central to improving attendance. In the out-performing schools, staff go beyond simply following up absences—they build trust through proactive, solution-focused conversations that acknowledge real-life barriers such as mental health, transport, or uniform needs. This relational approach is especially important in communities where families may fear authority or hold negative views of school.

“‘What can we do to get your children to school?’ That is always the question that I’d get asked if I had troubles... having the teachers on board and the children knowing that, and having you both work together then making a game plan, like ‘You’ve got it! we’re here!’”

PRIMARY PARENT



Attendance within a culture of safety and connection.

We found that attendance initiatives are most effective when embedded in a culture of safety and connection. Schools that actively foster emotional literacy — through programmes like Zones of Regulation—help students recognise and manage their emotions, which in turn reduces behavioural incidents and supports positive peer relationships. These factors contribute to improved attendance.⁷⁷ We also saw schools using structures such as vertical form groups and buddy classes to build supportive relationships between older and younger students, further strengthening the sense of belonging (see case studies below).

3) What do real-life examples of out-performing schools look like?

Case study 1: Attendance grounded in connection and accountability

A small, urban secondary school serving a moderate socio-economic community.

This school demonstrates a comprehensive and intentional approach to lifting and sustaining high attendance. Its success lies in combining clear expectations and accountability with a deeply embedded culture of connection, safety, and support. Attendance is not treated as a standalone issue—it is woven into the fabric of the school's philosophy, systems, and relationships.

Building connection and belonging

A strong sense of connection underpins the school's approach to attendance. Students describe feeling welcomed and included from day one, with small, mixed-year form groups fostering strong peer relationships and daily routines that build trust. These groups create a sense of belonging and accountability, where students check in on each other and encourage attendance. As one student explained, "Everyone includes you a lot more here... I enjoy coming to school now."

"I've got kids in my [form group]... I'm in a chat with all of them so that I can get them notices and stuff as needed. Or like reminders: 'bring this for tomorrow.' And every night, it's like a routine — 'make sure you set your alarm, make sure your uniform is ironed and ready to go. Send me a photo so I know it's ready.'"

STUDENT

Students also spoke about how the school's culture helped them feel part of something bigger. "You just feel tidy. You just feel like you're part of something," one student said. Another noted that the school's structure and routines helped them feel more confident and motivated: "I used to be really shy, but this school has pushed me to be more confident."

Creating a safe environment

Safety is a critical enabler of attendance. Students who have been poor attenders at previous schools due to bullying, now felt secure and supported. One student reflected:

“I used to get bullied and all that, so I just didn’t want to go to school. And then coming here — no, there’s no bullying, no nothing. So, I’m all happy that I actually come to school.”

STUDENT

The school’s clear policy against bullying, combined with strong pastoral care and peer accountability, creates an environment where students feel safe to learn and belong.

Setting clear expectations with parents and students

Expectations around attendance are established before students even enrol. The school holds a structured orientation evening followed by a one-hour enrolment interview involving students, parents, and senior leaders. During this meeting, the school’s values, expectations, and systems — including attendance requirements — are explained in detail. Students and parents sign a contract that outlines their responsibilities, reinforcing that attendance is a shared commitment. As one leader noted, “It’s not just a piece of paper — it’s a full conversation about what it means to be part of this school.”

Using attendance data and following up on absences

Attendance is tracked rigorously and reviewed daily. Staff know where every student is by 9:30 a.m., and absences are followed up immediately. Teachers, form group leaders, and office staff work together to monitor attendance, share information, and intervene early. If a student is absent for more than two consecutive days, a medical certificate is required — mirroring real-world expectations and reducing casual absenteeism. Students are aware that their attendance is visible and valued.

Using rewards with students

The school celebrates attendance through regular recognition and tangible rewards. Students with perfect attendance receive praise, certificates, and sometimes prizes. These acknowledgements are made publicly, reinforcing the message that attendance is an achievement worth celebrating. One teacher shared:

“At the end of the year, students with 100 percent attendance get a certificate — and the whole school sees it. It makes them feel seen.”

STUDENT

Consequences for poor attendance or lateness are clearly defined and consistently applied. Students understand the impact of their absence not just on themselves, but on their form group. Attendance contributes to form group points, and missing school can affect the team's standing. This creates a sense of peer accountability. As one student put it:

“I don't want to miss school—not just for me, but for my form group.”

STUDENT

Students who breach expectations may be placed on a contract, with clear steps for improvement. These consequences are framed within a culture of support, not punishment.

Providing supports to overcome practical barriers

The school actively removes barriers to attendance. Uniforms are subsidised or provided through a trust board, and students often support each other by sharing spare items. One student regularly brought extra uniform pieces to help peers avoid consequences. Transport costs are covered for students who live far away, and food is provided daily. Staff and parents noted that students who might otherwise struggle to attend are enabled through these practical supports.

Providing roles and responsibilities

Students are given meaningful roles and responsibilities that depend on their presence. Form groups operate like teams, with older students mentoring younger ones and everyone contributing to the group's success. Leadership roles, peer support, and participation in competitions all require consistent attendance. These responsibilities give students a sense of purpose and reinforce the importance of showing up.

Case study 2: Aspirational leadership driving attendance

A medium-sized, urban primary school, serving a low socio-economic community.

Faced with persistent challenges around attendance, this school undertook a deliberate and strategic culture shift, led by a reflective and proactive leadership team. Their approach demonstrates how strong leadership, clear systems, and relational practices can transform attendance patterns and build a thriving school culture.

Aspirational leadership

The leadership team began the change by encouraging staff to raise their expectations for students, asking, “Are we putting that lid on our kids?” — a reference to a video showing fleas trained not to jump higher than a jar lid, even after it was removed. This metaphor sparked a schoolwide shift known as ‘lifting the lid’, which led to more proactive attendance strategies and a noticeable improvement in student engagement and regularity.

Leadership also uses national research to inform practice. Staff were introduced to findings from ERO’s report on chronic absence, which helped them to act early to tackle patterns of absence, and shift their thinking from ‘school rules’ to ‘life outcomes’. This evidence has been shared with families to reinforce the long-term impact of attendance.

Building connection and belonging

Connectedness is at the heart of the school’s approach. Leadership has rebuilt a sense of belonging after the disruptions of Covid-19 and leadership changes. Initiatives include house sports, whole-school kapa haka, termly pōwhiri and cultural celebrations, stay-and-play sessions for families, and daily greetings at the school gate.

The school has also fostered cross-age relationships through its buddy class programme, which helps build connection and belonging across year levels.

“Buddy class has also really helped... some of the juniors were [previously] quite intimidated by seniors.”

SCHOOL LEADER

Staff have worked hard to ensure that relationships are strong — not just within the school, but with families and the wider community. Parents describe the school as “like a family,” where every child is known and valued. They praise the buddy class programme, noting that it gives “the older kids ... chance to step up and hang out with the younger guys,” especially when younger students are struggling to feel included. Students talk about feeling safe, supported, and excited to come to school.

Setting clear expectations with parents and students

Leadership has led a deliberate shift in mindset across the school, challenging assumptions and raising expectations. Attendance is framed not as a rule, but as a life skill. Staff explicitly communicate that regular attendance is essential for success — not just in school, but in life. This message is reinforced through conversations with students and parents, prizegiving speeches, and everyday interactions.

Teachers now contact families early in the term to introduce themselves and emphasise the importance of starting strong. Students are told that fun days, sports, and trips are not optional extras but part of building connection and achievement. These practices have resulted in increased rates of attendance at the start and end of each term. Parents report that the school is “staunch” about attendance — but in a way that feels fair, consistent, and supportive.

Using attendance data and following up on absences

The school uses real-time data to identify patterns and has developed a clear, staged system for monitoring and responding to attendance. Data is reviewed weekly, and students under 90 percent receive targeted follow-up. Teachers contact families by week four of each term, and those with persistent absence are escalated to leadership or the attendance officer. A flowchart guides staff actions, ensuring consistency and clarity.

“We’ve shifted our phone calls to Week 4, not Week 7... the longer you let it go, the more it becomes a pattern.”

SCHOOL LEADER

Using rewards with students

Positive reinforcement is a key part of the school’s strategy. Students are motivated by house competitions, prize draws, and recognition for high attendance. The school moved away from 100 percent attendance awards (to avoid penalising students who are genuinely sick) and now include students with more than 96 percent in termly draws for vouchers and other prizes. Students are well aware of their personal attendance rates and actively work to improve them. These incentives are not just extrinsic — they’re part of a broader culture of celebration and belonging.

Using consequences with students

While the school prioritises relational and supportive approaches, it also sets clear boundaries. Students are expected to attend unless genuinely unwell, and leadership challenges parents who keep children home for birthdays or minor reasons. One parent shared how a conversation with the deputy principal helped her realise the message she was sending her child — that it’s okay to skip work after doing well for a few days.

The school uses formal letters and meetings when attendance does not improve, and works closely with the attendance service to escalate cases appropriately. These actions are framed as part of a shared responsibility to support children’s futures.

Providing supports to overcome practical barriers

Leadership has ensured that practical barriers to attendance are addressed wherever possible. The school provides food through the iwi lunch model – students receive fresh, locally made meals. As a KidsCan school, they supply shoes and jackets for students who need them. Staff report that these items make a tangible difference in helping students to attend and participate. The school also provides broader support to families, driving them to urgent appointments and connecting them to crisis services.

Providing roles and responsibilities

Students are given meaningful roles that helped foster a sense of ownership and belonging. These included responsibilities such as road patrol, gardening, librarian duties, and leadership in buddy classes. Students describe feeling proud of their contributions to support their school community.

School leaders ensure that these opportunities are inclusive and aligned with students' interests and other staff go out of their way to find activities that engage reluctant attenders, helping them see school as a place where they belong and can succeed. One parent observed that “every child gets a turn at being who they want to be” noting the school's deliberate effort to align responsibilities with students' interests and strengths.

Case study 3: A relational approach to attendance

A large, urban intermediate school, serving a diverse student population from a moderate socio-economic community.

The school offers a compelling example of how actions rooted in connection can make a meaningful difference. The school is lifting regular attendance through a multi-layered strategy that includes clear expectations, dedicated roles focused on attendance and family liaison, data-informed follow-up, incentives, practical supports, and a strong sense of belonging. Staff understand that attendance is not simply about being present — it's about students feeling connected, supported, and valued.

Building connection and belonging

Teachers invest heavily in building connections with students and families, especially in the first weeks of the year. Students spoke about feeling cared for, listened to, and supported — with some describing school as their “constant” in otherwise unstable lives.

Staff also work to ensure students feel safe and included. For example, students who are anxious about assemblies or trips are given tailored support, such as opting out of public recognition or having a buddy system. Youth workers are brought in to mentor students and run breakfast groups, which have been particularly successful in engaging boys with low attendance.

The school's pastoral lead plays a critical role in building trust with families, especially those who have had negative experiences with education. His long-term relationships and community presence allow him to act as a bridge between home and school, helping to resolve attendance issues and encourage re-engagement.

Setting clear expectations with parents and students

Attendance is positioned as a shared responsibility from the outset. At the beginning of each year, teachers hold interviews with parents and students where attendance expectations are explicitly discussed. These conversations are framed positively, using Ministry-provided data visuals to show the cumulative impact of absences. Teachers report that this early engagement helps surface potential barriers (e.g. anxiety, transport issues, family dynamics) before they become entrenched problems.

“We’ve also pre-empted the fact that it is going to be a focus... when we ring them, it’s like, ‘Hey, remember how we talked about attendance?’”

TEACHER

Students also receive direct messaging about attendance through classroom lessons, notices, and weekly emails. Attendance is embedded into the school's PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning) framework, with themes like punctuality and participation reinforced through curriculum and class culture.

Using attendance data and following up on absences

The school has developed robust systems for tracking attendance. Teachers receive fortnightly reports showing individual student attendance percentages, colour-coded for easy interpretation. These reports allow teachers to identify emerging patterns and initiate early, informal conversations with students and families.

“It’s not a shock to the parents — we’ve done all the things before that to support them”

TEACHER

Where patterns persist, teachers escalate concerns to a designated attendance lead, who follows up with phone calls, meetings, and — if necessary — formal letters including visual calendars of absences. Staff are careful to maintain trust, ensuring that classroom teachers remain the first point of contact and that follow-up is framed around support rather than blame.

Using rewards with students

Rewards are used strategically to motivate students and reinforce positive attendance habits. Students with 100 percent attendance are entered into a termly 'spin-the-wheel' draw for prizes such as movie or Kmart vouchers. For students in the moderate-risk band (e.g. 40–70 percent attendance), there are tailored reward systems — such as daily report cards and \$5 canteen vouchers for attending five consecutive days.

Teachers report that these incentives have a tangible impact, especially for students who previously struggled to attend school regularly. Students themselves spoke about setting personal goals and feeling proud of their attendance improvements.

“Last year we had our bottom 10 percent students [with poor attendance]... if they came every day, they got a \$5 canteen voucher. Attendance dropped when it stopped — so it clearly worked!”

TEACHER

Using consequences with students

While the school prioritises positive reinforcement, it also uses consequences where appropriate. Students are made aware that poor attendance can affect their eligibility for leadership roles, participation in extra-curricular activities, and access to certain privileges. These natural consequences are framed as part of the school's expectations and values, rather than punitive measures.

Teachers also note that students begin to experience internal consequences — such as embarrassment or disengagement — when they miss learning and fall behind. Staff work to mitigate this by helping students re-engage quickly and positively after absences.

Providing supports to overcome practical barriers

The school actively removes barriers to attendance by providing practical supports. Teachers and pastoral staff source items for students who lack appropriate uniform and other clothing, including hard-to-find sizes. They also provide stationery so that students can participate fully, and sandwich cards and fruit are available for students who arrive without lunch, with systems designed to be discreet and inclusive. To help students get to school, staff have arranged pickups and sometimes offer petrol vouchers. These supports are offered proactively and without stigma, reinforcing the school's commitment to equity and inclusion.

“We just get it. If a kid needs a P.E. top, it turns up on my desk. No fuss.”

TEACHER

Providing roles and responsibilities

Students are encouraged to take on leadership roles, join clubs, and participate in extra-curricular activities — all of which require regular attendance. Teachers note that students who are involved in these roles are more motivated to attend. This is because these roles give students a sense of purpose and belonging, reinforcing the value of being at school.

Staff actively shoulder-tap students to join activities that align with their interests. Examples include Dungeons & Dragons clubs for students who feel socially isolated, robotics for those interested in tech and design, sports teams, and cultural groups, which are particularly effective in engaging Māori and Pacific students.

Case study 4: Strengthening attendance through curriculum and connection

A small, rural area school, serving a low socio-economic community.

The school has taken a strategic and relational approach to improving student attendance, focused on strengthening its curriculum and expanding vocational pathways, while implementing a wide range of actions to lift and sustain regular attendance.

Strengthening curriculum and expanding vocational pathways

A key driver of improved attendance at this school has been its commitment to making learning relevant and engaging. Driven by the leadership, students now have access to a broader curriculum, specialist subjects, hands-on learning, and flexible timetables. Senior students spoke positively about small class sizes and the quality of teaching, noting that teachers “help us catch up” and “support us to get good grades.”

Vocational options have expanded significantly, including courses in hospitality, mechanics, and other trades. These opportunities are often subsidised or free, removing financial barriers. One student described how attending their vocational course every Friday gave them purpose and motivation to attend school.

Building connection and belonging

The school places a strong emphasis on relationships and belonging. Students across age groups spoke of feeling known, supported, and connected — not just to peers, but to teachers and the wider school community. The school structure and its curriculum design play a key role in fostering connection.

Small class sizes, specialist teachers, and personalised learning approaches ensure that students feel seen and supported. Senior students described how teachers tailor instruction for them, help them catch up when absent, and will accommodate requests to work in different spaces or with preferred staff.

Students mix across year levels, support each other, and take pride in their school. Bullying, while present in the past, has decreased, and students feel safer and more included. One student shared:

“We have a mutual respect for each other, even if we don’t like each other.”

STUDENT

Parents, similarly, describe the school as caring. They appreciate the daily contact, the attention to wellbeing, and the school’s efforts to build habits of attendance from a young age.

Setting clear expectations with parents and students

The school has made a deliberate shift in messaging, placing responsibility for attendance back onto families. Through newsletters, texts, Facebook posts, and direct conversations, leaders communicate that regular attendance is expected, for example, with the messaging:

“We’re a normal school now... we expect you as a parent to bring your child to school.”

SCHOOL LEADER

Students also understand these expectations. Senior students we spoke to rated the importance of daily attendance as “four or five out of five”, citing academic progress, vocational access, and social connection as key reasons.

Using attendance data and following up on absences

Attendance is monitored daily. Teachers check attendance each day and follow up on patterns of absence. Form room teachers and office staff make regular phone calls to families, and students confirmed that their parents are contacted promptly if they are absent. There is increased vigilance by staff to monitor students who may be at school but not attending class.

Teachers use attendance data to identify students needing support and to inform conversations with families. One teacher noted:

“I check attendance every day... if there’s a pattern, we follow up.”

TEACHER

Using rewards with students

Students receive certificates for achieving 90 percent, 95 percent, and 100 percent attendance, making the reward system inclusive and motivating for more students. These are awarded publicly at assemblies or end-of-term events, creating a sense of achievement and visibility. Students described this as motivating:

“We do have this thing ... where at the end of a term or the end of the year, they would say how much your attendance is, and they’d give awards out like certificates to 90 percent, 95 percent, and 100 percent. It lets you know — like next time, you could be one of those students. “It lets you know — next time, you could be one of those students.”

STUDENT

Students also described leadership roles, like prefect duties, as an earned responsibility. These leadership roles require good attendance and come with recognition and status.

Using consequences with students

While the school maintains a pastoral approach, it does use consequences to reinforce attendance expectations. Students reported that teachers follow up on absences and there is accountability for skipping periods. In some cases, students are told they may be excluded from events or courses if their attendance falls below a certain threshold.

Access to valued experiences — such as camps, sports tournaments, and vocational courses — is often contingent on attendance. While exclusions can be viewed as a consequence, they were most often reported as motivating, especially for students who may not be academically driven.

“I switched up when I realised I’d miss out on sports...”

STUDENT

Providing supports to overcome practical barriers

The school actively removes practical barriers to attendance. The school provides free lunches, subsidised or free access to camps and courses, and flexible uniform expectations. Staff are aware of the financial pressures many families face and respond with empathy and pragmatism. As one teacher noted:

“No one’s pulling the kids up on not having the right kit... we turn a blind eye because we know things are hard.”

TEACHER

Transport is another area of support. In the past, staff have picked up students from home. While this is now less common, the school still maintains two vans and will assist when needed.

Providing roles and responsibilities

Students are given meaningful roles that require their presence at school. In addition to prefect and head student roles, senior students can take on duties during breaktimes, including helping to monitor younger students. These responsibilities foster a sense of ownership and belonging.

Conclusion

Most schools are actively using actions to improve attendance, with the strongest emphasis on analysing data, setting clear expectations, and keeping parents informed and following up on absences. Practical supports are also widely used, while strategies like rewards and consequences are less common and used more selectively – schools in low socio-economic communities are more likely to be using rewards and practical supports, secondary schools are more likely to be using consequences.

Out-performing schools are using these actions strategically as part of a package and whole-school approach. They are led by aspirational leaders who set high expectations and embed attendance into the school's culture and vision for student success. Staff share collective ownership, using clear roles and evidence-informed practices to monitor and respond to absence early. Strong relationships with families and whānau, a safe and inclusive environment, and an engaging curriculum give students a sense of belonging and purpose. These schools set realistic but ambitious attendance goals, celebrate progress, and remove practical barriers – ensuring every student feels supported to show up and thrive.



Part 8: How can we support schools?

We know the changes that will make the biggest difference to students going to school regularly. In Part 7 of this report, we explored what schools are doing to lift regular attendance rates. In this part of the report, we include the views of teachers and leaders on what the main challenges are and what support is most helpful. Schools can feel overwhelmed with significant attendance challenges, like term-time holidays, family events, and illness. They would like help in following up on absent students, engaging with parents, and providing practical supports to overcome the complex barriers for children attending school.

What we looked at

Parts 1 and 2 of this report looked at shifts in regular attendance and attitudes over time. Part 6 looked at the reasons for these changes, touching on why some types of schools have made less improvement than others. This section provides a deeper dive into the challenges facing schools and views of teachers and leaders on what can help. We drew on:

- interviews with students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- surveys of students, parents, teachers and school leaders
- site visits to schools.

This section sets out:

- 1) Key challenges for schools
- 2) Helpful supports reported by teachers and leaders.

What we found: an overview

Schools report term-time holidays remain their main challenge for attendance. Term-time holidays are more of a challenge for schools in high socio-economic communities.

Almost nine in 10 teachers and leaders (88 percent) in schools in high socio-economic communities report holidays as a main challenge compared to 49 percent of teachers and leaders in low socio-economic communities.

Schools with significant attendance challenges can be overwhelmed and need support.

Teachers can feel overwhelmed by the responsibility (particularly if the school is facing other issues) and want additional roles to help with attendance and help with educating parents about the importance of regular attendance.

Some attendance challenges facing families are beyond what schools can address and require broader responses.

These findings are set out in more detail below.

1) Key challenges for schools

In this section, we look at what teachers and leaders think are the main challenges for regular attendance at their schools and why.

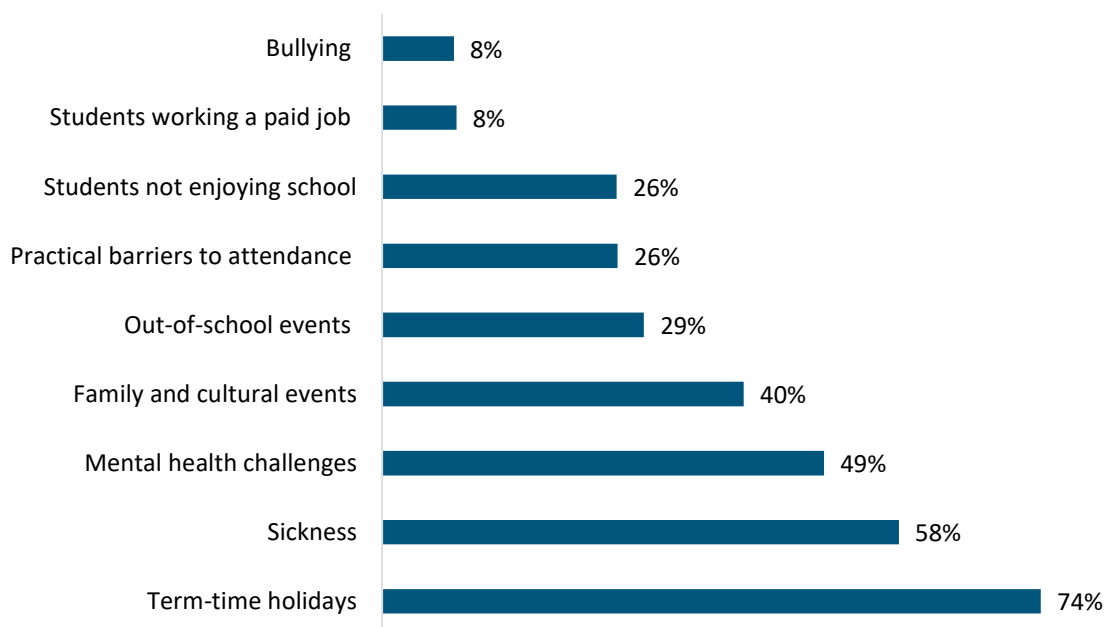
Schools report families taking term-time holidays is the biggest challenge for regular attendance.

Despite there being little change in absences due to term-time holidays (see Part 3), nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of teachers and leaders report term-time holidays as one of the school's main challenges for regular attendance.

We also found that fewer parents are now willing to keep their child home from school for a holiday of a week or more (see Part 5), but there is no real change in willingness to let them miss school for a holiday of a couple of days. While term-time holidays may feel like an overwhelming challenge for many schools, other challenges reported by schools include:

- sickness (58 percent of teachers and leaders)
- mental health challenges, including anxiety (49 percent of teachers and leaders)
- family and cultural events during term-time (40 percent of teachers and leaders)
- out-of-school events (29 percent of teachers and leaders)
- practical barriers to attendance (e.g., uniform, transport, meals) (26 percent of teachers and leaders)
- students not enjoying school (26 percent of teachers and leaders)
- students working a paid job (8 percent of teachers and leaders)
- bullying (8 percent of teachers and leaders).

Figure 64: *Percent of teachers and leaders reporting challenges to regular student attendance.*

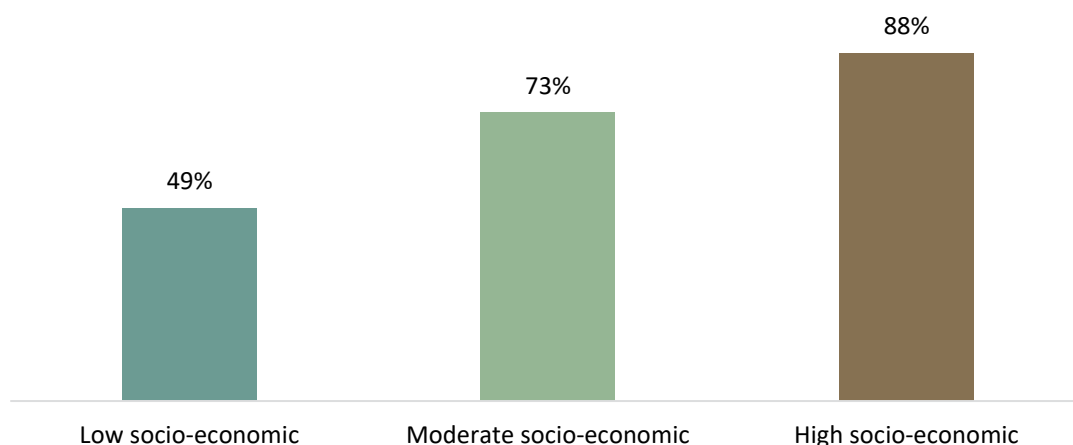


Term-time holidays are reported to be a bigger challenge for primary schools in high socio-economic communities.

More than three-quarters (77 percent) of primary teachers and leaders say that families taking holidays during term-time is the main challenge for regular attendance at their school – 7 percentage points higher than in secondary schools (70 percent).

This issue is especially pronounced in high socio-economic communities, where almost nine in ten (88 percent) of teachers and leaders report it as a main challenge – compared to seven in ten (73 percent) in schools in moderate socio-economic communities and fewer than half (49 percent) in low socio-economic communities.

Figure 65: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that term-time holidays are a main challenge for regular attendance, by socio-economic status.*



School size also matters: three-quarters (75 percent) of teachers and leaders at medium and large schools report term-time holidays as a challenge, compared to fewer than seven in ten (67 percent) at small schools.

The reasons for term-time holidays differ across schools, but typically it is around reduced costs.

“We had this teacher-only-day on a Thursday, and I wasn’t there on the Friday [because] flights were like \$20.”

STUDENT

In schools in high socio-economic communities, we heard that winter ski trips can be a challenge. This is because the snow season is short and ski holidays during the school holidays are expensive due to high demand. Ski slopes can also be crowded at these times, making them less appealing. Families will also extend family trips to take the opportunity for a holiday overseas. Parents emphasised that these holidays are exceptions and not regular occurrences, and that they are balancing learning in school with broader learning experiences provided by travel.

In schools in low socio-economic communities, families are more likely to travel overseas to visit relatives during term-time because this is when airfares are more affordable. Many families have been saving since Covid-19 and are only now able to afford these trips. Because of the cost and the time since their last visit, families tend to be away longer, making it difficult for students to maintain 90 percent attendance, even when averaged across the full year.

“We go to every effort to make sure our kids attend school. However, we also see the importance of family holidays/attendance at family events. There’s tension that occurs when the only time a family can afford to go on holiday is during school.”

PARENT



Over half of schools report sickness as a challenge, with no significant differences between school types.

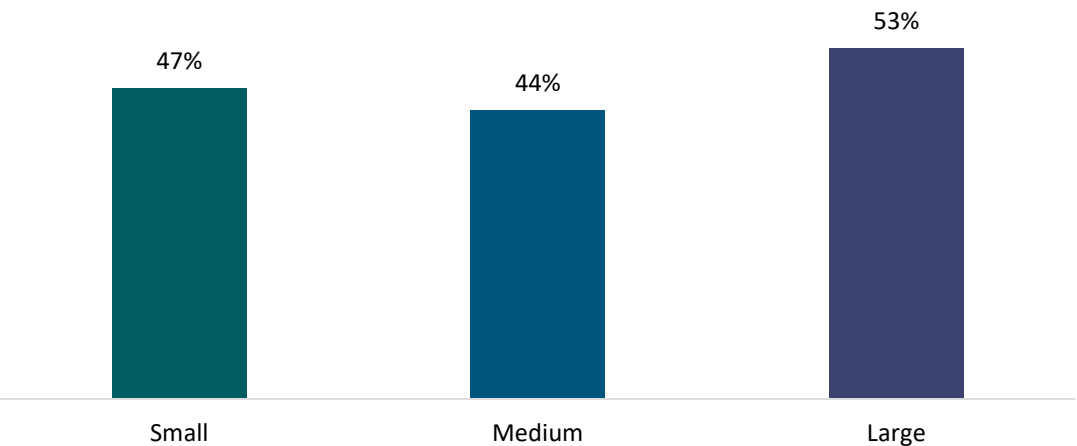
Although absences due to illness and medical reasons have slightly decreased (see Part 3), sickness is the second main challenge reported by schools after term-time holidays. Three in five leaders and teachers (58 percent) report it is a main challenge for regular attendance at their school.

Mental health is more of a challenge for large, urban secondary schools.

Although parents are now being firmer on their children going to school rather than staying home for mental health reasons, almost half of teachers and leaders (49 percent) report mental health as a challenge for regular attendance. Mental health is more commonly identified as a barrier to attendance in secondary schools, where two-thirds (67 percent) of teachers and leaders report it as a main challenge for regular attendance, compared to one-third (33 percent) in primary schools. Teachers and leaders in urban schools are also more likely to report mental health as a key issue for attendance —just over half (52 percent), compared to around a third (31 percent) in rural schools.

School size is important: over half (53 percent) of teachers and leaders at large schools report mental health as a challenge for attendance, compared to less than half at small and medium-sized schools (47 percent and 44 percent, respectively).

Figure 66: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that mental health is a main challenge for regular attendance, by school size.*



Teachers and leaders in schools in moderate socio-economic communities are also more likely to identify mental health as a main challenge for attendance—more than half (55 percent), compared to just under half in both low (44 percent) and high (45 percent) socio-economic communities.

The nature of mental health concerns varies across communities. In higher socio-economic areas, schools report rising levels of anxiety among students, with parents struggling to balance daily attendance with their child's wellbeing. In lower socio-economic communities, mental health is often impacted by unstable home environments and exposure to community violence. Traumatic events, including severe weather events like 'Cyclone Gabrielle', can further intensify these challenges. Teachers can feel pressured, but under-equipped, to support students facing mental health issues when there isn't specialist support available at the school.

“We have limited time and were not trained in [mental health support]. It's out of our scope to be all of those things, as much as we want to.”

TEACHER

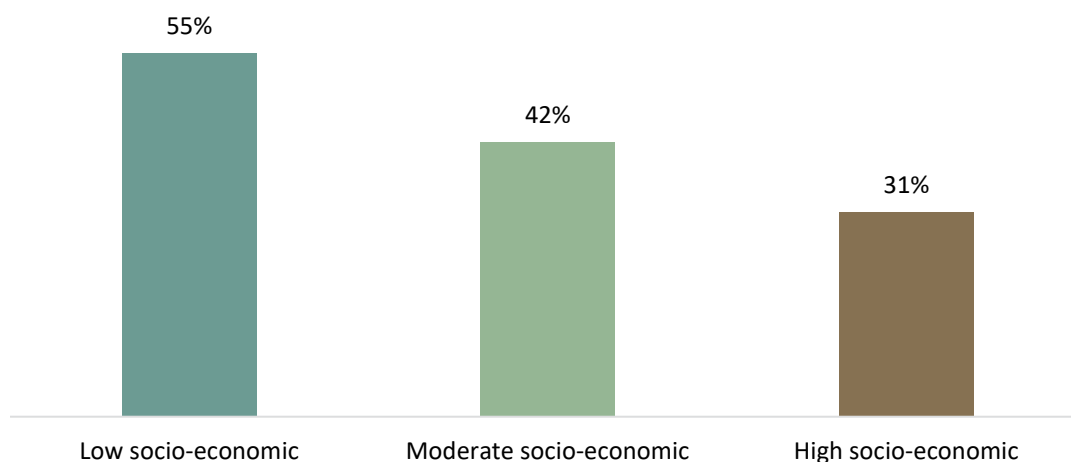


Family events are more of a challenge for primary schools in low socio-economic communities.

Family and cultural events are important to students and their parents but can be a challenge for regular attendance when they are routinely prioritised over school. Two in five teachers and leaders (40 percent) report they are a challenge for regular attendance at their school. This fits with what we heard from both students (see Part 4) and parents (see Part 5). More students now want to miss school for family and cultural events and parents are more willing to keep their child home for this reason compared to 2022.

More primary than secondary school teachers and leaders report that students missing school to attend family events is a main challenge for regular attendance — just over two in five (43 percent), compared to just under two in five (38 percent) say the same. This issue is even more pronounced in low socio-economic communities, where just over half (55 percent) of teachers and leaders identify it as a key challenge, compared to just over two in five in moderate socio-economic communities (42 percent) and less than a third (31 percent) in high socio-economic communities.

Figure 67: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that students missing school to attend family events is a main challenge for regular attendance, by socio-economic status.*



Absences for some family events, feel unavoidable and schools don't know what to do. In some cases, these events can involve a large section of the school community or can involve extended absences for students who need to travel across the country to attend a funeral or tangihanga.

“Whatever happens at the time it happens at a community level, if there's a death... everyone's gone.”

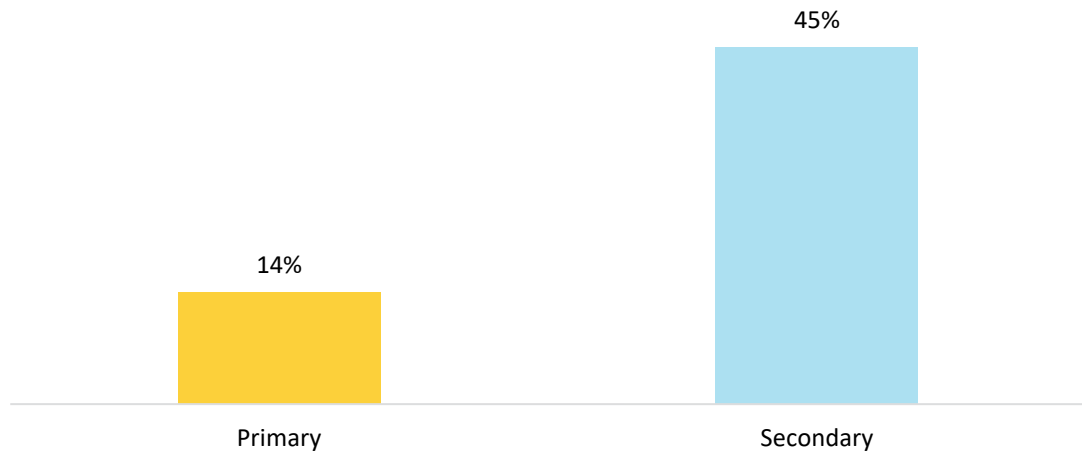
SCHOOL LEADER

Out-of-school events are more of a challenge for urban secondary schools in high socio-economic communities.

Just under three in ten teachers and leaders (29 percent) report that out-of-school events are a challenge for regular attendance. This aligns with what we heard from parents with over half reporting they are likely to keep their child out of school for out-of-school events this year, which is an increase compared to 2022 (see Part 5).

More teachers and leaders in urban schools report that students participating in out-of-school events is a challenge for regular attendance — three in ten (30 percent), compared to just over one in five (22 percent) in rural schools. The issue is even more pronounced in secondary schools, where almost half (45 percent) of teachers and leaders identify it as a challenge, compared to just over one in ten (14 percent) in primary schools.

Figure 68: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that students participating in out-of-school events is a main challenge for regular attendance, by school type.*



Socio-economic context also matters: about a third (32 percent) of teachers and leaders in schools in high socio-economic communities report this as a challenge, compared to less than one in five (17 percent) in low socio-economic communities.

Some teachers are frustrated by frequent out-of-school events because they reduce time in the classroom and impact learning. Some secondary teachers are even concerned about types of courses that take students out of school, like barista or flight attendant training, which can be for whole days and mean they miss other learning.

Conversely, we heard that out-of-school events can motivate students when participation is linked to attendance. We also know that parents and students value the experience gained through participation in out-of-school events, which are often offered to students in recognition of their skills and commitment. Out-of-school activities can also lead to credentials that will be valuable for the student's future (e.g. for passing music or dance exams).

“Learning is almost the add-on to extra-curricular... it doesn't often feel like academic progress is a focus.”

TEACHER

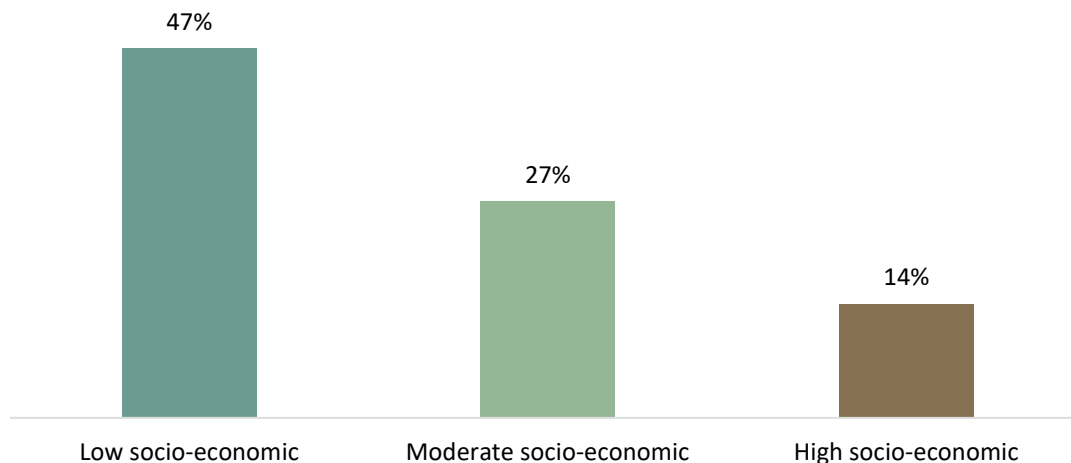
However, school attendance is widely recognised as a habitual behaviour formed through consistent routines and stable environments. When this habit is disrupted — such as through frequent participation in out-of-school events — it can lead to a breakdown in regular attendance patterns, making it harder for students to re-establish the routine.⁷⁸ Therefore, extra-curricular activities work best when they are school-connected because they can reinforce attendance habits.⁷⁹

Practical barriers to attendance are more of a challenge for primary schools in low socio-economic communities.

Around a quarter (26 percent) of teachers and leaders report that practical barriers to attendance (e.g. uniform, transport, meals) are a challenge for regular attendance. This fits with our finding that practical barriers to attendance are a real issue for a number of students and their families. One in six parents are likely to keep their child home for these reasons (see Part 5), and 3 percent of students report this as a reason they want to miss school (see Part 4).

More primary than secondary school teachers and leaders report that students missing school because they face practical barriers is a main challenge for regular attendance—just under three in ten (29 percent), compared to just under one in four (24 percent). This issue is especially pronounced in low socio-economic communities, where almost half (47 percent) of teachers and leaders identify it as a key challenge, compared to just over a quarter (27 percent) in moderate socio-economic communities, and less than one in five (14 percent) in high socio-economic communities.

Figure 69: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that students missing school because they face practical barriers is a main challenge for regular attendance, by socio-economic status.*



Some students miss school when they cannot afford transport, uniform, food, or digital devices. Being unable to afford transport is a literal barrier — the student simply can't get to school. Lack of uniform and food can be a barrier due to shame and stigma, and this is why teachers will sometimes travel to a student's home to provide the uniform. However, leaders and teachers told us it can be difficult to support families to overcome practical barriers to attendance when trust is low. Building trust can be resource-intensive and schools want additional and specialist staff to support parental engagement.

“Sometimes kids wouldn’t come to school if it’s raining. They’ve not got jackets or jerseys, they’re not going to walk to school in the rain.”

SCHOOL LEADER

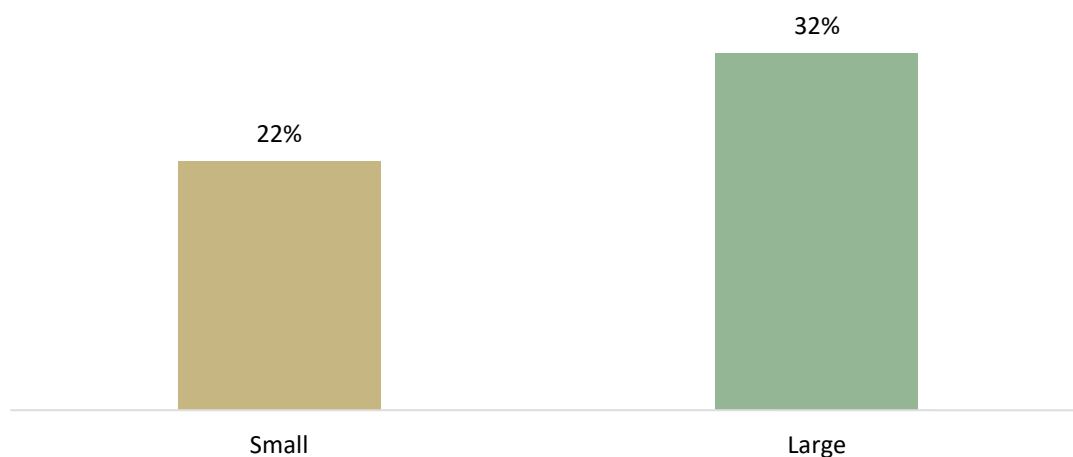
Students not enjoying school is more of an attendance challenge for large, urban secondary schools in high socio-economic communities.

Just over a quarter (26 percent) of teachers and leaders report that students not enjoying school is a challenge for regular attendance. This aligns with what we heard from students — one in five students (20 percent) report they would miss school because they don’t like or aren’t interested in what is being taught.

More teachers and leaders in urban schools report that students missing school because they do not enjoy it is a main challenge for regular attendance—just under three in ten (28 percent), compared to just over one in seven (15 percent) in rural schools. The issue is even more pronounced in secondary schools, where just over two in five (42 percent) of teachers and leaders identify it as a challenge, compared to just over one in ten (11 percent) in primary schools.

There is also a difference by school size; just under a third (32 percent) of teachers and leaders at large schools report students not enjoying school as a challenge, compared to just over one in five at small schools (22 percent).

Figure 70: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that students not enjoying school is a main challenge for regular attendance, by school size.*



Socio-economic context adds further variation, with just over a quarter (26 percent) in schools in low socio-economic communities reporting this as a main challenge, compared to only 16 percent in high socio-economic communities.

Students are more likely to enjoy school when teaching and learning is interesting and aligns with students' career aspirations and interests, increased independence, and smaller class sizes. Liking their teachers, having friends at school, and feeling like they are progressing also helps. Connection to teachers is especially important for anxious students and students with challenging home circumstances – they need to know there is someone they can talk to if needed. It can be more difficult to build connection with teachers in large urban secondary schools. We also heard that the frequent use of relief teachers can disrupt connection and result in students avoiding school on those days, or even going home from school.

Attendance challenges in a complex community context

This school is grappling with a complex mix of challenges that significantly affect attendance. Beyond socio-economic deprivation, students face community conflict, gang-related tensions, and the lingering trauma of extreme weather events. These factors have created a climate of heightened anxiety, with some students describing school as a place they want to be – but often can't manage to attend or engage in.

The school has implemented many of the standard strategies: follow-up on absences, whānau groups, positive reinforcement, and flexible learning pathways. However, these are not having the desired impact. While leaders emphasise consistent follow-up, some parents report never being contacted, and others have blocked school numbers. Teachers acknowledge that even when contact is made, it often feels futile – and the time required to sustain this work is considerable.

Students and whānau also describe how inconsistent staffing, frequent relievers, and a lack of trusted relationships with teachers can make school feel less safe or supportive. Mental health support is limited and inconsistent, and anxiety remains a major barrier to attendance for many.

The school is working to embed more consistent systems and reinforce positive messages, but leaders are clear: these efforts alone are not enough. This case highlights that even when schools do the right things, they may not work in communities facing complex, compounding pressures.

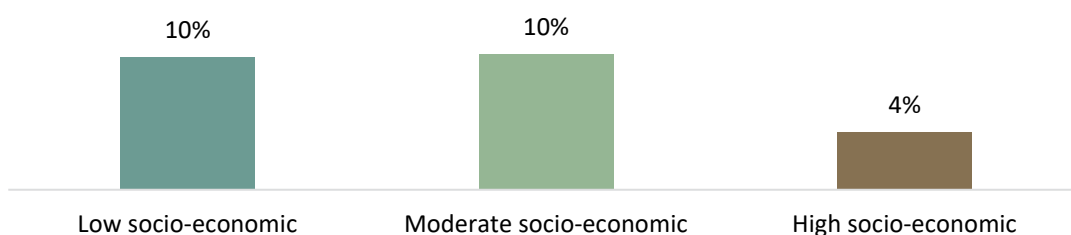
Additional support – including sustained wellbeing services, family liaison roles, and system-level tools – is needed to help schools move beyond reactive responses and build the long-term relationships that can shift attendance patterns.

Students missing school for paid work is more of a challenge for urban secondary schools in low socio-economic communities.

Unsurprisingly, students missing school for a paid job was reported by hardly any primary school teachers or leaders – this is largely limited to secondary schools. It is also more of an issue for urban than rural schools – around one in ten teachers and leaders in urban schools (9 percent) reported this was a main issue for regular attendance at their school, compared to just 4 percent in rural schools.

Socio-economic context plays a role: one in ten teachers and leaders in schools in both low and moderate socio-economic communities (both 10 percent) report this as an issue, compared to just 4 percent in high socio-economic communities.

Figure 71: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that students working a paid job is a main challenge for regular attendance, by socio-economic status.*



Students in lower socio-economic communities more often face financial stress at home, leading them to take on paid work to support their families. Urban centres tend to offer more part-time work opportunities (e.g., retail, hospitality), making it easier for students to find paid work. However, we also heard that students in farming communities will sometimes miss school to support their families with seasonal farm work, such as lambing.

“We’ve got kids who are splitting wood or helping with lambing, or they’ve got to get the stuff in from the field quickly because the rain is coming. That does crop up more than the fancy holidays and going to Bali – it’s not quite the same, is it?”

TEACHER

Bullying is more of a challenge for urban secondary schools in low socio-economic communities.

Eight percent of teachers and leaders report bullying as a challenge for regular attendance. While parents are now less likely to keep their child home due to bullying, still three in ten (30 percent) say they would (see Part 5) and more than one in eight students (13 percent), cite bullying as a reason that would make them want to miss school (see Part 4).

More teachers and leaders in urban schools report that bullying is a main challenge for regular attendance—just under one in ten (9 percent), compared to only 3 percent in rural schools.

Figure 72: *Percent of teachers and leaders who report that bullying is a main challenge for regular attendance, by urban and rural schools.*



The issue is also more commonly identified in secondary schools, where one in eight (13 percent) of teachers and leaders report it as a challenge, compared to just 3 percent in primary schools.

Socio-economic differences are also evident: just over one in ten (11 percent) of teachers and leaders in schools in low socio-economic communities report bullying-related absence as a main challenge, more than twice the rate reported in high socio-economic communities (5 percent).

We heard that secondary school offers a fresh start for students who experienced bullying previously, with the more positive environment helping students come to school more. This can especially be the case at small schools where everyone knows each other, as students look out for one another more and bullying is quickly noticed and addressed.

“Bullying doesn’t have an opportunity to grow because people notice really quickly, and typically someone’s going to say something.”

TEACHER

2) Helpful supports reported by teachers and leaders

Schools with significant attendance challenges can be overwhelmed and need support. Schools reported a range of supports that they think can help. Most commonly they report needing support to effectively engage with parents, including national campaigns, dedicated roles to manage attendance, and help to address practical barriers to attendance and wider support for students and families from specialist and outside agencies.

Teachers and leaders want support from national campaigns to help shift parental attitudes.

Schools also see a need for national campaigns, providing consistent messaging about the importance of attendance. Teachers and leaders in schools in low socio-economic communities are most likely to report this. They want consistent messaging that clearly communicates the long-term value of education and defines what constitutes a valid sick day—emphasising that occasional illness is understandable, but frequent or vague absences can harm learning.

“[Provide] good information out to the community around the importance of attendance... the community seeing it as a social responsibility.”

TEACHER

This messaging should be delivered across multiple platforms, supported by the Ministry of Education (the Ministry), and tailored to communities, helping build a culture where attendance is seen as essential and absences are taken seriously but compassionately. We found that the most impactful messaging around attendance is when national and school communications reinforce each other. Schools are often a trusted messenger. It may be valuable to consider who else can be a trusted messenger for different communities, including for Māori, and how communications can be tailored.

As noted in Part 2, the Ministry has launched a motivational awareness campaign called ‘My Why’. While student voices are at the heart of the campaign — encouraging them to identify their ‘why’ and see how attending school connects to their own goals —it also targets parents, and communities by providing resources and reinforcing the message that ‘every school day is a big day’. Its intended impact is to raise awareness of the value of attendance, foster supportive attitudes toward school participation, and contribute to reversing New Zealand’s declining attendance trends over time.

Similarly, the Department for Education (DfE) in England has used national campaigns around attendance. It launched ‘Moments Matter, Attendance Counts’ in early 2024 across multiple channels, including radio and, notably, social media influencers. The goal was to reach parents whose children were missing odd or ‘avoidable’ school days, emphasising the benefits of regular attendance, including wellbeing and extra-curricular engagement. The campaign prompted some criticism—particularly from neurodiversity advocates and parents—about unjustly stigmatising students with mental health challenges.⁸⁰ This demonstrates the importance of acknowledging challenges in the messaging about attendance.

Teachers and leaders want support to effectively engage with parents.

Teachers and leaders consistently emphasise the need for stronger communication and collaboration with parents and want support with this, especially when parents are difficult to get a hold of and aren’t on board with the school’s expectations for attendance. Schools with low attendance are most likely to say they want this type of support.

Teachers and leaders are concerned that some parents are disengaged or unaware of the impact of absenteeism, and schools need to bridge this gap. Strong community messaging, practical tools for communicating with parents, parent liaison roles to connect home and school, and parent education campaigns would support schools to more effectively engage with parents about the importance of regular attendance. Centrally prepared resources that schools can easily share with their parents would be especially valuable. While these resources might be part of a national campaign, there is added value in them being disseminated by schools, to reach a wider group of parents.

“I think that if attendance is going to be a key focus... there needs to be someone that goes directly to the houses and says what’s happening, what kind of support can we offer?”

SCHOOL LEADER

Aligning with their main challenge, teachers and leaders seek solutions to term-time holidays.

Teachers and leaders tell us they want stronger system-level supports to address the persistent problem of term-time holidays. They consistently call for clear, nationally consistent expectations and messaging to families about the impact of missed school, noting that schools alone cannot compete with the appeal of cheap travel. Many suggest policy or pricing changes—such as working with the tourism and transport sectors to reduce incentives for term-time travel—alongside communications campaigns that highlight the educational costs of absence. While some also favour clearer rules or penalties to discourage non-essential absences, the overall emphasis is on wanting coordinated, government-led action to shift family decision-making away from prioritising convenience or low-cost travel over schooling.

“The government needs to put a stop to the price gouging of airfares during school holidays. This would help to reduce the number of families taking their holidays during term-time and impacting hugely on student absenteeism.”

SCHOOL LEADER

“Most of the ones that we’ve really struggled to get to school, we don’t ever have any connection with the parents. If we try to reach out and say, ‘If you’re struggling to get your child to school, we can help.’ But... they don’t engage.”

SCHOOL LEADER



Some other countries regionally stagger school holidays, most prominently in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and France. While these policies have been primarily designed to manage travel infrastructure and the tourism economy rather than to influence attendance directly, they can indirectly reduce pressures on families to take children out of school to avoid peak-season costs. For example, in Germany, the 16 federal states coordinate summer breaks on a rotating basis, a system in place since the 1960s, to ease congestion on roads and railways and to spread tourism revenues across the season. France has taken a similar approach for winter and spring holidays, dividing the country into three ‘zones’ so that families are not all travelling at the same time.

While evidence on the link between staggered school holidays and attendance is limited, results from some recent trials show promise. For example, in England a group of schools that trialled an extended autumn half-term reported significant reductions in pupil illness absences and fewer cases of families booking term-time holidays.⁸¹ National debates around staggered calendars in other countries have often centred on fairness (with some regions preferring fixed holiday slots), the cultural significance of traditional school breaks (such as late-summer holidays in Bavaria, once justified by the harvest season), and the balance between family life, childcare, tourism and educational needs. This highlights the importance of considering the potential impacts on attendance, alongside wider impacts on families and society in New Zealand.

Teachers and leaders report that dedicated roles to manage attendance can help them focus on teaching.

Some teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the ongoing responsibility of following up on absences, attendance data tracking, and engaging with families over attendance issues. They want specialised roles such as attendance officers, truancy staff, and home liaison officers to provide valuable support, allowing teachers to focus more fully on teaching. Schools with low attendance are most likely to want these roles. While these roles have most often been used to respond to chronic non-attendance, schools are realising the benefits of using them proactively with students who aren’t regularly attending, to prevent these students slipping into chronic non-attendance.

“Someone dedicated to following up. Teachers try their best to ring parents, but don’t have the resources and time to visit whānau and problem solve the issues.”

TEACHER

“We need... a full-time job where they check attendance and work through individual cases. Each student’s poor attendance is for a different reason and requires individual support.”

TEACHER

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)—an independent charity in England dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement—is currently undertaking an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of specialist attendance roles, such as Attendance Officers and Family Liaison Officers, in improving school attendance. This research responds to a significant evidence gap around the value of these roles. Early findings suggest that school use of attendance and family liaison officers has increased over time and more than half of secondary schools in England currently employ one or more. These roles are most commonly found in larger schools and those serving low socio-economic communities, and their responsibilities span data monitoring, pastoral care, home visits, and strategic planning.⁸²

Teachers and leaders want help to overcome practical and social barriers to attendance faced by families.

Schools face the challenge of supporting families through practical barriers to attendance – such as lack of transport, food insecurity, and insufficient access to uniforms, often without adequate resources. They see that practical supports like school buses, free meals, and uniform grants help improve regular attendance and would like additional help to provide these to students and families. Teachers and leaders in schools in low socio-economic communities are most likely to say they want help to provide these kinds of supports.

“We used to do lunches, and I think that had a little bit of an impact... but unfortunately lack of finance meant that stopped... some of our more vulnerable students with attendance were the ones that utilised that, and now we’ve got nothing really.”

SCHOOL LEADER

Schools often fundraise so they can provide these supports. However, we heard this can divert staff time away from teaching. Some schools talked about the valuable support provided by being a KidsCan school. Schools in low socio-economic communities can apply, and partner schools receive food, health products and some items of clothing for students and families in need. Evidence shows these supports help with improved student nutrition, energy, and attention span, reduced absences, higher engagement in learning, and reduced stigma by providing support universally.⁸³ However, there is a waitlist to become a KidsCan school and schools in moderate and high socio-economic communities aren't eligible even if some of their students and families are facing challenge.⁸⁴

Breakfast clubs are well received because they are for all students, and this means there is no stigma associated with them. However, as noted in Part 7, some schools tell us they have recently lost their breakfast clubs and they are keen to have them back. While all schools are eligible for the national provision of breakfast clubs, called KickStart Breakfast,⁸⁵ the programme requires schools to provide their own basic equipment (bowls and spoons), suitable spaces, and staffing or volunteers, which can be challenging for under-resourced communities.⁸⁶ While direct impacts of KickStart Breakfast on attendance are not strongly evidenced, schools report that students are more settled and ready to learn and this supports engagement.⁸⁷ Evidence does show that the programme contributes to improved student wellbeing, concentration, and positive relationships between students and teachers,⁸⁸ which we know helps students feel more connected to school (see Part 6).

Teachers and leaders want support for students and families from specialists and outside agencies.

Teachers and leaders report unmet mental health and wellbeing needs are a barrier to attendance. They want students to have better access to counsellors, anxiety support, and holistic wellbeing programmes. These can be provided by schools or within schools by external agencies. Teachers also recommend partnerships with social services and community organisations to help address broader social issues such as poverty, housing, and family stress, which are seen as major attendance barriers. Schools with low attendance are most likely to say they want help to provide health and wellbeing supports.

“Counsellors... social workers... nurse, if they were all full-time here, it would mean those students could get access to it when they need it, not having to wait two or three days, or two or three weeks to even see particular people – because their problems are right now and they need helping right now.”

TEACHER



Rural and isolated schools report the downsides for attendance when mental health supports are not provided on-site or locally – attending appointments in urban centres can indirectly lead to absences, both for the student requiring the appointment, and sometimes their siblings too.

“We are a very isolated school. When a child attends an appointment in the nearest town, they will be gone for the entire day. Often their siblings will also be gone for the entire day.”

TEACHER

This challenge highlights the benefits of initiatives like Counselling in Schools (Awhi Mai Awhi Atu) and Mana Ake, which provide mental health support within schools. ERO's own review found that Counselling in Schools improved access to support for typically under-served groups, including students in rural areas, helped raise attendance, and had wider benefits for behaviour in the classroom.⁸⁹ Similar benefits are reported for Mana Ake.⁹⁰

Teachers and leaders at some schools want support to analyse their attendance data.

Another challenge for schools is identifying patterns in attendance. Teachers and leaders use administrative systems to track attendance, but this requires time and skill to interpret meaningfully. For example, we heard from schools they are looking at daily data to spot trends (e.g. repeated absences on specific days) but acknowledge that this work is time-consuming and not always straightforward. Teachers sometimes consult previous years' data or speak with colleagues to understand whether a pattern is new or ongoing, but this relies heavily on informal knowledge-sharing.

In England, the Department for Education (DfE) and independent organisations such as FFT Education Datalab⁹¹ have developed tools that allow schools to benchmark performance and attendance against groups of similar schools. School groupings are based on contextual factors such as prior attainment, socio-economic indicators, and geographic location. School leaders report that these tools provide valuable insights beyond national averages, helping to isolate the impact of school-level practices on outcomes like attendance and attainment. For example, the DfE's AI-powered attendance report⁹² enables schools to identify specific pupil groups or time periods needing attention and provide benchmarking for final-year secondary school performance. These tools also facilitate collaboration by identifying better-performing schools with similar intakes, encouraging the sharing of effective practices.

Similar challenges and areas of support have been identified in other countries, leading to toolkits that can help inform and guide schools.⁹³ Other countries have also set up 'attendance hubs,' which are groups of similar schools that come together to share effective attendance practice on a peer support basis.⁹⁴

Conclusion

A deeper dive into the challenges facing schools reveals that term-time holidays, physical and mental illness, and time away for family events present common challenges. Practical barriers to attending school and disinterest also play a role in poor attendance. So that schools can focus on teaching, teachers and leaders want more support with poor attendance. The most common forms of support called for were dedicated roles in managing attendance and communicating with parents. While the Education and Training Act 2020 allows schools to appoint attendance officers, some schools are struggling to make this happen alongside other priorities.

Teachers recognise the broader social issues that impact attendance and want wider collaboration to tackle these problems but want help with providing practical supports to overcome barriers. They also think that a national behaviour campaign would help get students to school regularly. As Part 2 detailed, there is already a national campaign in place, which continues to be informed by evidence and insights to make it effective. In Part 9, we offer recommendations that reflect the challenges raised by leaders and teachers, and the insights gathered throughout this report.



Part 9: Key findings and recommendations

The four questions we asked for this evaluation have led to 13 key findings that sit across this work. Based on these findings, we have identified three areas for action, which together have the potential to help improve regular attendance in New Zealand. This section sets out our findings and our recommendations for improvement.

In response to New Zealand's concerning attendance rates since 2015, the Government has set a target that 80 percent of students will be present for more of 90 percent of the term by 2030. To help meet this target there is a programme of work underway. In light of this, ERO was commissioned to undertake a national review to see whether regular attendance and attitudes to attendance have improved and what school actions and supports make a difference.

For this review, we set out to answer four key questions:

- 1) Has attendance improved and for whom?
- 2) Have student and parents' attitudes to attendance changed and what are the drivers?
- 3) What successful approaches are schools using to raise attendance?
- 4) What supports make schools most effective in raising attendance?

In undertaking this review, we drew on evidence from a range of data and analysis, including:

- over 14,600 survey responses from students, parents, teachers, and school leaders
- interviews and focus groups with over 300 participants including students, parents, teachers, school leaders, and experts
- site visits to 16 case study schools, including 10 'out-performing' schools
- administrative data from ERO and the Ministry of Education
- a review of the international and New Zealand literature.

Our review led to 13 key findings across the following three areas.

- **Area 1:** What has happened to attendance in New Zealand?
- **Area 2:** Why are students going to school more?
- **Area 3:** What are the challenges schools still face?

Context

Attending school regularly is essential for achievement and lifelong success. However, regular attendance can vary between schools and students and dropped as low as 40 percent during Covid-19 times. The Government has set a target of 80 percent of students attending school regularly by 2030. To help reach this target, there is a national Attendance Action Plan. This plan centres on attitudes, awareness, and accountability and involves the education sector, wider services, parents, and communities working together to turn things around. Attitudes are important because they strongly relate to attendance behaviours. The findings of our review will support the Attendance Action Plan.

We know from the international evidence about the importance of schools setting clear expectations and regular monitoring and tracking of attendance data. We also know that data-driven approaches enable schools to implement timely interventions and assess the effectiveness of interventions. Attendance data also enables schools to inform parents about their child's attendance, gaining their support to improve it. Evidence also points to the importance of creating a great, welcoming environment at school in raising student attendance. This review builds on the current evidence to help understand what is working well in New Zealand's schools.

Key findings

Area 1: What has happened to attendance in New Zealand?

We looked at which types of attendance, groups of students, and groups of schools improved the most and least.

Finding 1: Attendance has been increasing since 2022 and is now back to pre-Covid levels.

Area 2: Why are students going to school more?

We looked at how students' and parents' attitudes to attendance have changed, who they have changed for most, and why they have changed. We looked at the impact of a range of school actions. We also looked at what 'out-performing' schools are doing to raise and maintain high rates of regular attendance.

Reason 1: Students' attitudes

Finding 2: More students now think education is important for their future, think attending daily is important and never want to miss school.

Reason 2: Parents' attitudes

Finding 3: More parents now understand the importance of their child not missing a lot of school.

Finding 4: However, parents are not yet taking daily attendance more seriously.

Finding 5: Parents are increasingly content for children to miss school for some 'justified' reasons.

Reason 3: Schools' actions

Finding 6: Schools are making students feel connected to school, and this has the biggest impact on attendance and student attitudes to attendance. Roles and responsibilities can help with this.

Finding 7: Schools are setting clearer expectations which helps students see daily attendance as important and helps parents see the value of school.

Finding 8: Schools are providing practical supports, and this has a positive impact on both attendance and parent and student attitudes to daily attendance. Schools in low socio-economic communities use practical supports a lot more.

Finding 9: Schools are providing rewards that help both parents and students see daily attendance as important. Most schools in low socio-economic communities use rewards, while most schools in high socio-economic areas don't.

Finding 10: Schools that are successful in raising and maintaining attendance (even in challenging circumstances) have an "end-to-end" approach. They are aspirational, with leadership that drives a strong culture of attendance. They stay relentlessly focused on improvement, work in clearly defined roles, apply practices consistently, and partner with parents and whānau.

Finding 11: Schools' patterns of closures also matter, as they can impact parent and student attitudes to attendance.

Area 3: What are the challenges schools still face?

We looked at what challenges 'underperforming' schools in New Zealand are facing and the supports that are most needed to lift regular attendance.

Finding 12: Schools report term-time holidays remain their main challenge for attendance. Term-time holidays are more of a challenge for schools in high socio-economic communities.

Finding 13: Schools with significant attendance challenges can be overwhelmed and need support.

Recommendations

Based on these key findings, ERO makes 10 recommendations across three areas:

- **Area 1:** Continue to do what works
- **Area 2:** Strengthen systems and accountability for attendance
- **Area 3:** Look more broadly

Area 1: Continue to do what works

We know that when schools communicate with parents, explain the importance of attendance, use effective strategies, and work collaboratively, regular attendance can improve. To support this, ERO recommends the Ministry of Education continue to:

Recommendation 1: Provide parents with visibility of their child's absences and total attendance through school reports and regular updates.

Recommendation 2: Target parents with both centralised and localised messaging to reinforce why every day matters – communicating the impact of absences on achievement and how missing bits of learning can lead to gaps in students' knowledge.

Recommendation 3: Provide practical support and data for school leaders to:

- understand what the evidence shows are the most effective things schools can do to support attendance – building students' connection to the school, setting clear expectations, providing practical supports, and using rewards.
- track the school's performance and learn from schools 'like them' about which methods and approaches are most effective.

Area 2: Strengthen accountability for attendance

There are encouraging signs that attitudes towards attendance are improving. However, progress is uneven, and further action is needed to consolidate gains and address persistent gaps. In particular, parental perceptions of what counts as a 'justified' absence continue to normalise unnecessary time away from school, and patterns of school closures may undermine messages signals about the importance of daily attendance. To strengthen the systems that support attendance, and to increase accountability across schools, parents, and wider society, the Ministry of Education and schools should continue to:

Recommendation 4: Remove the distinction between justified and unjustified absences so that schools and parents focus on what matters the most – the number of days students are in school learning.

Recommendation 5: Increase parents' awareness of the legal consequences already in place for parents that won't (not can't) support their child's attendance.

Recommendation 6: Make attendance a 'whole of society' issue, with increased expectations for other agencies engaging with parents and students (such as medical professionals, social services and others) to reinforce expectations of attendance.

Recommendation 7: Consider whether an attendance requirement or a visible record of attendance can be included for the new senior school qualifications so that it incentivises students to attend while also avoiding disadvantaging students who face significant barriers to attendance.

Recommendation 8: Monitor school closures and their impact on attendance and look carefully at which days schools are open for instruction and how this is communicated to parents to support attendance.

Area 3: Look more broadly

While much of the focus on attendance rightly sits with schools, parents, and students, there are also wider structural and contextual factors that shape patterns of absence in New Zealand. Recognising these broader influences is important to building a system that both reduces the drivers of absence and lessens the negative impact when absences do occur. Therefore, ERO recommends exploring innovative solutions to address the root causes of students missing school, as well as strategies to help schools support students to recover learning when absence is unavoidable.

Recommendation 9: Consider innovative solutions that reduce the main drivers for students to miss schools – for example, consider international models of regional school holidays to reduce the cost of travelling in the school holidays and how extra-curricula providers can schedule activities for outside school time.

Recommendation 10: Reduce the impact of absence on attainment – for example, recognise that New Zealand's remote location and high proportion of foreign-born residents create unique drivers for school absences and invest in supporting schools to 'catch up' students when they return.

Together these actions can help schools maintain the upward trend of increasing numbers of students attending regularly.

Conclusion

Not enough New Zealand children attend school regularly. While attendance is now back at pre-Covid levels, we have a long way to go to meet attendance targets and keep up with students internationally. To continue to move the dial, we need to do more of what we know works, strengthen attendance systems and accountability, and find innovative ways to mitigate the impacts of attitudes and behaviours that are hardest to shift.

Our recommendations are designed to support students to thrive at school and beyond. Better life outcomes for individuals are important for flourishing communities and a prosperous country.



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