



# Attendance Code Webinar

## Summary

SEPTEMBER 2025



Te Tāhuhu o  
te Mātauranga  
Ministry of Education

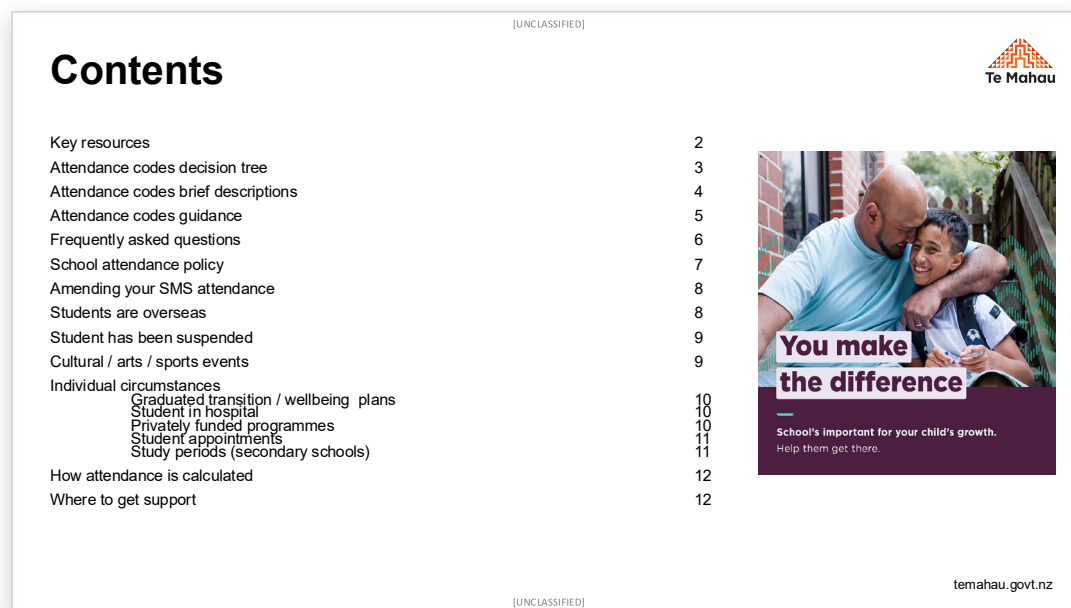
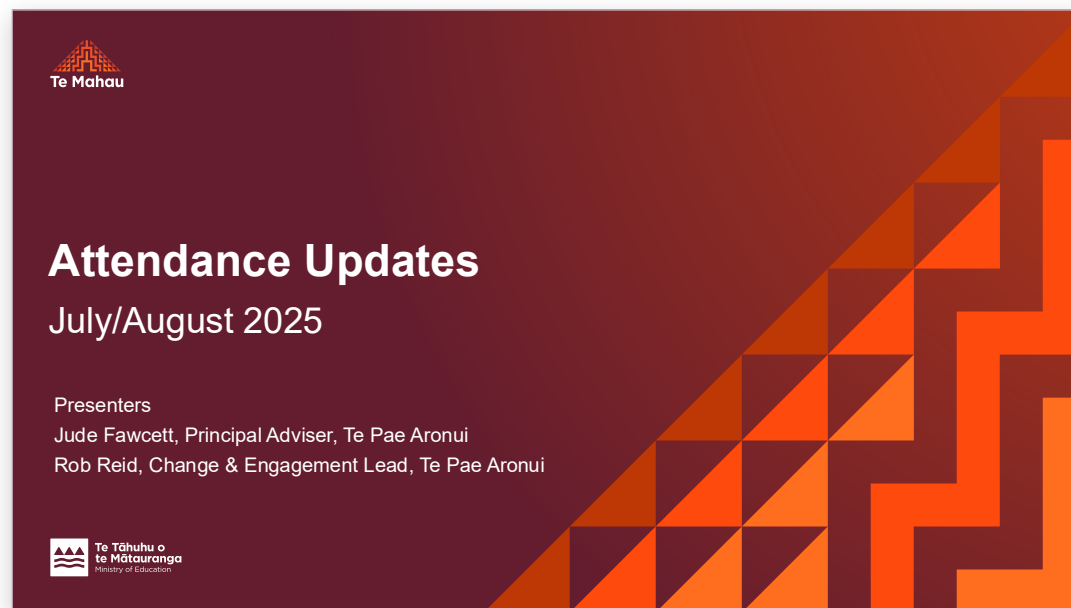
# Background

In late July/early August 2025, a series of Attendance Codes webinars were offered to school leaders and school administrators responsible for recording student attendance. This pack contains copies of the slides presented at the webinar, alongside summary notes and related information.

The webinars were designed to support school leaders and administrators with the use and consistent application of attendance codes, and provided an overview of frequently asked questions received since the refreshed codes were released in Term 1, 2025.

We know that schools work hard to ensure attendance is recorded accurately, and understand how important it is that our records reflect what's really going on with attendance. We hope this pack, along with the other resources it refers to, will help.

Note that this pack was provided in mid-September 2025, and guidance may change or be updated. Please consider this content alongside the latest attendance code resources found [here on the Ministry's website](#).



The key Attendance Codes resources, found [here on the Ministry's website](#), are:

- Attendance codes decision tree
- Attendance codes guidance
- Attendance codes frequently asked questions (updated June 2025)







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## Attendance Codes

Te Mahau

[Attendance codes - Ministry of Education](#)

Read the attendance code decision tree, attendance code guidance and frequently asked questions document for more information.

	Attendance code decision tree	 <a href="#">Download</a>	PDF   98KB
	Attendance guidance	 <a href="#">Download</a>	PDF   460KB
	Attendance codes frequently asked questions	 <a href="#">Download</a>	PDF   330KB

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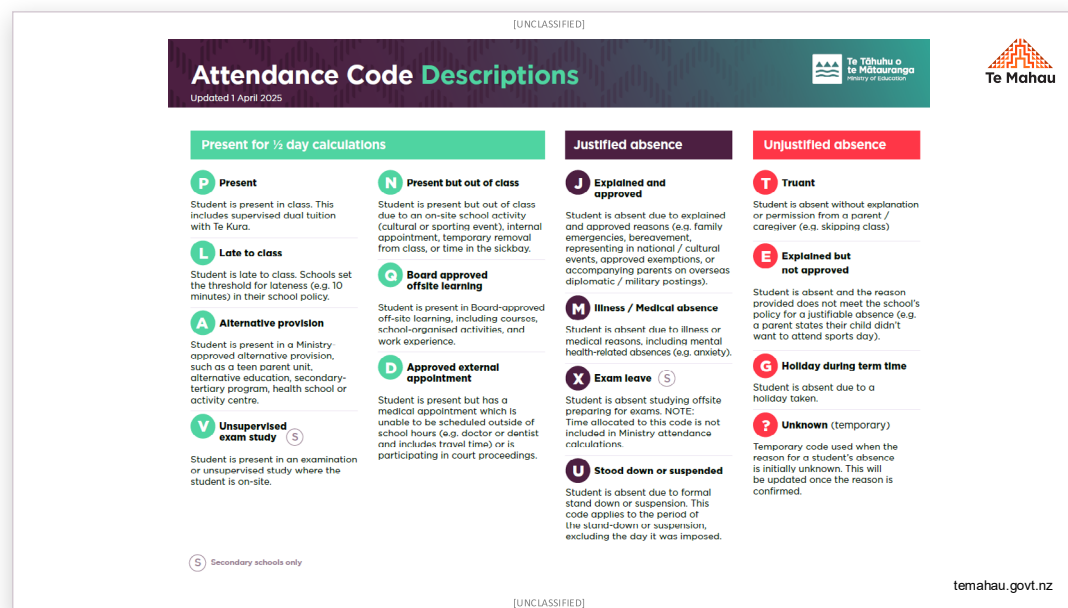
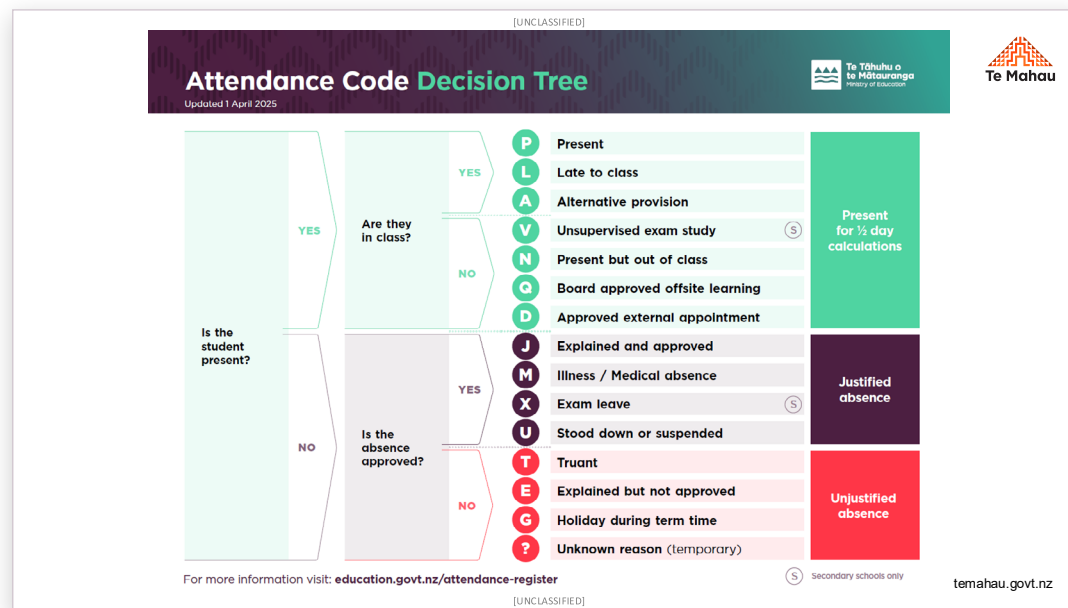
The **Attendance code decision tree** provides a quick reference to the attendance codes and their application.

At the start of 2025, 26 codes were reduced to 15. Some codes were combined, but no codes that previously indicated presence were moved to absence, or vice versa.

Code **X** applies only to secondary schools, and while under review it remains as Exam leave. When used, this is recorded as a justified absence but it is not included in Ministry's attendance calculations. That means, for example, that where the **X** code is used, that absence won't be included in your Every Day Matters (EDM) reports.

**NOTE:** Some SMS providers are not able to remove the **X** code from their own reporting, so you may note a discrepancy between your Every Day Matters (EDM) report and your SMS attendance report if they have included students coded with an **X**.

The second page of the Attendance code tree contains a very brief summary of each of the codes.



Have the **Attendance codes guidance** handy for quick reference. Most queries can be answered by referring to this guidance.

You and your school board have discretion over the application of four codes. These are:

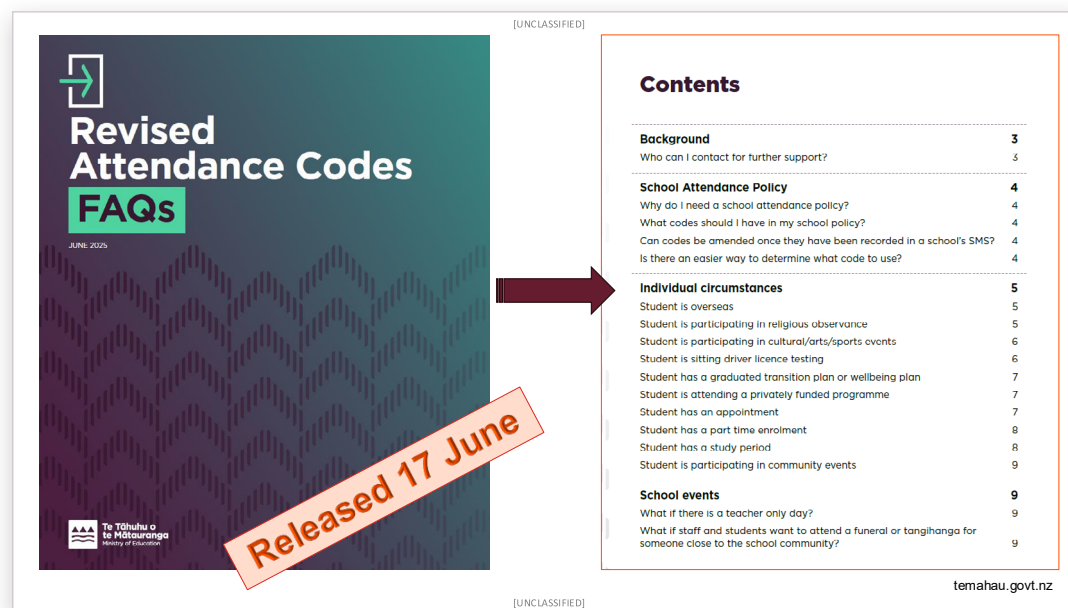
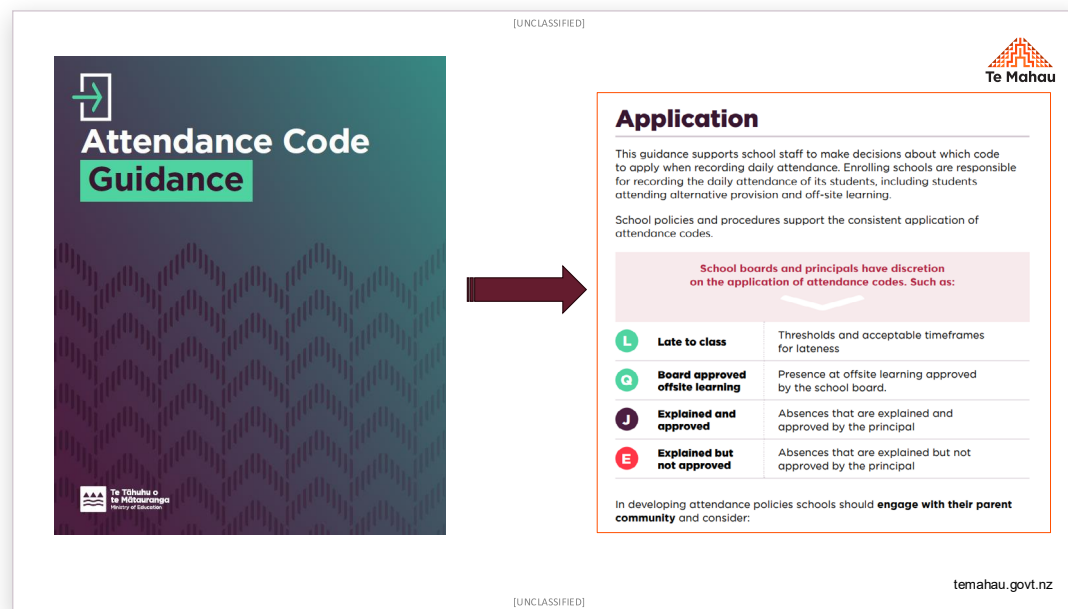
- L** late for class,
- Q** board approved offsite learning,
- J** explained and approved, and
- E** explained, but not approved.

Schools must describe in their school policy how these will be applied.

For example, what will be recorded as late for class at your school – is it five minutes, ten minutes, 15 minutes (or longer)? This will help define how you code a student who turns up, say, 30 minutes late – were they late, were they absent, and was it a justified or unjustified absence for that first hour of the day?

Take care when using **J** (explained and approved). Section 45 of the Training and Education Act 2020 (the Act) says a principal can use **J** for no more than five days. If a student's absence extends beyond five days, a different code (**E** - explained but not approved) will need to be applied.

The **updated frequently asked questions resource** reflects the most common questions we've received in 2025. Our session focuses on some of the major headings.



## School Attendance Policy

Schools must have an attendance policy that reflects the current attendance codes and other attendance requirements and legislation.

You need **one overarching attendance policy**, and clear attendance procedures that describe your systems, the actions you will take, and how you will apply your attendance recording. For example, how you treat lateness to class (and when does 'late' become an absence), how you need to be informed if a student is late, unwell, or offsite for any reason. Your policy and procedures should be communicated with and understood by your students, parents, whānau and school community, and – importantly – by all those in your school responsible for recording attendance.

## School Attendance Policy...Amending your SMS attendance



### Can codes be amended once they have been recorded in a school's SMS?

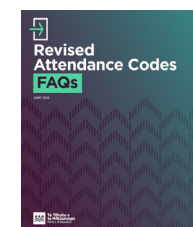
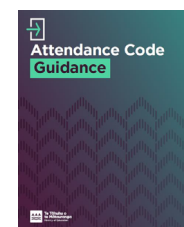
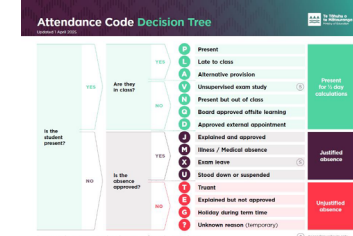
Yes. Attendance codes can be amended, and this should be done as soon as possible after the date of absence or presence. It is important that there are no **?** codes remaining in the SMS. This is not only recorded as an absence but also an error / unknown code.

- A **?** code will be considered an absence on that day if it remains a **?** by 6.00 pm. However, if this is updated to a presence code after the day the **?** was recorded, then the school's daily attendance will be amended. This will also be reflected in the termly attendance Every Day Matters reports.
- If teachers do not record attendance, or if a reliever does not submit attendance for each class, the attendance beside each student's name will be blank. This will revert to a **?** code in the first instance, which will then need amending to a correct code.

### Is there an easier way to determine what code to use?

Use the **Attendance code decision tree** and **Attendance Code Guidance**. If for any reason it is not clear how to record an absence, check the FAQs. As students are required to attend school every day, it is likely **E** should be used for the absence, unless:

- an exemption applies, then **1** may be used
- the student is engaged in learning offsite, which is approved by the board, then **A** may be used.



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## Amending your SMS attendance

Codes can be amended after they've been recorded in the school's SMS, and this should be done as soon as possible if new information about a student's attendance is identified.

The most common number of errors are around the use of the **?** code (**unknown reason-temporary**). This code is a temporary code only and should be changed to the correct code as soon as possible. There should be no **?** codes in your attendance data by the end of each day. Amending **?** to the correct code may have an impact on attendance if the student was present.

The **?** code does not automatically default to **T** (**truant**) or to any other code, and needs to be updated to ensure the correct code is used to reflect the student's reason for non-attendance.



## Individual circumstances

### Students are overseas

Students may be overseas for a number of reasons (holiday, home to their home country for a special religious ceremony, family emergencies, funerals or very unwell family members).

**J (explained and approved)** could be used if the absence is approved – for example the school understands the family situation – but **J** can only be used for up to five days, and then becomes **E**.

It is up to a board to make that decision about the circumstances in which **J** can be used, and then delegate the responsibility to the principal.

**If the student is on holiday** (whether in New Zealand or overseas), use **G (holiday during term time)**. Section 36 of the Act indicates that a parent must ensure that their child attends a registered school on every day it's open, so if a child is being taken on holiday during school time, the legislation is being breached.

**If a student is not attending for a long period of time** (15 weeks or more), the student type can be changed to **NA (not attending)** in the Student Management System. This is not a code – it is student type. The student will be shown as not attending and that absence no longer affects daily or termly attendance data. This student type is temporary.

### Student is overseas

#### What if they're overseas due to a family emergency?

If a student is absent due to travel overseas, funeral, visiting sick relatives, religious observance, wedding, planned holiday then the school should use

**G – holiday during term time** unless:

- an exemption applies, then **J** may be used
- the school policy states that the specific reason for absence (e.g. funeral, cultural event) is approved then **J** may be used, or not approved, then **E** may be used.

#### What if they're overseas for a long time?

If a student is absent overseas for an extended period, then no attendance is recorded, and the school should change the student type to **NA** in their SMS. The student's timetable should be removed for the period of time they are overseas.

#### What if they're on an exchange?

If a student is participating in an overseas exchange programme, then no attendance is recorded, and the school should change the student type to **NA** in their SMS. The student's timetable should be removed.

#### What if they are on holiday in New Zealand?

If a student is on a domestic holiday during term time, then the school should also use the **G** code unless:

- the absence is not condoned by the parent, then **T** may be used.

## Suspensions

If a student has been suspended, from the day of suspension until the next board meeting, **U** (stood down or suspended) is used. If the board decides to exclude the student, the student type should be changed to **NA**, the next day.

The student remains on your roll, which fulfils legislation, until they have a new educational pathway or new school to go to, but their exclusion does not impact your attendance data.

If a student is on exchange, the student type should immediately be changed to **NA**.

## Cultural / arts / sports events

These examples are all treated in a relatively similar way, and schools have some discretion they need to consider. Review page 5 of the guidance, particularly around Kaupapa Māori settings.

Also in the guidance, under the **Q** code (page 8), is information covering sporting, marae, Kapa Haka and other events and situations.

Students attending and playing sport for the summer and winter sports tournaments weeks, for example, are marked as **Q**.

If a student is overseas representing New Zealand, this absence requires the school to apply discretion to either **E**, **J** or **Q**. If the student is fully engaged in distance learning while overseas and there is evidence of this occurring, **Q** could be applied.

### Student is participating in cultural/arts/sports events

#### What if they are attending a funeral or tangihanga?

If a student is attending a funeral or tangihanga, then the school should use **E** unless:

- an exemption applies, then **J** may be used
- the board has approved offsite learning then **Q** may be used.<sup>2</sup>

#### What if they are performing/playing/participating in a regional or national event?

If a student is performing/playing/participating in a regional or national event, which is not organised by the school then the school should use **E** unless:

- an exemption applies, then **J** may be used
- The board has approved offsite learning, then **Q** may be used.

#### What if they are overseas?

If a student is participating in an event overseas, then the school should use **E** unless:

- an exemption applies, then **J** may be used
- the board has approved offsite learning, then **Q** may be used.



## Graduated Transition Plans

Graduated Transition Plans apply to primary school new entrants, e.g. a graduated transition plan for a five-year-old, supported by the Ministry's Learning Support team, with a plan to progressively build up to full time.

Use **P** for present at school, use **J** when they're not. But if the student is engaged in board approved offsite learning, **Q** is an option.

For secondary schools there are two examples of well-being plans:

1. **Dual enrolment - well-being reintegration pathway with Te Kura.** If they're on your roll and attending half a day and then they're doing Te Kura for half a day, you could use **A** (**alternative provision**) or apply **Q** as board approved off site learning.
2. **Transition attendance plan (TAP).** This needs to be signed off by a medical professional (not necessarily a doctor). Under a TAP, the student is entitled, for up to six months, to attend an agreed number of days or combination of half days - whatever works best for them and the subjects they're taking. This is part-time attendance, and the attendance code guidance indicates applying **P** (**present**) when the student is present and **J** when they're not.

### Student has a graduated transition plan or wellbeing plan

#### What if the student is not attending their planned days?

If a student is expected to attend but did not arrive, the school must send an absence notification and record the absence unless:

- the student has a flexible plan, where their expected days of attendance are not specified, then **J** may be used
- the student is engaged in board approved offsite learning, then **Q** may be used.

#### What if the student is in hospital?

If a student is in hospital or attending a treatment programme and is unable to attend any of their planned days, the school should use **M** to record all days of the week unless:

- they are enrolled with the Health School, then **A** may be used.

### Student is attending a privately funded programme

#### What if the parent wants their child to attend a 'day school/ forest school/nature school'?

If a student is absent due to attending a 'day school', then the school should use **E**, unless:

- an exemption applies, then **J** may be used
- the student is participating in an agreed programme as part of their IEP, or there is board approval for learning offsite, then **Q** may be used.

Always consider what's best for the student. Could they be linked into the school's Google Classroom when they're not attending? Is it better that they're home in a quiet environment? This might be classed as **Q** rather than **J** if you approve of them working that way.

## Student in hospital.

**M** (illness/medical absence). However, if they're in hospital for longer than a week, the health school looks after these students. Use **A** (alternative provision) if they are enrolled in the Health School.

## One-day privately funded programmes

These programmes are not registered schools and do not receive Ministry funding. They are not endorsed or regulated by the Ministry and operate independently. The Ministry does not hold data on these programmes.

The Ministry recognises that many children and families value one day programmes and the opportunities they provide students for engaging with like-minded peers. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to work closely with their child's school to make sure that attendance aligns with educational goals and curriculum expectations. Schools may choose to use **E** (explained but not approved) or alternatively **Q** (board approved off-site learning). Section 53 of the Act supports the use of **Q** but does not imply schools need to use this code.

## Student has an appointment

### What if a student will be late to school due to an appointment?

If a student has a planned appointment the school should request that this is scheduled outside of school hours. If this is not possible then **L** should be used unless:

- the student arrives later than the school lateness policy, then **E** may be used
- the reason for the appointment is specified in the school policy as an approved external appointment, then **D** may be used.

## Student appointments

Student has an appointment that can't be scheduled outside school hours. This includes medical related appointments, and other urgent appointments.

For secondary schools, a common example is students attending driver's licence test. This might be considered an important skill, a requirement for part time or future work / career, or may be considered part of an education and training programme. They can seldom be scheduled outside school time.

If specified in the school policy, **D** (approved external appointment) can be used, but the student should return to school after the appointment.

Another example is examinations for dance or music. Students can't determine when their dance exams are, so if they arrive at school, go to the exam and then come back, consider if you should use **D**. If the student arrives late with evidence of having been at an exam, either use **L** (late), or **D**. Both are present codes.

If a student is going for an approved appointment (**D**), and they need to travel get there and then don't come back to school, consider using **E** for the remaining time if they've chosen not to come back to school.

If you haven't been notified by the parent, it becomes **T** (truant) because they've chosen their absence for the rest of the day, which is not approved.

## Study periods in secondary schools

Some schools have study periods in the school timetable schedule. Some schools have them as blank, but the senior students know that's their study spell. Students on study periods may be onsite or offsite, and supervised or unsupervised.

Use **V** (unsupervised study) if they're studying onsite. Use **X** if a student is engaged in unsupervised study off-site (or completing an offsite exam).

### Student has a study period

#### What if a student has a study period in their timetable?

If a student has a study period, then the school should use **P** unless:

- the student is studying for an exam, or internal assessments onsite, then **V** may be used
- the student is studying off site without school approval, then **E** or **T** may be used
- the student is studying off site, with school approval then **Q** may be used.

**Note:** If a student has a study period and attended for two hours in the morning that is recorded as a half day present, and if they attend for two hours in the afternoon that is also recorded as a half day present. These four hours contribute to a full day of attendance.

## How attendance is calculated

Attendance is measured in half-days of 120 minutes. For secondary schools this is usually a combination of 60-minute blocks or a combination of this time.

This system helps account for timetables that are weighted more heavily in the morning than in the afternoon. There is no need to alter existing timetables, but it is important to be aware of how different scheduling, such as study periods, may affect attendance records or coding.

Students are considered to have attended school if they are present for four hours or more of the school day (section 36 of the Act) and are required to attend whenever the school is open.

## Summary

Schools should maintain an up-to-date attendance policy that aligns with current codes and legislation, including anticipated changes from 2026. Have one clear policy and procedures for recording and addressing absences or lateness, specifying definitions and notification processes. Ensure these are communicated clearly to students, parents, whānau, staff, and the wider school community.

### If you need advice or support

Check these key resources first:

- **Attendance codes decision tree**
- **Attendance codes guidance**
- **Attendance codes frequently asked questions**

Find them here [on the Ministry's website](#).

## Summary for Attendance Codes

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- Unpack the new resources and documents on the website and ensure they are available for all teachers and administration staff responsible for attendance
  - **Teachers and Kaiako**
  - **Relevant administration staff**
- Ensure that your school's Board has updated attendance policies and procedures to identify and consider:
  - **Thresholds for discretion (or limitations of discretion) when applying codes – such as L for Lateness, J for Explained and approved, E for Explained and not approved, Q for Board approved off-site learning**
  - **Ensure there is only one school attendance policy that covers both the application of attendance codes and the thresholds for Attendance Management Plans (from term one 2026).**
  - **Consistent application of attendance codes for all students by all school staff**
- If your school requires more support with **Attendance Codes** following this hui, please reach out to:
  - **Your Senior Education Advisor**
  - **Email: [attendance.codes@education.govt.nz](mailto:attendance.codes@education.govt.nz)**
  - **Email: [everydaymatters@education.govt.nz](mailto:everydaymatters@education.govt.nz)**
  - **SMS provider (for system support)**

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### If you still have questions, contact:

- **Senior Education Advisors** through your [regional office](#)
- **Email [attendance.codes@education.govt.nz](mailto:attendance.codes@education.govt.nz)**
- **Email [everydaymatters@education.govt.nz](mailto:everydaymatters@education.govt.nz)**  
(for EDM report or data issues. Remember though, that the attendance data in your EDM report is taken directly from the codes you have entered in your SMS)
- **Contact your SMS provider** for system support and SMS queries.



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