



Te Tāhuhu o  
te Mātauranga  
Ministry of Education

# Communicating with parents about attendance

## Information for School Leaders

### Purpose

This document provides school leaders with optional messages for use in communications with parents (including guardians and caregivers) around attendance. The messages are consistent with activities and escalations set out in the **Stepped Attendance Response - STAR**.

### Audience

School leaders, teachers, and school staff with attendance responsibilities.

# About the STAR

The STAR sets expectations for school, student, parent/guardian, Ministry of Education and broader system responses to student absence. It provides a series of activities that should be considered when students meet absence thresholds.

The STAR, and supports for using it, are available on the Ministry of Education's website: [Stepped Attendance Response \(STAR\)](#).

## Communicating with parents at each step

Effective use of the STAR requires regular communications between you and parents, guardians or caregivers. At each step of the STAR there are activities (the bullet points within the boxes) that require you to engage with parents, guardians or caregivers. This document is intended to support you to communicate with parents, guardians or caregivers as part of using the STAR.

## Adapting to your context

You can use, or adapt, the following messages in your communications. The content is entirely optional and can be adapted to suit your school's local context. Ensure the student's absence circumstances are understood before initiating any communication.

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# GOOD ATTENDANCE



## Good chance of success

Less than 5 days absence in a school term

### Message 1: Setting expectations




|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>STAR activities</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear communication to parents about attendance expectations on enrolment, at the start of school year, and each term</li> <li>• Communicate to parents what steps the school will take in the event their child is absent from school</li> <li>• Communicate good attendance habits to students and parents</li> </ul>  |
| <b>School staff member(s) responsible</b> | Principal or school leadership   |
| <b>Format/channel</b>                     | Newsletter or other communication channel with all parents  |
| <b>Audience</b>                           | Parents of whole student population   |
| <b>Message information</b>                | <p>Your school might choose to use this message or similar messaging at the start of the year to set expectations with parents and remind them of their responsibilities.</p> <p>You can reuse or adapt this content for inclusion in other newsletters throughout the year.</p>  |
| <b>Message content</b>                    | <p><b>OUR EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT ATTENDANCE</b></p> <p>Regular attendance at school is important to your child's success and there is a clear connection between going to school regularly and doing well in the classroom. Making sure students attend and engage in learning is a shared responsibility. As a parent, you are responsible for making sure your child attends school every day.</p> <p>If your child is going to be absent for any reason it is essential that you let us know as soon as possible. It is important that you <b>[phone us/send us an email/message us on (app)]</b> to confirm your child's absence and provide us with the reason.</p> <p>We acknowledge that there are genuine reasons students may occasionally be absent. However, without regular attendance your child will struggle to make progress. If your child is absent regularly, or for extended periods, we will reach out to you to discuss the situation.</p> <p>We are committed to supporting your child to attend school. If you're having difficulty getting your child to school, you can ask for support by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• speaking with your child's teacher,</li> <li>• sending us a message on <b>[app]</b>, or</li> <li>• calling us on <b>[xxx]</b> and ask to speak to <b>[xyz]</b></li> </ul> <p>We can work with you to develop a support plan that addresses any barriers to regular attendance.</p> <p>More information on attendance, including your rights and responsibilities as parents or caregivers, is available on the Ministry of Education's webpage: <b>Attendance</b>.</p> |

## Message 2: Student absence (day-to-day)

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>STAR activities</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate with parents about every absence</li> </ul>  |
| <b>School staff member(s) responsible</b> | Administrative staff or attendance lead (if your school has one)                                      |
| <b>Format/channel</b>                     | Phone call, text, email or other message directly to parents/guardian of individual student   |
| <b>Audience</b>                           | Parents of whole student population   |
| <b>Message information</b>                | Schools will already have procedures in place to respond to day-to-day absences (these may be automatically generated by your SMS or other software). These communications may be an opportunity to remind parents of the need to explain all absences as soon as possible. |
| <b>Message content</b>                    | <p>Tēnā koe <b>[parent's name]</b></p> <p><b>[Student's name]</b> was marked absent today.</p> <p>Please get in touch with us as soon as possible to provide a reason.</p> <p>Ngā mihi</p>  |

**TIP:**  
Consider using this template to acknowledge students who have shown improved attendance across all thresholds.

## Message 3: Attendance updates for students

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>STAR activities</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide student with regular updates on their own attendance</li> <li>Communicate good attendance habits to student and parents</li> </ul>   |
| <b>School staff member(s) responsible</b> | Administrative staff, attendance lead (if your school has one) or teacher      |
| <b>Format/channel</b>                     | Through app or in class (individually)  |
| <b>Audience</b>                           | Individual student  |
| <b>Message information</b>                | <p>Format, frequency and content should be tailored to the student's age and individual circumstances.</p> <p>Updates should be simple and easy for students to understand.</p> <p>You can choose to use attendance rate as a percentage or number of days.</p>   |
| <b>Message content</b>                    | <p><b>Attendance update:</b></p> <p>Your attendance information for <b>[Term 3, 2025]</b></p> <p>Goal <b>[90]% attendance</b></p> <p>Your attendance this term <b>[92]% attendance</b></p> <p>Your attendance last term <b>[83]% attendance</b></p> <p>STAR step <b>GOOD ATTENDANCE</b></p> <p><b>[Personal message]</b> Well done <b>[student's name]</b>! You have improved your attendance this term. We love your effort and we can see the improvements in your learning, keep up the good work.</p> |

or

**Attendance update:**




Your attendance information for **[Term 3, 2025]**  
Goal **[50]** days  
Your attendance this term **[46]** days  
Your attendance last term **[40/48]** days  
STAR step **GOOD**

**[Personal message]** Well done **[student's name]**! You have improved your attendance this term. We love your effort and we can see the improvements in your learning, keep up the good work.

**TIP:**

Consider using this template to acknowledge students who have shown improved attendance across all thresholds.

## Message 4: Regular attendance reporting for parents



|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>STAR activities</b>                    | • Report regularly to parents on attendance of their child  |   |
| <b>School staff member(s) responsible</b> | Administrative staff, attendance lead (if your school has one) or teacher   |    |
| <b>Format/channel</b>                     | Email, letter or other message directly to parents  |   |
| <b>Audience</b>                           | Parents/guardian of individual student  |   |
| <b>Message information</b>                | Most schools already report to parents on students' attendance. You might choose to add this into student's regular school report.  |   |
| <b>Message content</b>                    | <p><b>Attendance update:</b></p> <p>Your child's attendance information for <b>[Term 3, 2025]</b><br/>Goal <b>[90]</b>% attendance<br/>Attendance this term <b>[92]</b>% attendance<br/>Attendance last term <b>[83]</b>% attendance<br/>STAR step <b>GOOD ATTENDANCE</b></p> <p><b>[Comment (optional)]</b> I am really pleased to see <b>[student's name]</b> has showed an improvement in their attendance this term. We've loved having them back more regularly, and we're now beginning to see improvements in their learning and progress.</p> |   |
| <b>or</b>                                 | <p><b>Attendance update:</b></p> <p>Your child's attendance information for <b>[Term 3, 2025]</b><br/>Goal <b>[50]</b> days<br/>Attendance this term <b>[46]</b> days<br/>Attendance last term <b>[40/48]</b> days<br/>STAR step <b>GOOD ATTENDANCE</b></p> <p>I am really pleased to see <b>[student's name]</b> has showed an improvement in their attendance this term. We've loved having them back more regularly and we're now beginning to see improvements in their learning and progress.</p>  |   |

# WORRYING ATTENDANCE

## Less chance of success

Up to 10 days absence in a school term

### Message 5: First formal notification



|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>STAR activities</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact parent/guardian to discuss reasons for absence and impact on learning</li> </ul>  |
| <b>School staff member(s) responsible</b> | Teacher or attendance lead (if your school has one)    |
| <b>Format/channel</b>                     | Email, letter or other formal message directly to parents  |
| <b>Audience</b>                           | Parents/guardian of individual student   |
| <b>Message information</b>                | <p>This is an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure parents are aware of their child's attendance rate, and</li> <li>prompt/request a conversation about constructively working towards improved attendance</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Message content</b>                    | <p>Discussion about <b>[student's name]</b>'s attendance</p> <p>Tēna koe <b>[parent's name]</b></p> <p>I'm reaching out to talk about <b>[student's name]</b> attendance this term, they've been absent for <b>[number of days absent]</b> days this term, which means their attendance rate is currently below <b>[80]</b>%.</p> <p>We know that regular attendance plays a big part in helping students feel connected and succeed in their learning. I'd really value the opportunity to talk with you about how things are going and see how we can work together to support <b>[student's name]</b>'s attend more regularly.</p> <p>Please let me know if <b>[date]</b> works or send me an <b>[email/message]</b> to arrange a time.</p> <p>Ngā mihi,</p> <p><b>[Staff member's name and role]</b></p> |

# CONCERNING ATTENDANCE

## Hard to make progress

Up to 15 days absence in a school term

### Message 6: Escalated formal notification


|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>STAR activities</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact parent to escalate concerns</li> </ul>   |
| <b>School staff member(s) responsible</b> | Attendance lead or school leadership    |
| <b>Format/channel</b>                     | Email, letter or other formal message directly to parents   |
| <b>Audience</b>                           | Parents/guardian of individual student  |
| <b>Message information</b>                | <p>This is an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure parents are aware of their child's continued low attendance rate, and</li> <li>request a meeting to discuss barriers to attendance and develop an attendance plan</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Message content</b>                    | <p><b>[Student's full name]</b> – Continued low attendance</p> <p>Tēna koe <b>[parent's name]</b></p> <p>I'm getting in touch to talk about <b>[student's name]</b> attendance. We've noticed they've been absent for <b>[number of days absent]</b> days this term, and their attendance hasn't improved as much as we'd hoped since our last kōrero on <b>[date]</b>.</p> <p>We know that regular attendance helps students feel connected, confident, and successful in their learning. We also understand that there can be challenges, and we're here to work with you to find solutions that support <b>[student's name]</b> to be at school more consistently.</p> <p>Let's meet to create a plan that helps <b>[student's name]</b> get back on track with their learning. I will give you a call [or, Please get in touch with me on <b>[contact details]</b> so we can arrange a time to develop this plan.</p> <p>Ngā mihi,</p> <p><b>[Principal's or deputy/associate principal's name]</b></p> |

# VERY CONCERNING ATTENDANCE

## Very hard to make progress

15 days or more absence in a school term

### Message 7: Warning notice

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>STAR activities</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact parents to inform of escalated response</li> </ul>   |
| <b>School staff member(s) responsible</b> | <p>School leadership</p>   |
| <b>Format/channel</b>                     | Email, letter or other formal message directly to parents   |
| <b>Audience</b>                           | Parents/guardian of individual student  |
| <b>Message information</b>                | <p>This message provides an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure parents are aware of their child's continued low attendance</li> <li>advise parents of the consequences if their child's attendance does not improve (or a reason for absences isn't provided)</li> <li>offer to discuss the situation</li> </ul> <p>You might consider using this if supports offered have not been taken up.</p>  |
| <b>Message content</b>                    | <p><b>Referral / Consideration of Legal action:</b></p> <p>Tēnā koe <b>[parent's name]</b></p> <p>This is to inform you that <b>[student's name]</b> has not had regular attendance at <b>[school name]</b>.</p> <p><b>[give brief details as to absences].</b></p> <p>This letter is to inform you of your legal obligation to ensure that <b>[student's name]</b> attends school whenever it is open and request that <b>[student's name]</b> returns to regular school attendance immediately.</p> <p>School staff have engaged with you on the occasions listed below, to discuss these ongoing absences and attempt to get <b>[student's name]</b> attendance back on track.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>[email/letter, date]</b></li> <li><b>email/letter, date</b></li> <li><b>details of meeting, date</b></li> <li><b>details of meeting, date]</b></li> </ul> |



The school has also involved **[external agencies involved]** to support **[student's name]** to return to regular attendance.

This has not resulted in the improvement of **[student's name]** attendance at school.

Section 36 of the Education and Training Act requires a student to attend the registered school at which they are enrolled whenever it is open, while section 244 provides that a parent of that student commits an offence if they do not attend as required by section 36.

If there are insufficient improvements by **[date]**, the board will consider the appropriate next steps available, which may include a referral to the Ministry of Education to consider prosecution for irregular attendance under section 244 of the Education and Training Act 2020.

Please contact **[school leader name]** as soon as possible with any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely/ Nāku iti nei, nā,

**[sender name and role title]**



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