

“School attendance is the most crucial prerequisite for quality education - students cannot learn if they are not at school.”

NZ Ministry of Education, February 2020

Regular School Attendance Increases Likelihood of Academic Success - There is a clear link between school attendance and academic achievement.

In recent weeks the Ministry of Education has shared data about student attendance, much of which makes for concerning reading.

There is a direct correlation between attendance levels and academic achievement. Simply put, students who attend school regularly are far more likely to achieve NCEA qualifications than those whose attendance levels are lower. A recent Ministry of Education report exploring the relationship between attendance and attainment stated:

"School attendance is the most crucial prerequisite for quality education - students cannot learn if they are not at school."

This same report concludes that when attendance is below 95% there is a reduction in levels of achievement. While 95% sounds high, it still means missing half a day of school per fortnight. The New Zealand Ministry of Education uses 90% or higher as its cut-off point for measuring regular attendance. This means that there are students whose level of attendance is having a negative impact on their academic achievement, yet they are considered as regular attendees at school. Interestingly, in a number of other countries 90% attendance at school would be the level that triggers concern, rather than having them considered as regular attendees. At Postgate, we have students who sit in the 70% bracket. Students who attend school 100% of the time achieve, on average, 13 to 15 more credits in NCEA than do students who attend 90% of the time. To put it into another context, 90% attendance means that a student is absent from school for one day per fortnight. If we put that into a workplace context, for most of us, this level of attendance would put our continued employment in jeopardy.

In the same breath, the same can be said for lateness. The importance of teaching of children to be punctual is a life long skill. For our children at school, the notion of arriving early to socialise with others before the school day starts is also a vital key to success of our students; in the classroom and in the playground.

The impacts of lower school attendance are greater for some groups. The report identifies students from disadvantaged backgrounds as having their achievement levels affected to a greater extent by lower attendance. It also finds that the impacts of lower attendance are particularly harmful for Māori and Pasifika students when compared to other groups.

This report may also shed further light on the achievement gap. In New Zealand, there is a growing gap between the achievement of girls and boys, with girls' achievement levels higher than boys in all measures of NCEA. Girls attendance at school is also higher.

While this report considered achievement at NCEA, the impact of absence from school is cumulative. It is not enough simply to improve attendance in any one year, although all attendance at school helps, regular attendance in all years of schooling is essential. NCEA assesses skills and knowledge that are developed throughout a student's education, not simply knowledge and skills learnt in a single year.

Boys with lower attendance rates are more likely to fail to gain an NCEA qualification before leaving school, while boys who are classed as regularly attending school are more likely to achieve the University Entrance qualification than their peers who have lower levels of attendance. Simply put, every day counts.

Whenever Syndicate Teams meet, minutes of these meetings are sent through to all staff. The first section of every meeting is used to discuss student achievement, Target Students and Teacher as Inquiry. A huge frustration for us all is the students who have high absenteeism levels and are a target student. Basically, staff are being asked to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

We can not accelerate achievement when children are having one or two days off a week.

Causes of Attendance Concerns

We appreciate that there are circumstances that make attendance at school impossible - sickness, medical appointments and family bereavements are all examples of this. Absences of this nature are unavoidable and understandable.

However, there are a growing number of situations where parental ease or attitude is having an impact.

We see some students who miss a day of school to attend a single appointment because it was easier for their parent/caregiver, or who are provided with an absence note because the family was late home from an out-of-town function, or who make non-urgent appointments during the school day. All of these absences are avoidable. If your child is hearing a message that your convenience is more important than their education, then they are hearing a very powerful message. Likewise, making every effort to have your child attend school whenever possible, especially when it might inconvenience you, sends a very powerful message to them about the value you place on his education.

Again, we appreciate that there are some family circumstances that make getting to an appointment difficult and we understand that extended time may be required when there are issues with transport etc.

Disrupted sleep, in particular resulting from digital device use until late at night or the early hours of the morning, is increasingly an issue for young men and women and their whānau. Having devices in the bedroom will have a negative impact on the amount and quality of sleep your child has. Once they fall into this pattern it is not uncommon for school attendance to slip and young people pressure their parents to provide an excuse informing the school that they were 'sick' and unable to attend. It does not take long for a pattern to develop that has a negative impact on academic achievement.

As a school, we sit at 93%, with our Year 1's with the highest at school percentage of 94%. We want to have all areas of our school sitting around the 95% mark. We will need the support of everyone at our school to do this. Currently, we have 8 students who have an attendance rate in the 60% bracket; a few with a very valid reason for being away. For the other 6, if this continues until the end of the year, these children will miss over a term and a half of school.

Thank you for your support in working together to helping us lift the achievement levels of all our pupils. We know ongoing success at all levels of education needs a partnership between everyone in our children's lives.