



Attendance Code Guidance

Updated 1 February 2026



Te Tāhuhu o
te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Purpose

Students are required to attend school whenever it is open, and school boards are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure the school's students attend¹.

The Attendance Rules 2024 require schools to use Ministry-approved attendance codes to record student attendance. The attendance codes and guidance are designed to support schools and the Ministry to:

- distinguish between presence, justified absence and unjustified absence
- provide high-level indicators to support monitoring of trends and patterns
- support school attendance activities e.g. tracking the location of students.

Attendance codes are not intended to record causal factors for absences such as transport barriers, bullying, anxiety, birthdays, or teacher practice. It is not practical for codes to record this level of granularity and schools should have information management systems in place so that reasons for absences (justified and unjustified) are recorded and responded to appropriately.

1 [Appendix 1: Links to further information/references](#)

Definitions

Presence

A student is **present** if they;

- P** are physically **present in class**,
- L** arrive **late to class** within school/kura determined thresholds,
- A** are physically present in **alternative provision**,
- V** are engaged in onsite **exams or study**,
- N** are **temporarily out of class** either **at school**,
- D** or in an **appointment**,
- O** or are engaged in **Board approved learning offsite**.

Justified absence

A student is **justifiably absent** if they;

- M** are **ill/unwell**,
- U** have been formally **stood down or suspended**,
- X** are engaged in offsite **study for exams**,
- J** or the school principal has **approved their absence**.

Unjustified absence

A student is **unjustifiably absent** if;

- ?** the reason for the absence is **not yet known**,
- T** they are absent **without parent/caregiver permission**,
- G** they are taking a **holiday during term time**,
- E** or their absence is **explained but not approved** by the principal.

Application

This guidance supports school staff to make decisions about which code to apply when recording daily attendance. Enrolling schools are responsible for recording the daily attendance of its students, including students attending alternative provision and off-site learning.

School policies and procedures support the consistent application of attendance codes.

School boards and principals have discretion on the application of attendance codes. Such as:

L	Late to class	Thresholds and acceptable timeframes for lateness
Q	Board approved offsite learning	Presence at offsite learning approved by the school board.
J	Explained and approved	Absences that are explained and approved by the principal
E	Explained but not approved	Absences that are explained but not approved by the principal

In developing attendance policies schools should **engage with their parent community** and consider:

- **Thresholds for discretion, any limitations of discretion** (including timeframes) and acceptable timeframes e.g. lateness, extended absences due to illness/medical reasons, bereavement
- **Context of the school and environmental considerations** e.g. distance from health care providers, common weather events and other factors that may impact on student attendance and reasons for absence
- **Students' cultural and religious commitments** (see Appendix two for a calendar of Māori events) and development opportunities for students (e.g. obtaining driver licensing)
- **Processes for early communication** wherever possible so that planned absences can be discussed and agreed to in advance
- **Expectations and responses for repeated or extended absences.** Schools are encouraged to engage with parents, community leaders, iwi and agencies when developing policies that could have unintended impacts, for example requiring medical certificates for extended medical/illness related absences.

Kaupapa Māori settings

Board approved decisions about what qualifies as off-site learning will be informed by tikanga Māori and requires a holistic and culturally responsive approach that is rooted in Māori values, practices, and principles. This could include consideration of the wider context of the whānau and ākonga life, including their cultural practices, commitments and obligations that provide valid and relevant off-site learning opportunities; for example, historical, cultural, political, social and religious events which are an integral part of their Māori heritage. This could include expanding the learning environment to include marae, ngahere, moana and events of cultural significance in recognition of the off-site learning that takes place outside of school directed events.

Special circumstances

Part-time students

Schools and parents may agree to part-time attendance for students over the age of 16 years. Students must be recorded as part-time students on ENROL and have their timetable adjusted to align with their plan. Attendance is not recorded for the days/times when the student is not timetabled for school classes.

Dual tuition

Students engaged in dual tuition with Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu | The Correspondence School are required to attend school and attendance must be recorded. An exception to this requirement is when students are receiving dual tuition through the Reintegration Gateway as a reintegration plan is in place. Attendance is recorded for the days/time when the student is present at school. For the days/times that the student is not expected to attend, a **J** - explained and approved code applies.

Wellbeing/transition plans

Students with a wellbeing/transition plan under Section 42 of the Education and Training Act 2020 are required to attend school according to their plan. Attendance is recorded for the days/times when the student is expected to be present at school. For the days/times that the student is not expected to attend, a **J** - explained and approved code applies.

Stand downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions

On the day the decision is made to standdown/suspend a student, their attendance must be recorded as either a **N** - present but out of class or **P** - present, if in class at school. If the student is collected from the school, they are recorded as **J** - explained and approved.

The **U** code '**stood down or suspended**' applies for the period of the standdown or suspension.

Schools should change the student type to **NA** - **not attending** when students are excluded from school and a new enrolment has not yet been arranged. The same applies if a student over 16 years is expelled and arrangements are being made for a new enrolment. Expelled students that do not wish to continue their schooling may be removed from the school roll.

Exchange programmes/schemes

Schools should change the student type to **NA** - **not attending**, when students are on exchange attending a school overseas. Schools must record the attendance of students on exchange attending New Zealand schools.

Extended absence (illness and medical)

Students who are not able to attend school as they are unwell or injured should be recorded as **M** - **illness/medical**. This includes short-term hospital stays and rehabilitation programmes if the student is not admitted to a Regional Health School. If a student is engaged with a Health School, then the **A** - **alternative provision** code applies.

Extended and recurring illness and medical related absences may require consideration of a wellbeing plan or admission to Health School.

Extended absence (overseas)

If a student is **absent overseas for more than 15 consecutive weeks in one year**, then the student should be recorded as **NA** - **not attending** or removed from the school roll and re-enrolled on their return².

Extended absence (unknown cause)

Schools are required to unenroll students if they have been **absent for 20 consecutive school days** unless the principal has been informed that the absence is temporary³. This does not prevent schools from unenrolling students earlier if they have received an ENROL notification that a new school enrolment has been made, or they have been informed the student is not intending to return (e.g. moving overseas).

School closures and emergency situations

If a school is **closed due to a teacher only day or emergency situations** e.g. natural weather event or pandemic, then the day(s) should be removed from student timetables as no attendance is recorded.

2 Note that the re-enrolment of out-of-zone students may be impacted. For more information see: [Education Circular 2013/07 - Ministry of Education](#)

3 [Appendix 1: Links to further information/references](#)

Presence codes

P Present

Student is present in class.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is present in class or engaged with their Te Kura tuition on-site.

L Late to class

Student is late to class.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is present but late to class.

- school policy determines the threshold for lateness and the process for students arriving late to class
- students attend school if they are present for 4 hours or more of the school day ([Section 36](#)).

A Alternative Provision

Student is present in a Ministry approved alternative provision, such as a teen parent unit, alternative education, secondary-tertiary program, regional health school or activity centre.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is present in Ministry approved alternative provision:

- [Alternative Education](#)
- [Secondary Tertiary Programme](#)
- [Activity Centre](#)
- [Teen Parent Unit](#)
- [Regional Health Schools](#) or health camps.

V Unsupervised exam study

Student is present in an examination or unsupervised study where the student is on-site.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a secondary school student is present studying or sitting internal or practice exams at school.

- for external examinations, use code **X** - **exam leave**.

N Present but out of class

Student is present but out of class due to an on-site school activity, internal appointment, temporary removal from class, or time in the sickbay.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is present on-site but out of class.

Examples include:

- school activities and appointments within the school environment e.g. cultural event, pōwhiri, assembly, musical performance, sporting events, such as athletics day, meeting with form teacher, dean, counsellor, coach, nurse, careers, tuition
- out of regular class in the school sickbay or temporarily removed from class
- release from tuition in a particular class or subject on religious or cultural grounds.

Q Board approved offsite learning

Student is present in board-approved off-site learning.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is learning off-site and where the learning is approved by the school board ([Section 53](#)).

Examples include:

- organised school trips e.g. camps, competitions, exhibits.
- board approved cultural, academic or sporting activities e.g. haerenga tapu, noho marae, cultural performances, kapa haka, community events, inter-school events and sports tournaments
- visits and orientation activities e.g. transition visits to another school
- other learning experiences e.g. work experience, civic engagement, cultural practices, commitments and obligations
- emergency situations where the school is temporarily closed, and students are learning from home.

Note: School boards must consider their obligations under [Section 127](#) before approving learning off-site.

D Approved external appointment

Student is present but has an appointment which is unable to be scheduled outside of school hours or student is participating in court proceedings.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is present but is temporarily attending an appointment which is unable to be scheduled outside of school hours.

Examples include appointments with:

- doctor, dentist, medical specialist
- social worker, mentor, psychologist, therapist
- government and non-government agencies, court proceedings
- learning specialists.

Note: Students attend school if they are present for 4 hours or more of the school day ([Section 36](#)). This is intended only for temporary appointments that are unable to be scheduled outside of school hours and excludes personal grooming (e.g. haircuts) and other meetings or appointments.

Justified Absence codes

M Illness/Medical absence

Student is absent due to illness or medical reasons, including mental health.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is unable to attend school due to illness or medical reasons.

Examples include:

- short-term illness, injury, or medical event
- mental health including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder
- other medical, oranga or hauora related absences where students are unable to attend school as they are accessing healthcare, treatment, counselling, therapy, and other services.

Note: A diagnosis or medical certificate is not a requirement for the application of this code.

U Stood down or suspended

Student is absent due to a formal stand down or suspension.

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is unable to attend school as they are stood down or suspended.

- this code applies to the period of the stand-down or suspension, excluding the day it was imposed
- on the day of the standdown, if the student is removed from their regular class, use **N** – **present, but out of class**
- if a student is attending school during a stand down or suspension ([Section 80](#)) then this code does not apply.

Note: This does not apply to excluded students as they should be removed from the timetable (recorded as NA not attending in the school SMS).

X Exam leave

Student is engaged in unsupervised study off-site

USE THIS CODE WHEN a secondary student is:

- not attending school as they are engaged in unsupervised study off-site
- completing an offsite exam.

Note: this code is not counted in Ministry attendance calculations.



Explained and approved

Student is absent due to explained and approved reasons

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is absent due to explained and approved reasons.

Examples include:

- family emergencies, bereavement, bus breakdown, accident, road closure or extreme weather conditions
- student is participating in non-school events e.g. regional/national sports, arts and cultural events that are not board approved offsite learning (**Q code**) however are approved as a justified absence
- student has a wellbeing/transition plan⁴

Note: Principals have discretion to approve absences as justified (Section 45).

School policies should consider the thresholds for discretion and any limitations of discretion (including timeframes) for justified absences.

⁴ See [Appendix 1: Links to further information/references](#).

Unjustified Absence codes

?

Unknown

Temporary code used when the reason for a student's absence is initially unknown

USE THIS CODE AS an initial entry for a student not in class and the reason is unknown.

- this code should be replaced if the student arrives late to class or as the reason for absence becomes available.

T

Truant

Student is absent without explanation or permission from a parent/caregiver

USE THIS CODE WHEN an explanation is not able to be provided or when a student is absent without parent/caregiver permission

Examples include:

- student has chosen to miss a class or has left class without permission
- parent/caregiver is unable to provide a reason for the absence.

G

Holiday during term time

Student is absent due to a holiday being taken

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is absent due to a holiday being taken during term time.

Examples include:

- both domestic and overseas travel.

Note: Holidays during term time are an unjustified absence. Schools should consider thresholds for discretion including any limitations e.g. timeframes for cultural/family events such as funerals taking place overseas.

E Explained but not approved

Student is absent and the reason provided is not approved as a justified absence

USE THIS CODE WHEN a student is absent and the reason provided is not approved as a justified absence by the Principal.

Examples include:

- when an absence has exceeded the agreed timeframes for a justified absence (**Section 45**)
- other absences where approval has not been provided by a principal
- employment during school hours
- celebrating birthdays, visiting relatives, caring for siblings, babysitting
- haircuts, personal grooming, shopping
- non-approved extra-curricular activities, experiences, personal interests, club meets and hobbies
- privately funded programmes and 'day schools', unless board approved (see **G code**).

Appendix 1: **Links to further information/references**

Education and Training Act 2020

Presence

- [Section 43: Exceptions to attendance because of secondary-tertiary programmes and multiple timetable arrangements](#)
- [Section 44: Exemption from attendance because of walking distance to school or some other reason](#)
- [Section 50: Release from tuition on religious or cultural grounds](#)
- [Section 51: Release from tuition for specified parts of health curriculum](#)
- [Section 52: Release from tuition for outside tuition or if good reasons to leave early](#)
- [Section 53: Courses, work experience, and visits outside school premises](#)
- [Section 59: Student attendance at religious observances not compulsory](#)
- [Section 127: Objectives of boards in governing schools](#)

Justified absence

- [Section 45: Exemption of student from attendance for period of no more than 5 days](#)
- [Section 42: Exceptions to attendance because of well-being or transitional plan](#)
- [Section 77: Principals or persons responsible for teaching and learning may preclude students for health reasons](#)

Unjustified absence

- [Section 36: Students of registered schools required to attend whenever schools are open](#)
- [Section 54: Restrictions on employing school-age children](#)

Managing and Supporting students - including health guidance:

- <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/managing-and-supporting-students/managing-student-attendance/student-attendance-guide-for-schools-and-kura>

Attendance Regulations 2024:

- [Education \(School Attendance\) Regulations 2024 \(SL 2024/214\) \(as at 15 January 2026\) - New Zealand Legislation](#)

School Attendance Rules 2026:

- [School Attendance Rules 2026 - 2025-go7119 | New Zealand Gazette](#)

School roll returns:

- [School and kura roll returns - Ministry of Education](#)

Stepped Attendance Response:

- [Stepped attendance response - STAR - Ministry of Education](#)

Attendance Management Plans

- [Attendance Management Plans - Ministry of Education](#)

(Links updated 1 February 2026)

Appendix 2: Events in the Māori calendar

The table below outlines 15 annual / biennial cultural events that occur throughout the year.

Indicative timing	Event	Type
Biennial - Dates vary depending on region	Ahurei	Performing arts (Regional/hapū)
Series of event dates throughout the year - these vary depending on which venue is being visited	Poukai	Kīngitanga events (Regional/hapū)
Late June - early July	Matariki	Commemoration of the Māori New Year (National cultural event)
Late June - early July	Hautapu/umu kohukohu whetu ceremonies	Ceremony celebrated in conjunction with Matariki
Early August (<i>based off 2024 dates</i>)	Toitū te reo	Language and cultural festival
Mid-late August	Koroneihana	Commemoration of the coronation of the Māori Queen/Kīngitanga movement
Early September	Ngā manu kōrero	Speech competition (Secondary school)
Mid-late October	Te Ahurea Tino Rangatiratanga	Performing arts (Secondary School)
Biennial - October/ November	Te Mana kuratahi	Performing arts (Primary school)
January 25th, November 8th	Ratana celebrations	Religious/cultural events
February 6th	Waitangi	National cultural event
Biennial - February/ March	Te Matatini	Performing arts (National)
Biennial - February - May	Kapa haka regional competitions	Performing arts (Regional/hapū)
Late March/April	Polyfest	Performing arts (Secondary School)
Mid-late June	Ngā kapa haka kura tuarua	Performing arts (Secondary School)



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