



Requiring compulsory attendance at school for under sixes

Regular attendance in the first year of school supports the development of positive attitudes to learning and provides a sound foundation for future learning and achievement.

Changes have been made to the Act so that children under the age of six are now required to regularly attend school once they are enrolled. Previously children were only required to regularly attend school when they turned six, regardless of whether or not they had already enrolled.

Parents need to consider whether their child is ready for regular attendance at school before enrolling them. A later transition to school based on a judgment about the child's maturity and readiness for school is likely to support better educational outcomes than an earlier transition in which a child attends school irregularly.

What if a child experiences difficulty transitioning to school?

Individual schools can support students who are having difficulty adjusting to full-time schooling as they see fit. This could include developing a transition plan which is agreed to by the child's parents, the school principal and the Ministry.

Does this mean that children will have to enrol in school as soon as they turn five?

No. Children are not required to be enrolled in school until their sixth birthday. The requirement for regular attendance only applies once a child's parents have enrolled them in school.

Is there any flexibility around the compulsory attendance requirements?

Where a child would benefit from a staggered transition to school, a transition plan can be agreed between the child's parents, the school principal and the Ministry of Education. The child will then be required to attend school in accordance with that plan. Transition plans will set out expected absences during the child's transition into school, providing some flexibility for transitions for children with additional learning needs if needed.

Why is there an exception for some children?

Some children with additional learning support needs attend school part-time in their first year as part of a managed transition process. Research suggests that staggered transitions can be effective for these children, so this option needs to still be available.

Does this change affect four year olds who are enrolled at a school with cohort entry?

Yes. All children who have started school have to attend regularly, unless they have a transition plan.

Will parents face penalties if their children attend school irregularly after they enrol?

As is currently the case, parents of children who do not attend school as required may be fined up to \$30 per school day, not exceeding \$300 for a first offence and \$3000 for subsequent offences.

Where are the compulsory attendance provisions located in the Act?

The compulsory attendance provisions are located in section 25.

When do the changes take effect?

These changes take effect from 3 July 2017.