



# Briefing report

## Education Review Office (ERO): **Missing out: Why Aren't Our Children Going to School?**

Date	25 October 2022
Security Level	N/A
ERO Priority	Medium
ERO Reference	M22-62
Date requested	ERO initiated
Date due	ERO initiated
Proactive release	Recommended

**Addressee      Action sought      Deadline**

**Associate  
Minister of  
Education**

It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** that ERO intends to release the attached report *Missing out: why aren't our children going to school?* on Tuesday 8 November 2022.
- b) **Note** that this report complements the Attendance and Engagement Strategy and will inform the Ministry of Education's work in implementing the strategy.
- c) **Note** that, ERO's evaluation partners will work with schools to collect data and information about processes, practices, and outcomes in place at the school in relation to student attendance.
- d) **Agree** to forward this briefing and the attached report to the Minister for Education, Hon Chris Hipkins, and the Associate Ministers for Education, Hon Kelvin Davis and Hon Aupito William Sio.
- e) **Indicate** if you want to discuss this report with ERO officials prior to its launch.
- f) **Note** this briefing is recommended for proactive release at the time of its publication.



**Attachments:**

**Education Review Office (ERO):  
Missing out: Why Aren't Our  
Children Going to School??**



**Comments:**

### Minister's Office to complete

Noted

Seen

Approved

Referred to:

Date signed by Minister:



Our Ref: M22-62

25 October 2022

**Hon Jan Tinetti**  
**Associate Minister of Education (School Operations)**

## **Missing out: Why Aren't Our Children Going to School?**

### **Purpose**

1. This briefing provides you with a near final draft report and summary from ERO's research on school attendance, attached as Appendix A. We intend to publish this report on Tuesday, 8 November 2022.
2. This study looked at the views that parents and learners have about school, and about attending school across Aotearoa New Zealand, in English-medium schools.

### **Background**

3. Attendance is when learners are at school and in the class they are supposed to be at. If learners miss more than a week of school in a term they have irregular attendance. Learners who miss a week each term will have missed out on more than a year of schooling by the time they are 16.
4. Covid-19 has badly disrupted attendance but even before the pandemic New Zealand had lower attendance than other countries. And alarmingly attendance is falling – twelve percent fewer learners were going to school regularly in 2019 than were in 2015.
5. ERO has been working very closely with the Ministry of Education to understand the drivers of school attendance and how we can change them.

### **Overall findings**

6. ERO looked at the importance parents and learners place on attending school, and barriers to attendance and what motivated learners to attend school. This report sets out key attitudes, behaviours, and motivators. It also looks at how these differ for:
  - Māori and Pacific learners.
  - Older and younger learners.
  - Learners from different socio-economic communities.
  - Learners who do regularly attend school, and those that do not.

**We found that many parents and learners do not understand the importance of regular attendance or the importance of school.**

7. Four in ten parents (41%) are comfortable with their child missing more than a week of school a term, or almost a year of their schooling by the time they are 16. Parents thought that regular attendance was less important in primary school.
8. A third of learners (33 percent) don't think going to school every day is important and nearly a quarter (22 percent) of learners do not think school is that important for their future.

### **Many parents and learners are choosing to prioritise other things**

9. School needs to be a priority if we are to reverse the decline in attendance. We found that:
  - Two-thirds of parents (67%) would keep children home for a family, cultural or special event.
  - A third of parents (35%) would take children out of school for a holiday of a week or more, or to participate in a sporting event (41%).
  - Twelve percent would keep children home for their birthday.
10. Māori (81%) and Pacific (71%) parents are more likely to keep their child out of school to attend family cultural events. Parents of primary aged learners or from rural areas are more likely to support missing school to go on a short holiday.

### **Learners face barriers to going to school**

11. To shift attendance we need to understand and overcome barriers to going to school. The data was collected during the peak of the Omicron outbreak, so illness and injury was by far the most common barrier to school attendance identified by parents and learners. 76% of parents said they had kept their child home in the past term for illness or injury.
12. We also found that:
  - Nearly half of parents would keep their child out of school for mental health challenges (46 percent).
  - More than a third would keep their child out of school to avoid bullying (38 percent).
  - One in ten would keep their child out of school because the child is tired.
13. Learners face barriers to school attendance:
  - For over a third of learners (35 percent) not liking getting up in the morning/tired is a barrier for them attending school and one in five (19 percent) had missed days of school in the last two weeks due to being tired.
  - For nearly one in five learners (17 percent) not liking at least one of their teachers was a barrier for them attending school.
  - Being bullied or picked on at school (10 percent) and not liking people in my class (15 percent) are also barriers for learners to attend school.
14. Some groups face additional barriers:
  - Māori and Pacific parents are more likely to keep their child out of school due to bullying, illness and mental health challenges.

- Older learners (year 11-13) are less engaged in school and more likely to want to miss school because they aren't interested in what is taught.
  - Learners in low decile schools are more likely to think it was important to go to school every day. However, parents of learners in low decile schools face more challenges with transport or their children not having all the equipment/resources they needed to go to school.
  - Learners in high decile schools have higher attendance, but they are less motivated to go to school if they have more enjoyable things to do at home.
15. Disabled learners have multiple barriers to attendance and stay at home more because: they can't participate in an activity; don't have the support or equipment to participate, have physical and mental health challenges, are bullied and faced challenges with transport.

### **What makes learners want to go to school**

16. By understanding what motivators learners to go to school we can be more effective in raising attendance. The top motivators that make learners want to go to school are:
- Getting to see and spend time with friends (80%).
  - Seeing how school will help in their future 54%).
  - Liking at least one of their teachers (41%).
17. We need to tailor our approaches to different learners. We found that:
- Participating in sports and clubs is more motivating for Māori learners, Pacific learners and learners from low decile schools to attend school.
  - Having an adult they trust is more motivating for primary learners, disabled learners, and learners from low decile schools.
  - Pacific learners are more motivated to go to school to make their whānau proud of them
  - Fewer Māori learners and disabled learners are motivated by being able to see the relevance of school to their future.
18. Learners who told us they had regular attendance are more motivated to go to school because they liked or were interested in what was being taught and could see how school was relevant to their future. Learners who told us they had irregular attendance are more motivated to go to school because they would get into trouble if they didn't go.

### **Good practice in schools**

19. You asked us to include in our report how schools and teachers viewed attendance. We talked to 40 schools, who identified similar issues as parents and learners around the barriers to school attendance. The report highlights the ideas that schools had to improve attendance and includes examples of good practice from schools.

### **Recommendations**

20. In response to these findings we are making recommendations for parent, schools and government agencies across five areas:
- Improving understanding of the importance of regular attendance.
  - Improve awareness of how often learners are attending school.

- Make learning more engaging.
- Make school a great place to be.
- Tackle barriers to attendance.

21. The recommendations are set out in Appendix A.

### **Related Ministry of Education work**

22. The areas for change align with the priorities from the Attendance and Engagement Strategy ('the Strategy'):

- Empowering ākonga and their whānau to engage in education.
- Strengthening school and kura engagement practice.
- Strengthening system enablers and supports for engagement.
- Strengthening cross-government collaboration to address barriers to engagement.

23. The research was designed complement the Strategy and inform the Ministry of Education's work in implementing the Strategy. Already underway is a communications campaign that is building the broader societal awareness of the importance of attendance and engagement. This research will help that campaign by.

- Providing a more in-depth picture of whānau and student drivers of attendance.
- Sharing practical ideas on changes parents, schools and communities can make to help improve attendance.

24. Together the work of the Ministry and ERO will provide Ministers and Cabinet with a more complete picture and the two agencies will continue to work closely on this. The Ministry will be briefing you shortly on the Term 2 2022 attendance statistics.

### **Other ERO work**

25. In response to government attendance targets, ERO will evaluate how schools are preparing to meet these targets, and how they collect, analyse, report, and use student attendance data currently. From Term 4 2022, as part of each Te Ara Huarau evaluation cycle, evaluation partners will work with schools to collect data and information about processes, practices, and outcomes in place at the school in relation to student attendance.

### **Publication**

26. ERO intends to publish this report on Tuesday 8 November 2022. We plan to share the report with key groups through:

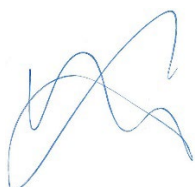
- a. An ERO media release on the morning of publication (see Appendix C).
- b. Publication of the report on the ERO website.
- c. Sending the report to peak bodies that support boards, principals, early childhood education providers, and carer groups.

27. At the start of the 2023 school year, ERO will deliver online webinars on key findings and advice for schools including accessible guides for schools, whānau and learners.

## Recommendations

28. It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** that ERO intends to release the attached report *Missing out: why aren't our children going to school?* on Tuesday 8 November 2022.  **Noted**
- b) **Note** that this report complements the Attendance and Engagement Strategy and will inform the Ministry of Education's work in implementing the strategy.  **Noted**
- c) **Note** that, ERO's evaluation partners will work with schools to collect data and information about processes, practices, and outcomes in place at the school in relation to student attendance.  **Noted**
- d) **Agree** to forward this briefing and the attached report to the Minister for Education, Hon Chris Hipkins, and the Associate Ministers for Education, Hon Kelvin Davis and Hon Aupito William Sio.  **Agreed**  **Disagreed**
- e) **Indicate** if you want to discuss this report with ERO officials prior to its launch.  **Yes**  **No**
- f) **Note** this briefing is recommended for proactive release at the time of its publication.  **Noted**



Nicholas Pole  
**Chief Executive**

NOTED/APPROVED



Jan Tinetti  
**Associate Minister of Education (School Operations)**

04 / 11 / 2022

Appendix A: Summary of Areas for Action  
Appendix B: Report and Summary  
Appendix C: Draft ERO media release

## Appendix A: Areas for Action

### Area 1: Improve understanding of the importance of regular attendance

- Explain the importance of attendance and the impact of non-attendance
- Set clearer expectations about attendance
- When learners miss school, have ways to help them catch back up

### Area 2: Improve awareness of how often learners are attending school

- Understand the attendance of every learner in a school and act early when concerned
- Help parents to better understand their children's attendance
- Empower learners to better understand how their attendance is tracking
- ERO will review schools' attendance monitoring targets

### Area 3: Make learning more engaging

- Understand learners' interests and what at school they find engaging or disengaging
- Review the way in which teaching, and learning is organised and draw on learner perspectives
- Help learners to see how subjects are relevant and valuable to them
- Take early action when learners are disengaging from learning and support them to re-engage and catch up

### Area 4: Make school a great place to be

- Understand how learners find the school environment and identify issues early
- Use proven tools to tackle bullying, racism, and discrimination
- Provide access to mental health support for those learners who need it

### Area 5: Tackle barriers to attendance

- Government agencies to work together to tackle the key barriers to attendance, for example, transport and uniform costs
- Build strong relationships between schools and whānau to identify key barriers to attendance and any action schools can take to overcome them
- Have pathways back into regular attendance for learners who aren't attending regularly