



## Briefing Note: Term 2 Attendance Survey, 2018

<b>To:</b>	Hon. Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Cc:</b>	Hon. Tracey Martin, Associate Minister of Education Hon. Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister of Education Hon. Jenny Salesa, Associate Minister of Education		
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<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	Yes		

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

**Note** that the report 'Term 2 Attendance Survey, 2018', and associated data are ready to be released on Education Counts.

### Summary

- This briefing informs you of the key results of the Term 2 attendance survey, 2018, prior to its public release. A copy of the full report is attached for your reference.
- In 2018, regular attendance stabilised at 64% of students, following declines in survey results for 2016 (67%) and 2017 (63%).



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14/1/19



Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**

5/2/19

## Background

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1. This Briefing Note addresses the Term 2 Attendance Survey, 2018, notified in the Indicative Early Learning and Schooling Annual Data Release Schedule (METIS 1125305).
2. Last year's Term 2 attendance survey covered from 30 April to 6 July, 2018. The term includes 98 half-days, as Queen's Birthday reduced it by two half-days. It includes data from 87% of all schools and represents 93% of enrolled students in New Zealand.
3. Since 2015, the annual attendance survey has used the data for each week of Term 2. Prior to that the survey focused on a single week during the term, although attendance data for a full term has been captured since 2011.
4. This is the first time commentary on the Every Day Matters (EDM) programme has been included in a Term 2 Attendance Survey report. The voluntary programme processes attendance data from participants for all four terms each year.<sup>1</sup>
5. Until now EDM analysis of participant data has been routinely issued to them, but the programmes existence has not been acknowledged wider than the sector.

## Key Findings

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6. Analysis of the survey data found the proportion of students meeting the definition for regular attendance had stabilised at 64%, following declines seen in 2016 and 2017.<sup>2</sup>
7. By encouraging students with irregular absence patterns (attending 81% to 90% of Term 2) to lift their attendance by up to five half days, regular attendance in Term 2 could rise to 79% of students, and evidence suggests that student achievement outcomes could improve.
8. The gender gap continues to be seen in Years 12 and 13, but is pronounced for Y13 female students. Regular attendance for these students is 42%, about six percentage points below Y13 male students.
9. Regionally, Auckland had the highest number of students with irregular absence (52,161), but Tai Tokerau had the highest proportion of students with irregular absence (28%).
10. In 2018, chronic absence continued to be more prevalent in lower socio-economic schools, with the rate about four times higher in Decile 1 (13%) than in Decile 10 (3%) schools.
11. EDM returns for the last ten terms (Term 1, 2016 to Term 2, 2018) shows attendance varies across a year; Term 2 was lower than Term 1 and higher than Term 3, but fluctuated against Term 4.
12. Of the 3,212 Unjustified Absence cases closed by the Attendance Service in Term 2, one in five was unresolved and progressed to a Non Enrolled case.<sup>3</sup> Also in Term 2, over 17,700 students (Years 1 to 13) missed at least 20 non-consecutive days of school.

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<sup>1</sup> By the end of 2018, 14.5% of schools had signed up to participate in the EDM programme.

<sup>2</sup> The Ministry defines regular attendance as being at school for greater than 90% of all half-days in Term 2.

<sup>3</sup> A student is 'Non Enrolled' when they miss 20 consecutive days of school, or it is believed they are likely to.

## Communications Approach

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13. The findings in the 2018 report are broadly consistent with the 2017 report.
14. With similar results to 2017, no worsening or improving of headline figures, media interest in the report may not be as high as it was last year.
15. We have prepared reactive questions and answers as part of this release (attached as Annex 2), and will continue to work closely with your office ahead of the release.

## Next Steps

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16. The report (attached as Annex 1) will be ready to release on Education Counts in the week beginning 28 January and we will work with your office on the exact timing.

## Proactive Release

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17. We recommend this Briefing Note is proactively released as per the expectation that information will be released as soon as possible. Any information that may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

## Annexes

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- Annex 1: Term 2 Attendance Survey, 2018
- Annex 2: Reactive questions and answers

# Term 2 Attendance Survey, 2018

## Overview

1. This report looks at the data generated by the 2018 Term 2 Attendance Survey, which is a voluntary survey run across primary and secondary schools. The 2018 survey includes data from 86.6% of all schools and represents 92.5% of students in New Zealand.
2. Using this data, the report looks at four patterns of student attendance:
  - **Regular attendance**, students attending school for more than 90% of available half-days.<sup>4</sup>
  - **Irregular absence**, students attending between 81% and 90% of available half-days,
  - **Moderate absence**, students attending between 71% and 80% of available half-days, and
  - **Chronic absence**, students attending school 70%, or less, of available half-days.
3. The number of half-days schools are open in a year is prescribed.<sup>5</sup> Secondary and composite schools are required to be open 380 half-days. Primary, intermediate, and special schools between 384 and 390 half-days (depending on the timing of Easter).

## Key Findings

4. The report shows that in 2018 regular attendance stabilised at 63.8% of students, following declines seen in the two previous surveys; 67.2% in 2016 and 63.0% in 2017.
5. Encouraging students who have irregular absence to lift their attendance by up to five half days could see regular attendance in Term 2 rise up to 79.1% of students, and evidence suggests that student achievement outcomes could improve.
6. The trend of female students having less regular attendance than male students in Years 12 and 13 continues, and is most pronounced for Y13 female students. Regular attendance for these students is 41.5%, 5.5 percentage points below Y13 male students.
7. Regionally Auckland had the highest number of students with irregular absence (52,161 students), but Tai Tokerau region had the highest proportion of students with irregular absence (27.8% of students).
8. In 2018, chronic absence continued to be more prevalent in lower socio-economic schools, with the rate about four times higher in Decile 1 (13.2%) schools than in Decile 10 (3.2%) schools.<sup>6</sup>
9. The lowest socio-economic schools (Deciles 1-3) have the highest number and rate of chronic absences. Decile 1 schools, at 13.2% (6,840), have over 1,800 more students than Decile 3 (5,013) schools, the next largest group.
10. Every Day Matters (EDM) returns for the last ten terms (Term 1, 2016 to Term 2, 2018) show how attendance varies across a year; Term 2 attendance is lower than Term 1 and higher than Term 3, but fluctuates against Term 4.

<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Education (Ministry) defines regular attendance as attending school for more than 90% of all half-days in Term 2.

<sup>5</sup> A half-day can either be the minimum two hours before, or after, noon contributing to the minimum four hours of a school day.

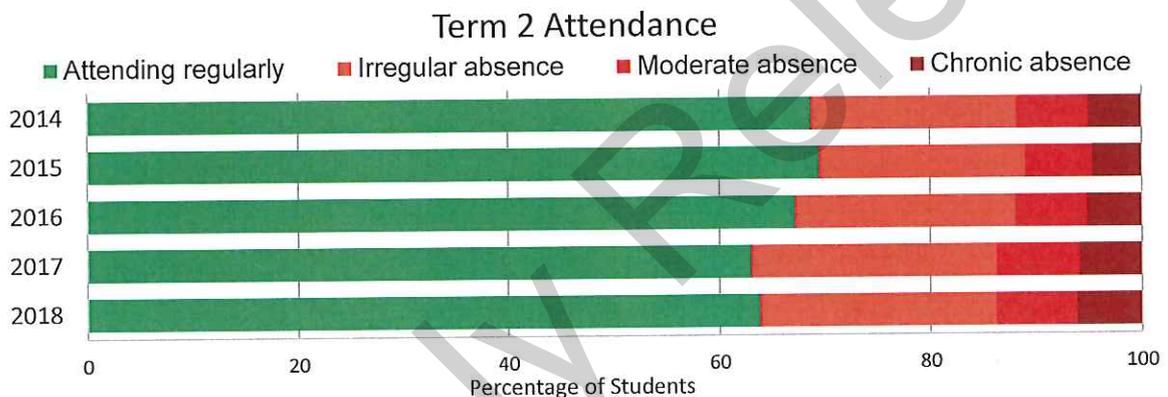
<sup>6</sup> Deciles are used in many of the indicators used by the Ministry as a proxy for socio-economic status.

11. In Term 2, of the 3,212 Unjustified Absence cases closed by Attendance Service, one in five was unresolved and progressed to a Non Enrolled case.<sup>7</sup> Also in Term 2, over 17,700 students (Years 1 to 13) missed at least 20 non-consecutive days of school.

## What Happened in 2018?

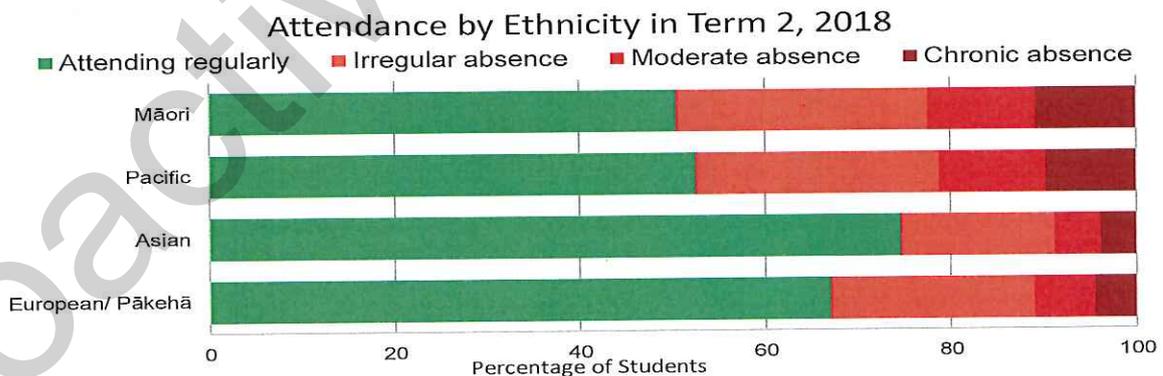
12. In 2018, Term 2 was a ten week term, which started on Monday 30 April and included 98 half-days.<sup>8</sup>
13. As noted in *The Ministry of Education Annual Report 2018*, the Ministry has a target of 70% of students attending school regularly (page 4, "The year at a glance").<sup>9</sup> Regular attendance in 2018 stabilised at 63.8% of students, following declines seen in 2016 (67.2%) and 2017 (63.0%).
14. Over the last eight years, regular attendance was at its highest in 2015 (69.5%).
15. As with regular attendance, proportions of irregular, moderate and chronic absences remained fairly constant in 2018 (from 2017); Irregular absence at 22.5% (23.3%), Moderate absence at 7.7% (7.8%), and Chronic absence at 6.0% (5.8%). See Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1:** Percentage of students in the four attendance categories, across the last three years (Term 2).



16. Maori and Pacific students have the lowest rates for regular attendance and highest rates for chronic absence (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Percentage breakdown of ethnicity across the four attendance categories in Term 2, 2018.



17. Comparing attendance of Y1 to Y8 male and female students the differences between them are slight (see Figure 3). The biggest gap between the genders goes to female students in Y7 and Y8, each being 1.8% higher than males. Regular attendance in Primary School years is above 60% for each gender.

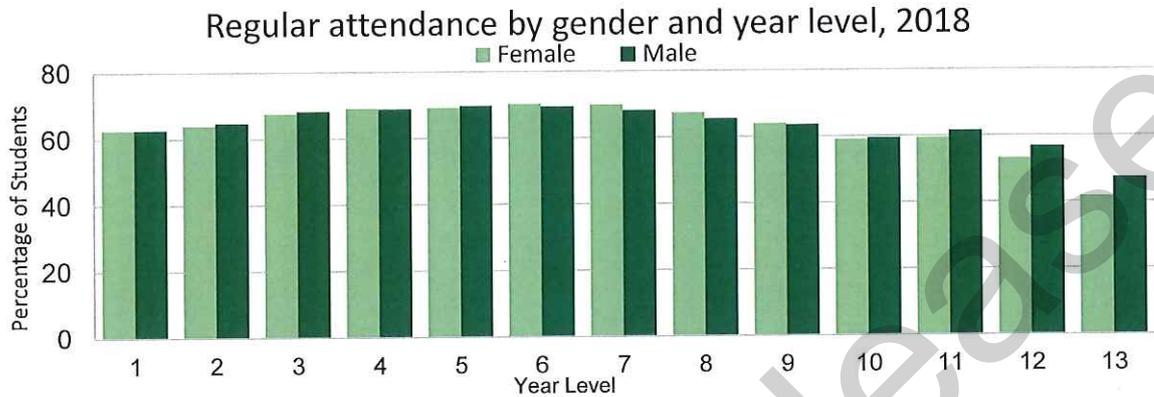
<sup>7</sup> A student is 'Non Enrolled' when they miss 20 consecutive days of school, or their school believes they are likely to miss these days.

<sup>8</sup> Term 2, 2018, included Queen's Birthday (4 June) as a public holiday, reducing the term by two half-days.

<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Education defines regular attendance as attending school for greater than 90% of all half-days in Term 2.

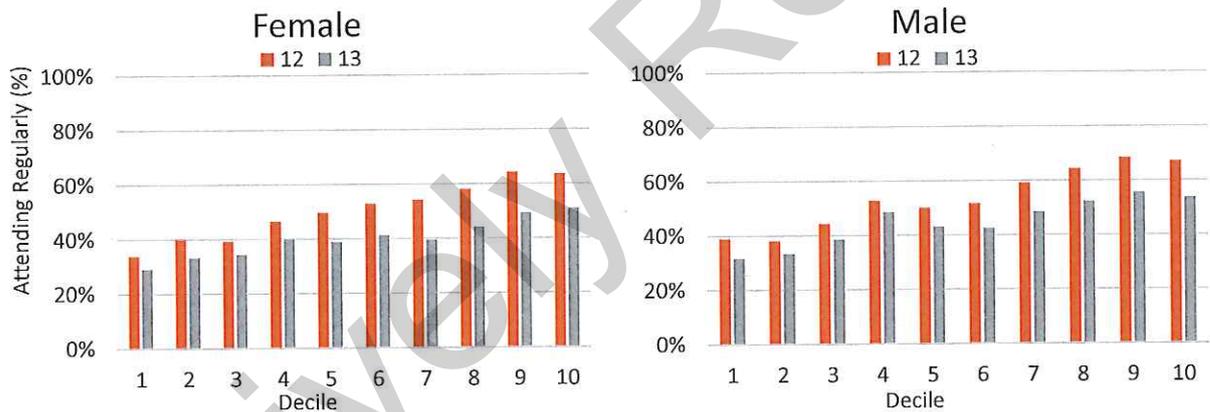
18. In Secondary School years (Y9 to Y13), regular attendance declines notably for both genders, but is most pronounced in Y13 females. In 2018, only 41.7% of Y13 females met the definition for regular attendance. Regular attendance of Y13 females is 5.5 percentage points lower than Y13 males.

**Figure 3:** Students attending school regularly, greater than 90% of Term 2 in 2018, comparing genders.



19. When Y12 and Y13 students are broken down by the deciles of the schools they attend, the proportional decline between the years is most notable in the higher deciles (see Figures 4 & 5).

**Figures 4 & 5:** Regular attendance of female and male students across Years 12 and 13 by school decile.

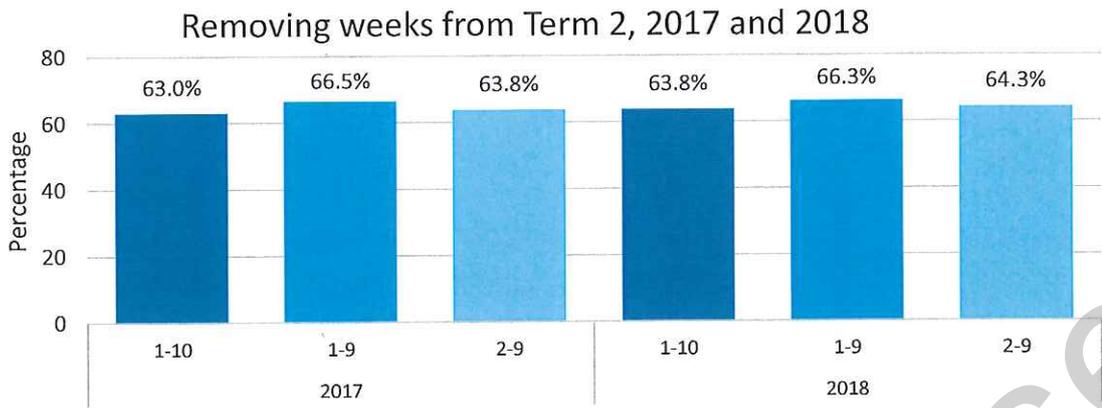


### Attendance declines across Term 2

20. Attendance is not consistent across the ten weeks of Term 2, due to a range of factors. In 2017, illness had a significant impact on Term 2 attendance, contributing around three quarters of the drop in regular attendance from 2016. This was not as clear in 2018, with a late start to the flu season.

21. Alongside irregular factors, like illness, some factors have a regular impact on attendance. This can be seen when week 10 is removed from the Term 2 data and regular attendance increases around three percentage points (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6:** Regular attendance improves when week ten is removed from the Term 2 data.



22. When comparing what happens between weeks 9 and 10 of Term 2 it can be seen that:

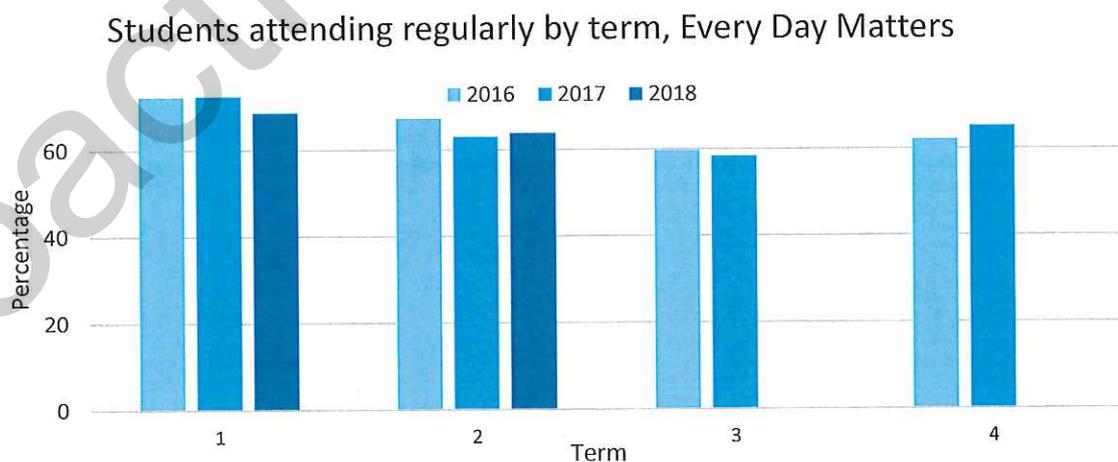
- absences marked as Holidays almost doubles from 1.0% to 1.9%, when the average for the first eight weeks is 0.7%, and
- absences assigned to Truant<sup>10</sup> increases from 2.3% to 2.8%, when the average for the first eight weeks is 1.9%.

#### Every Day Matters: Data for each term across a year

23. Every Day Matters (EDM) is a programme of work where participating schools are provided with monitoring of attendance for each term across a year. Schools are encouraged to participate in EDM as it enables them to monitor specific groups of students and provides a more robust monitoring platform to track the impacts of Ministry initiatives. The aim is to use this data to help raise regular attendance.

24. While a limited dataset, the EDM returns for the last ten terms (Term 1, 2016 to Term 2, 2018) shows how attendance varies across a year (see Figure 7).<sup>11</sup> Within this dataset Term 2 is lower than Term 1, but higher than Term 3, and inconsistent against Term 4.

**Figure 7:** EDM returns for the last ten terms – Term 1, 2016 to Term 2, 2018 – showing variance in attendance across the terms.



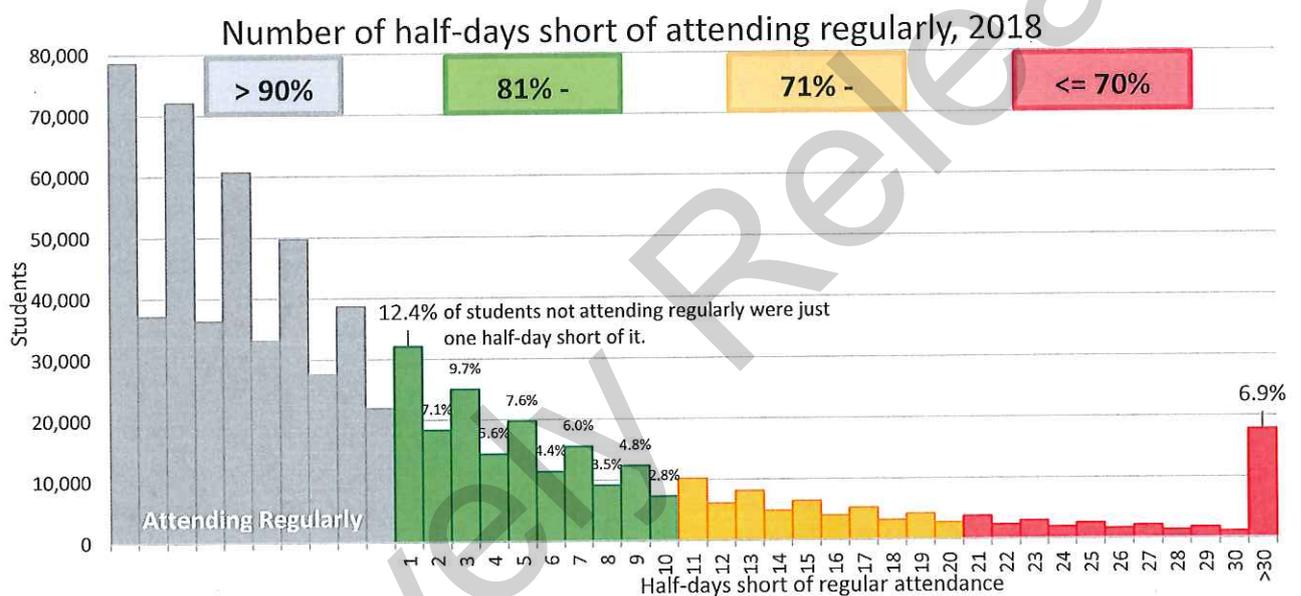
<sup>10</sup> In Unjustified absences, 'Truant' is the default code and is used to record absences when a reason has not been provided.

<sup>11</sup> By the end of 2018, 14.5% of schools had signed up to participate in the EDM programme.

## Student Absence

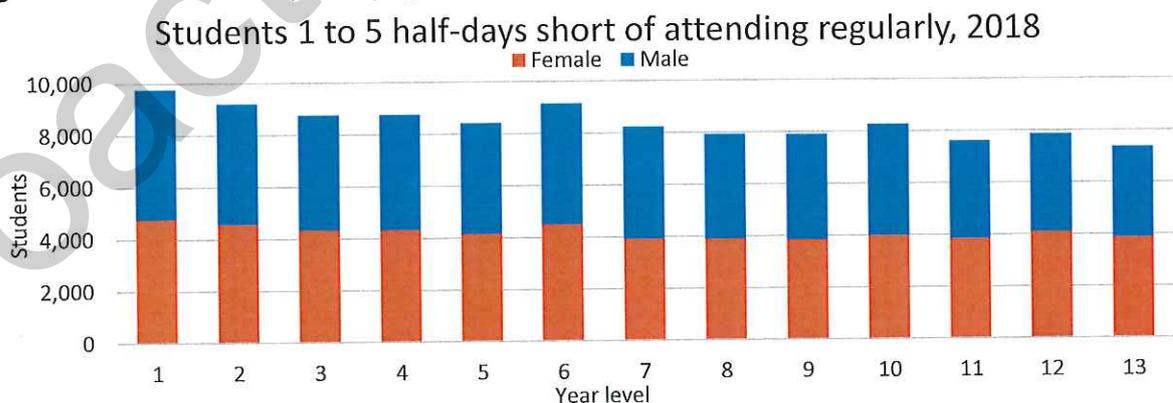
25. Students attending school 90%, or less, of Term 2 are not attending regularly. Across a ten week term, these students will have missed at least five days (or ten half-days). Repeating this in each of the four terms, students will miss at least a month of the almost ten months available to learn.<sup>12</sup>
26. The distribution of students who missed attending school regularly in Term 2 can be seen in the chart below (see Figure 8). The green bars have the bulk of these students, about 64%, who meet the irregular absence criteria, attending school from 81% to 90% of Term 2 (missing ten to 19 half-days).
27. Focusing on students who were short of attending regularly by up to five half-days, they account for 42.3% of absent students. Significantly, those short by half a day made up 12.4% (32,067) of absent students.

**Figure 8:** Grey columns show regular attendance, being at school more than 90% of half days in Term 2.



28. Absent students who were short of attending regularly by up to five half-days in Term 2, were slightly more likely to be primary school aged (Y1 to Y6, see Figure 9).

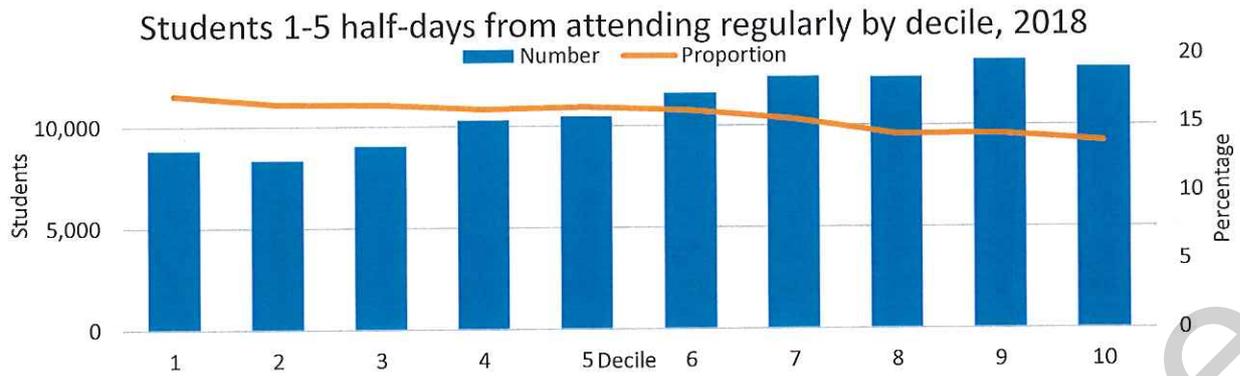
**Figure 9:** Somewhat more primary age students (Y1 to Y6) miss regular attendance by up to five half-days.



29. When students up to five half-days short of attending regularly (meeting the irregular absence criteria) are graphed by their schools' socio-economic status, they are more likely found in Deciles 7, 8, 9, & 10. Each of these deciles has more than 12,000 students who fit this criteria (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10:** Students, by school decile, one to five half-days short of meeting the regular attendance target.

<sup>12</sup> See *Appendix 1: Attendance Matters* to see why the Ministry advocates for regular attendance by students.



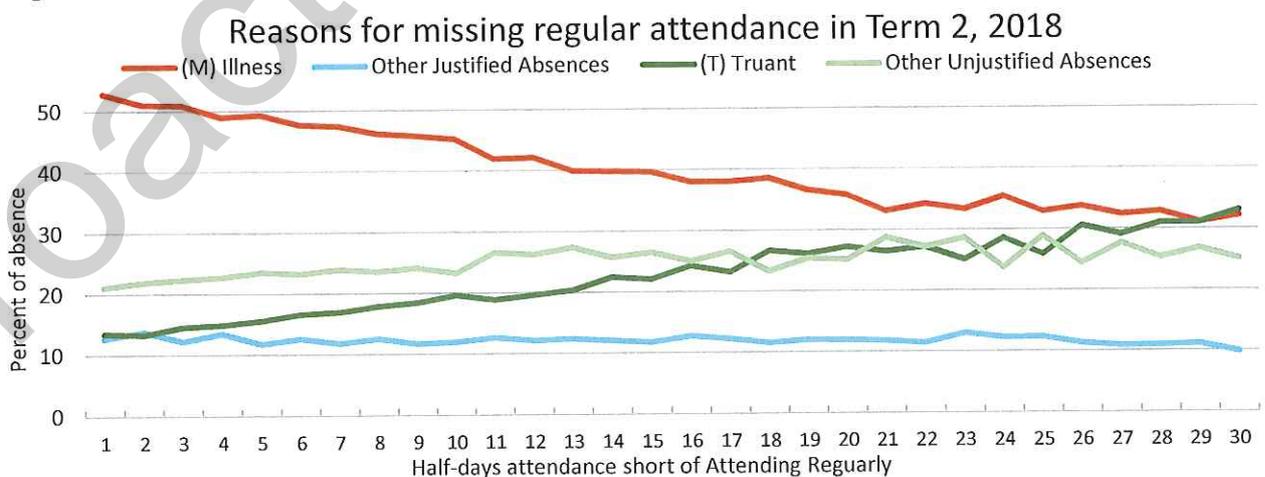
30. By encouraging students with irregular absence to increase their attendance by up to five half-days, regular attendance could be lifted from 63.8% to 79.1% (see Table 1) and evidence suggests that student achievement outcomes could be improved. As noted in Appendix 1: Attendance Matters, Y11 students who improved their attendance from low rates in Y10 had higher rates of attaining NCEA Level 1 than students with poor attendance in each year.

**Table 1:** If students short of regular attendance by up to five half-days improved their attendance, regular attendance could increase up to 79.1% of all students.

Half-days Attended	Half-days Absent	Total Students Attending (%)	Additional Students Attending Regularly
>90%	9	63.8%	
90%	10	68.3%	32,067
89%	11	70.9%	18,312
88%	12	74.4%	25,002
87%	13	76.4%	14,372
86%	14	79.1%	19,719

31. The data suggests an initiative to lift attendance in the short term might be best focused on primary age students (Y1 to Y6) who attend a higher decile school (Decile 7 to Decile 10).
32. When the reasons recorded for absences are broken down by half-days short of regular attendance, it is clear that for irregular absences 'illness' is the predominant coding (one to ten half-days, see Figure 11). As absences increase so does the likelihood they are coded as 'Truant' (absent without a reason).

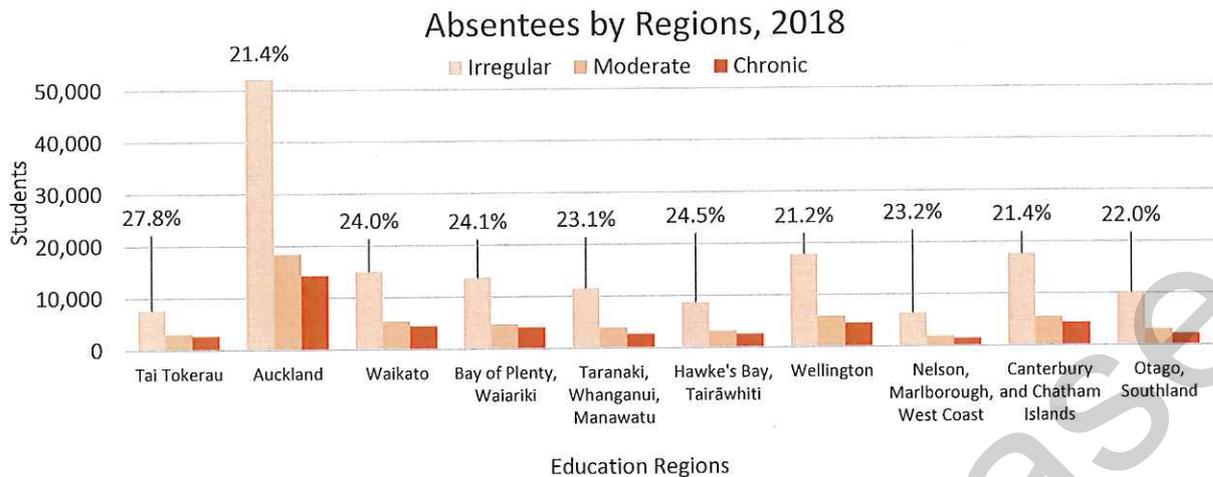
**Figure 11:** The fewer days a student is absent, the more likely it is recorded as an illness.



### Distribution of absentees

33. Charting the four attendance patterns across the regions shows an expected concentration of students in Auckland (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12:** Student absentees across the Education Regions, showing number and proportion of absences.



34. Regionally, Auckland has the highest number of students who meet each of the absence types, while Tai Tokerau has the higher proportions of students.

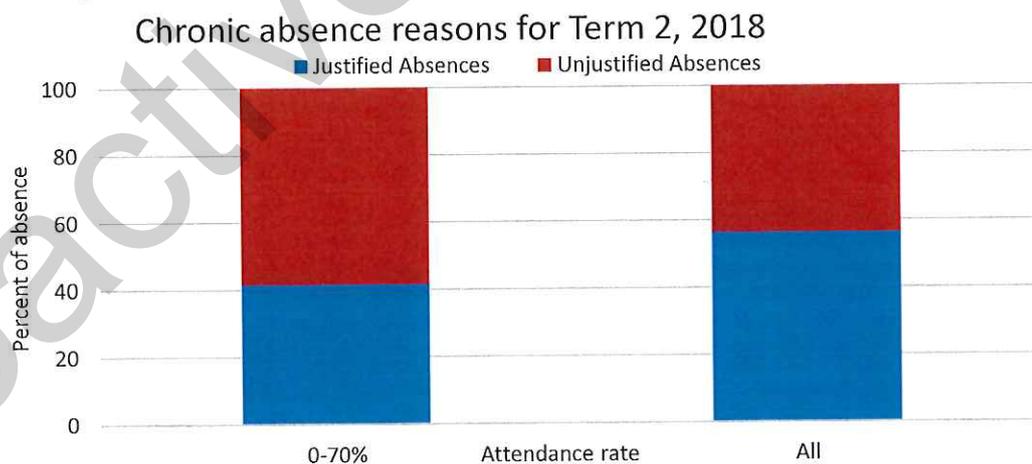
- Chronic absences ... Auckland has 52,161 students, Tai Tokerau with 27.8% of students;
- Moderate absences ... Auckland has 18,366 students, Tai Tokerau with 11.1% of students;
- Irregular absences ... Auckland has 14,270 students, Tai Tokerau with 9.8% of students.

### Chronic absences

35. Students who attended school 70%, or less, of Term 2 missed at least 15 days of the term. Repeated across the year these students are likely to miss over three months of learning. Essentially they will lose at least a term of learning.

36. Chronic absence students were most likely recorded as being away from school for an unjustified absence (see Figure 13). Their rate for 'Truant' was 33.6%, while the rate for all students was 20.5%.

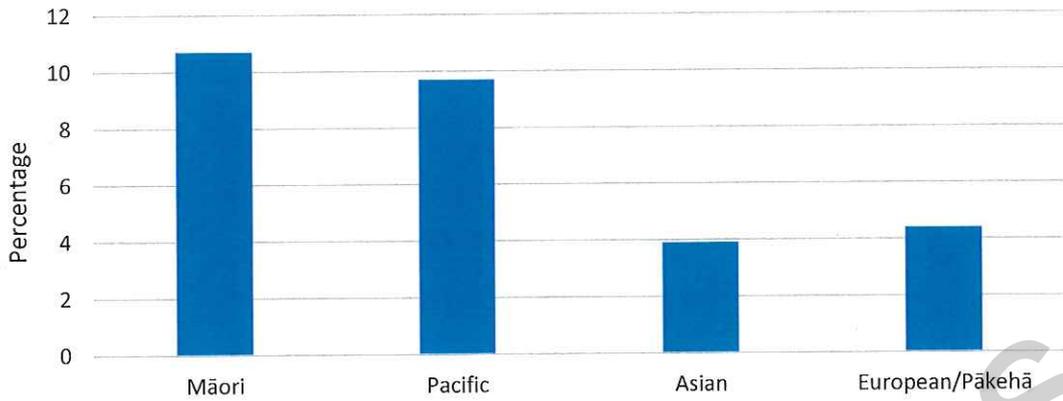
**Figure 13:** Comparison of absence reasons between all absences and chronic absences for Term 2, 2018.



37. Chronic absences are most commonly seen in students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This is reflected in the proportionally higher results seen for Maori (10.7%) and Pacific (9.7%) students (see Figure 14). Further analysis is needed to fully understand why this might be occurring.

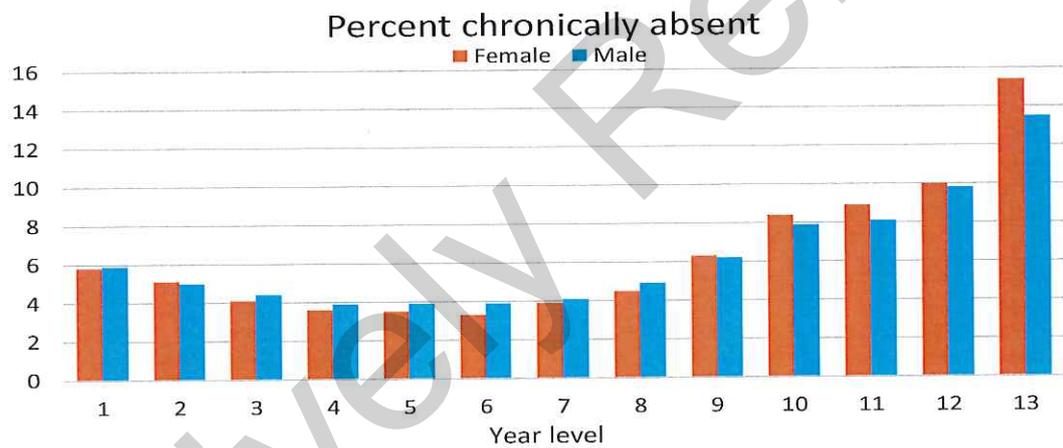
**Figure 14:** Percentage of chronic absence students missing at least 15 days of Term 2, by ethnicity.

Chronic absence by ethnicity, 2018



38. When the gender of students meeting the criteria for chronic absences are graphed across Year levels, primary age students (Y1 to Y8) sit below 6%, while secondary age students rise markedly from 6.2% for Y9 males to 15.4% for Y13 females (see Figure 15).

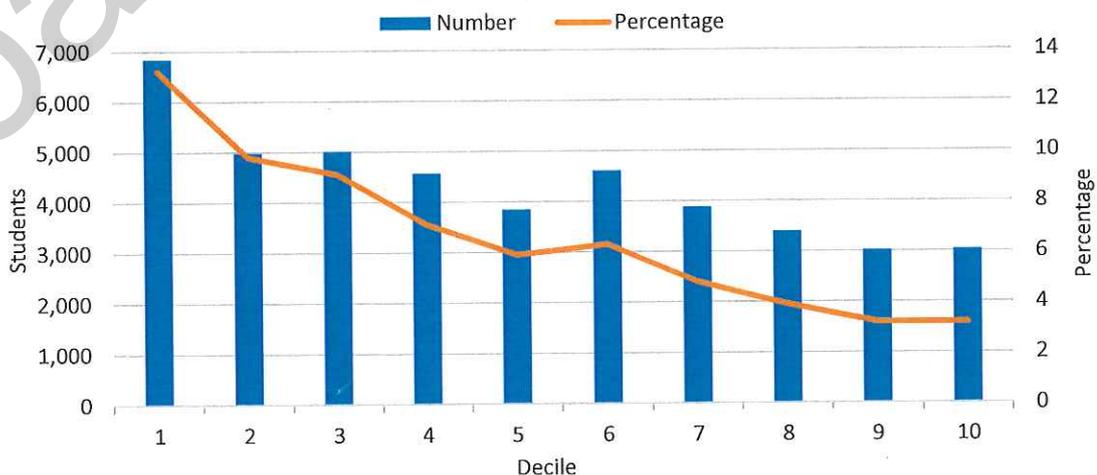
Figure 15: Percent of students meeting the chronic absence criteria across Year levels, peaking in Y13.



39. When chronic absences are broken down by decile, Decile 1 schools have over 1,800 more students than Decile 3 schools, which is the next highest group (see Figure 16). The three lowest deciles are prominent in this attendance pattern.

Figure 16: Students meeting the chronic absence definition, missing at least 15 days of Term 2, by decile.

Chronic absentees by Decile in Term 2, 2018



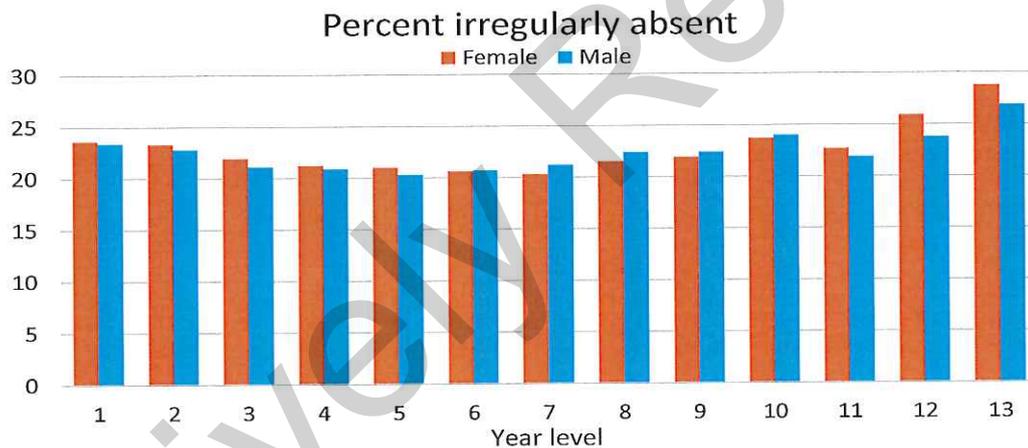
### Moderate absences

- 40. Students who attended school from 71% to 80% of Term 2, will have missed between ten and 14.5 days of the term. Across the year, these students miss at least two months of learning.
- 41. Trends seen in moderate absences reflect those seen in chronic absences, but are less pronounced.

### Irregular absences

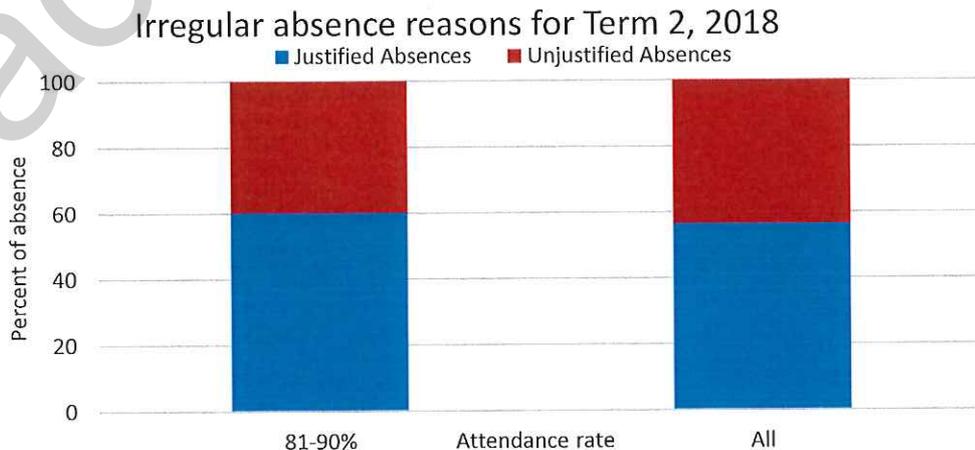
- 42. Students who attended school from 81% to 90% of Term 2, will have missed between five and 9.5 days of the term. Across the year, this could see students miss at least one month of learning.
- 43. When the gender of students meeting the irregular absences criteria are graphed across Year levels, the majority of results sit between 20% and 25% of students in each Year (see Figure 17).
- 44. The only Year levels that exceed 25% of students are Y12 and Y13 females, and Y13 males. The former results are consistent with the general trend of females attending school less in late secondary school years.

**Figure 17:** Year 13 females (28.8%) have the highest portion of irregularly absent students and Year 7 females (20.3%) the least.



- 45. Irregular absence students were most likely recorded as being away from school for a justified absence (see Figure 18). Their rate for 'Illness' was 47.8%, while the rate for all students was 43.2%.

**Figure 18:** Comparison of absence reasons between all absences and irregular absences for Term 2, 2018.



## Attendance Service

46. The Attendance Service was set up to support schools and students with the intent of managing and improving attendance.<sup>13</sup> Its aim is for students to attend school every day, establishing a foundation for engaging in learning and achievement. It aims to support schools to:

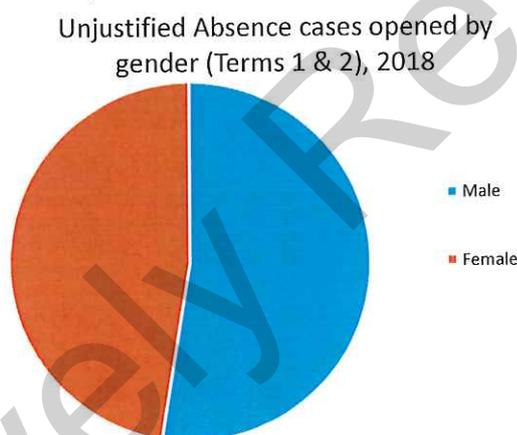
- effectively manage attendance,
- reduce unjustified absence rates and non-enrolment, and
- reduce the time taken to return students to education.

47. In Term 2, 2018, the Attendance Service had 3,850 Unjustified Absence cases opened and closed 3,212 Unjustified Absence cases.

### Almost no difference by gender

48. During Terms 1 & 2, 2018, the Attendance Service saw 7,144 Unjustified Absence cases opened. When broken down by gender, 52.6% were for males and 47.4% for females (see Figure 19).

**Figure 19:** Unjustified Absence cases opened in Terms 1 & 2 were almost equally split between genders.

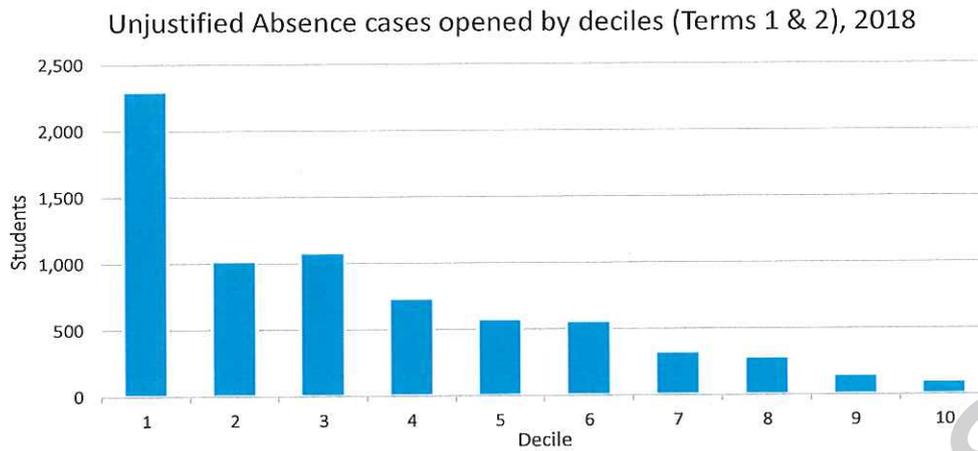


### Over representation in lower socio-economic schools

49. Of open Unjustified Absence cases in Terms 1 & 2, 2018, almost two thirds (61.6%) related to students whose last school was either in Decile 1, 2, or 3 (see Figure 20). This is more pronounced than in general absenteeism.

**Figure 20:** Opened Unjustified Absence cases in Terms 1 & 2, 2018, are over represented in the first three deciles with 61.6% of total cases.

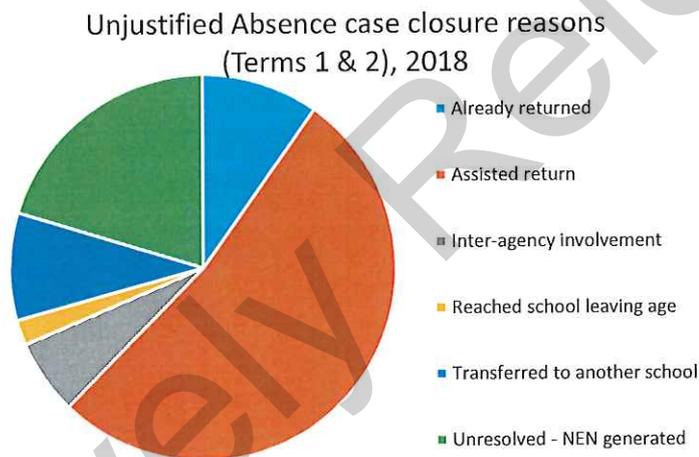
<sup>13</sup> An integrated business group, Attendance Service was formed in 2012 by combining the Non-Enrolled Truancy Service and the District Truancy Service.



### Closure of Unjustified Absence cases

50. For Unjustified Absence cases closed in Terms 1 & 2 in 2018, over half of them (52.0%) were an assisted return of a student to school by an Attendance Service contractor (see Figure 21).

**Figure 21:** One in five Unjustified Absence cases closed resulted in a Not Enrolled Notification (NEN).



51. The next largest portion of closures was for unresolved incidents, accounting for one in five cases (20.1%). In these instances absences went unresolved for more than 20 days, triggering a Non Enrolled Notification and escalation of the intervention.<sup>14</sup> A student could be the subject of multiple notifications in a term.

52. In Term 2 alone, over 17,700 students (Years 1 to 13) were chronic absentees who missed the Ministry target by 30 half days; meaning they missed at least 20 days of Term 2. But as these days are likely to be non-consecutive and students returned to school, they may not have met the guidelines for lodging an Unjustified Absence referral.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> While the guideline to generate a NEN is 20 days, a school can initiate one earlier if they are convinced a student won't return.

<sup>15</sup> Outlined on the *Absence referrals to the Attendance Service using the Attendance Service Application* webpage, Education Counts.

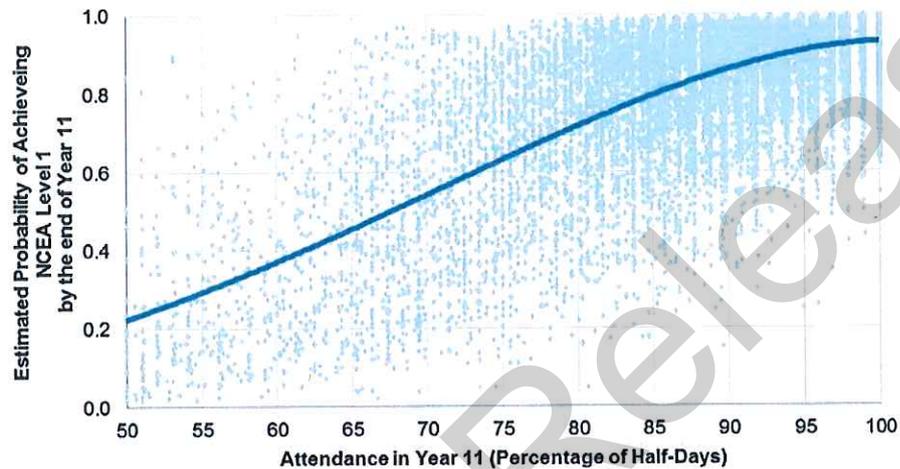
## Appendix 1: Attendance Matters

53. Attendance is important as it supports student success in education. To show this, attainment rates of NCEA Level 1 by Year 11 students were modelled against attendance rates in Term 2.<sup>16</sup>

### Attendance is linked to achievement

54. Attendance in Year 11 had the strongest relationship with NCEA Level 1 attainment, about 90% of students attending every class in Term 2 attained NCEA Level 1. This compares to 60% of students who missed a quarter of the term, or two and a half weeks of learning (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: Probability of Year 11 students in 2016 attaining NCEA Level 1, by attendance in Term 2.



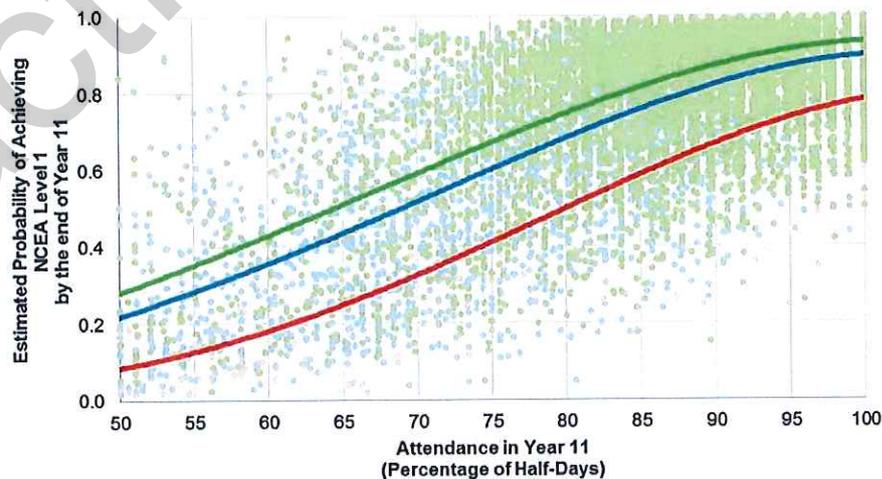
55. While attendance strongly aligns with a high probability of achievement, it does not guaranteed it. This reflects situations where other conditions may influence a student's ability to achieve.

### Improving attendance can improve achievement

56. How regularly students attended school during Year 10 was linked to their attainment of NCEA Level 1 in Year 11; high attendance tended to result in high attainment. Notably, this effect is not rigid.

57. When students with low attendance in Year 10 raised their attendance to high levels in Year 11, they had higher rates of attaining NCEA Level 1 than students with low levels of attendance across both years (see Figure 23). Suggesting addressing barriers to attendance can lead to better outcomes.

Figure 23: Probability of attaining NCEA Level 1, by Term 2 attendance in Year 10 and Year 11.



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

<sup>16</sup> The model included student demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, and school decile (as a socio-economic status proxy).