



Evaluation of the District Truancy Service

August 2009

Final Report

MartinJenkins

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Preface

This report has been prepared for the Ministry of Education by Meenakshi Sankar and Marinka Teague from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Limited).

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank DTS providers, schools, students and their families and other representatives from local and national community networks who have made a significant contribution to this evaluation.

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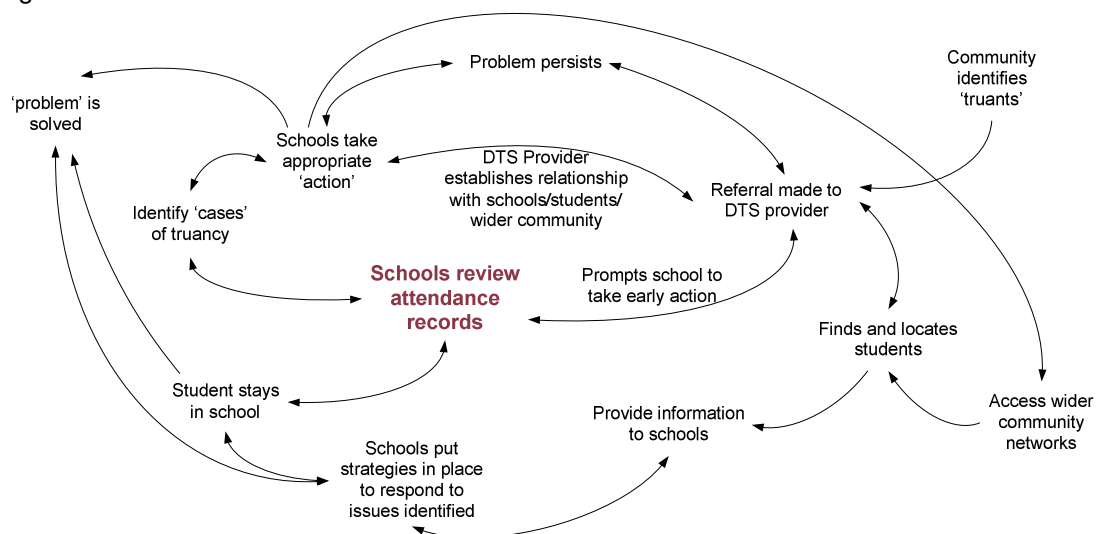
Executive summary

Introduction

MartinJenkins was contracted by the Ministry of Education to undertake the evaluation of District Truancy Services. There is a strong evidence base that suggests that student attendance is one of the most significant variables influencing student achievement. Truancy is also of concern as it is a strong predictor of negative outcomes in later life including violence, delinquency, substance abuse, unemployment and early parenting. The District Truancy Services set up in 1996 is one of a range of programmes that offer the Ministry of Education some leverage to affect change in the truancy landscape. This evaluation was initiated to understand aspects of the current response that works or does not work with a view to informing decisions about the future truancy management services that may be considered by the Ministry.

Evaluation Approach

The District Truancy Service was essentially set up to support schools to keep students in school by improving day-to-day attendance. The DTS assists schools by locating students, returning them to school, providing the school with possible reasons for the student's truancy and referring students to other support agencies where required. The Ministry has 78 contracts with a diverse set of DTS providers. According to the contract, the main function of DTS is to 'act as an extended arm for the school and provide the school with meaningful information about why a student is not at school'. The contracts are outputs oriented and the milestone reporting processes have also been set up to track progress against these outputs. It is the school that holds the responsibility of engaging students and ensuring that students attend regularly. The following figure illustrates how the DTS operates on a day-to-day basis to fulfil its obligations under the contract.

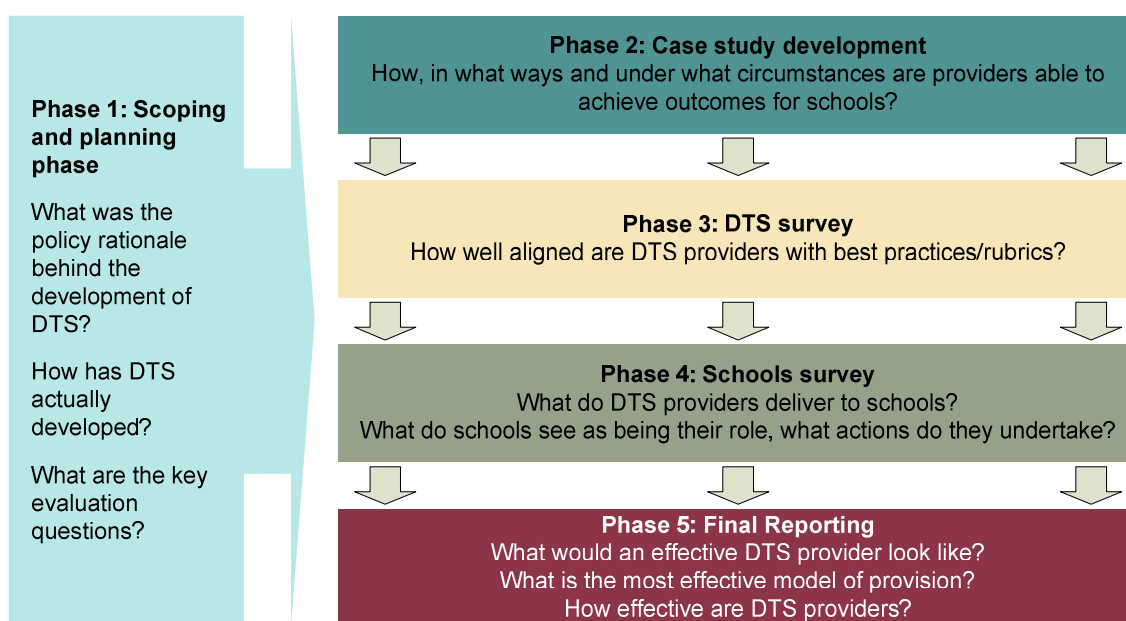


Evaluation objectives and approach

The overarching evaluation questions were:

- What evidence exists to demonstrate that DTS practices support schools to improve the day-to-day attendance of all students, particularly those at-risk of truancy?
- Which DTS practices appear to contribute to strong or promising outputs and which appear to be linked with adequate or low outputs?

A five phased approach was adopted in order to answer the overarching and sub evaluation questions and the objectives of each phase are outlined in the diagram below:



This report is a synthesis of data gathered from the evaluative activities carried out during the entire evaluation and the main findings have been presented in four parts:

- Describing the current state of play with respect to truancy.
- District Truancy Services – how did they operate?
- What works? Dimensions of effective practice.
- So what? Implications for the future of truancy management services.

Findings

Part 1: Describing the current state of play with respect to truancy

- Truancy is of growing concern** – Concern for truancy is growing as there is a perception that the problem has intensified over the years. Principals and providers interviewed observed that they were noticing the problem earlier (more year 9 & 10 students where as in the past it was the older students); there has been an increase in numbers of ‘justified absences’; students are exhibiting more mental health issues which was an impediment to learning; older students misusing the system to gain sanction for truancy and the lack of co-ordination across the different agencies that have a role in monitoring and addressing truancy.
- Lack of clear definitions around truancy** - There were many terms used to describe absenteeism such as truancy, non-attendance, absence and lateness, and more often than not these terms were used interchangeably. The Ministry officially defines truancy as the sum of unjustified and intermittent unjustified absences where ‘unjustified absences’ are those which are not explained or not explained to the satisfaction of the school. On the face of it this definition seems clear. However applying this was difficult as each school determined what a satisfactory explanation for an absence was. Both truancy officers and principals noted that across and within schools, the definition was applied differently.
- Schools’ systems and processes for monitoring attendance is variable** - Schools had a range of systems in place to monitor, collect and store attendance information. Nearly all schools have a student management system¹ (SMS) which contained valuable attendance information; some had eAR (electronic attendance register as an add-on to their SMS); others had a paper-based attendance register; and all schools had ENROL. The evaluation showed that while at a primary school level there was a high degree of consistency in how data is collected and recorded, at the secondary school level there was considerable variation across schools in terms of their processes and how data was recorded. This variation was attributed by principals to the increased complexity of attendance information at a secondary school level requiring the administrative staff to pool together information gathered from many teachers across many short duration classes.
- Analysis of milestone reports suggests that the total number of referrals have gone down since 2008** – The analysis of milestone reports since 2008 suggests that the number of referrals being made to DTS is reducing and this reduction has come from all sources i.e. primary schools, secondary schools, community referrals. This can be interpreted quite differently and could mean that schools did not know that they had a problem; schools did not prioritise truancy; schools managed the ‘light’ cases themselves and only referred the chronic truants (owing to a shift in the contract); DTS were successfully working proactively with schools to manage referrals or that the introduction of programmes like Rock On has provided alternative pathways to escalate the referral bypassing DTS.

¹ There are currently seven approved SMSs being utilised by schools throughout the country.

- **Schools were taking initiative to address problems of non-attendance** – Most principals were aware of their responsibilities in relation to attendance and had committed significant resources to managing truancy in their schools. However in a resource-constrained environment decisions were made about which students to focus attention on to ensure targeted use of resources. The school survey indicated that principals were balancing priorities and believed that the problem of truancy was a shared responsibility and not isolated to the school. This suggests that any meaningful response to address truancy needs to include the wider community. Interestingly, only a little over half of the schools surveyed reported regularly to the Board of Trustees on attendance rates or analysed and linked attendance and achievement data.

Part 2: District truancy services – how did they operate?

The case studies and provider survey indicated that there was wide-spread variability in how providers operated nationally. Most providers took on the DTS contract as they strongly believed that truancy was an important problem that needed to be addressed in the longer-term interests of students and the community. All providers displayed a high degree of concern and wanted to ensure a better future for their people. Most of the resourcing for each DTS comes from the Ministry's contracts – in other words the only input for a DTS is monetary. However there was a strong sense amongst providers and echoed by principals that current funding levels did not reflect the differing workload across the regions nor did it reflect the extent and quality of services provided.

Providers contacted the school in the beginning of each year to promote and market the service. The contact could be either by phone, an email or letter, personal visit to each school in the cluster or a collective meeting of all schools hosted by the provider. The evaluation findings indicated that the level and type of contact and service provided reflected funding, contractual obligations, skills and resources of a provider as indicated by the following:

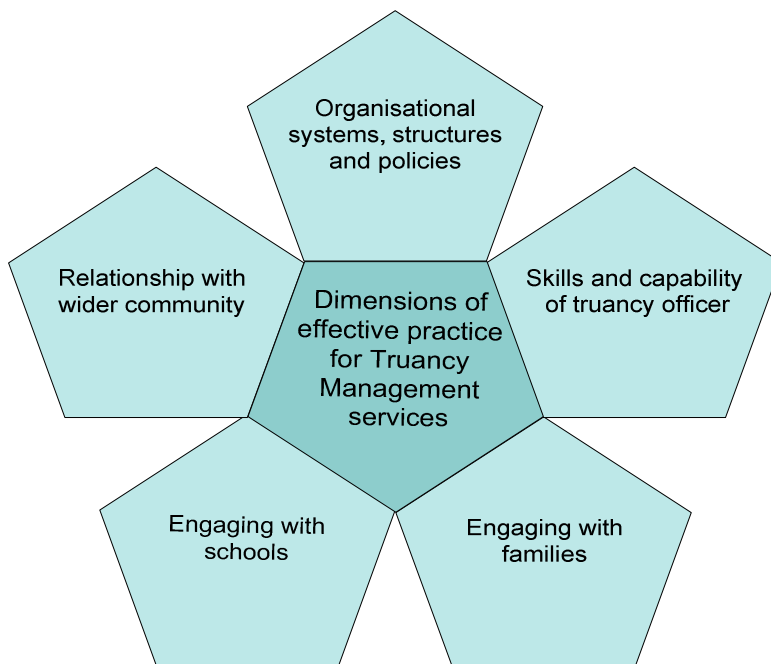
- Majority of providers said that they had put in place organisational systems, structures and processes to ensure that they took a structured approach to planning, prioritisation and responding to referrals. This meant that each provider had developed a customised, fit-for-purpose database to meet their needs and the information was either stored electronically or in a paper based system making it difficult to analyse across in any consistent way.
- The definition of the role of truancy officers was also varied and reflected the philosophy of the contract holder. Majority of truancy officers had no qualifications beyond secondary schooling and this highlighted a strong need for professional development and training. However in the absence of training budgets, providers looked for training opportunities elsewhere and this further contributed to variability in approaches of truancy services.

- Providers and schools perceived the role of truancy service quite widely. Providers in particular felt that they were accountable to the Ministry; schools; students; parents and families of truants and the wider community. Despite the breadth in terms of their accountabilities, providers had an unequivocal focus on the student and did all they could to meet the needs of the student. School principals surveyed indicated a high level of satisfaction with DTS and believed that they worked well with schools and the wider community.

Part 3: What works? Dimensions of effective practice

A key question posed for this evaluation was to identify dimensions of effective practice across the providers with a view to developing the Ministry's knowledge base about what constitutes effective practice in provision of truancy services. Evaluators were tasked with gathering the data to identify strong, adequate and poor providers. The scoping phase revealed that it was challenging to do this owing to the strong output focus of the DTS contracts. If one was to determine effectiveness of providers on the basis of their ability to deliver and meet contract obligations, all providers can be deemed as being successful. Investigating this a bit further revealed that there were other characteristics of effective practice evidenced by providers and these can be broadly categorised into five areas:

- Organisational systems and processes – structures, systems, policies and processes in place to enable the organisation to track and respond to referrals.
- Engagement with schools – ways of working with schools to promote use of the service and achieve successful outcomes for students.
- Relationship with the wider community – ways of working with other agencies to meet needs of their students, families and the school.
- Skills and capability of the truancy officers – qualities and attributes of the officers that enables them to achieve positive outcomes.
- Engagement with families – ways of working with parents so as to support them in their role as parents and support schools and students.

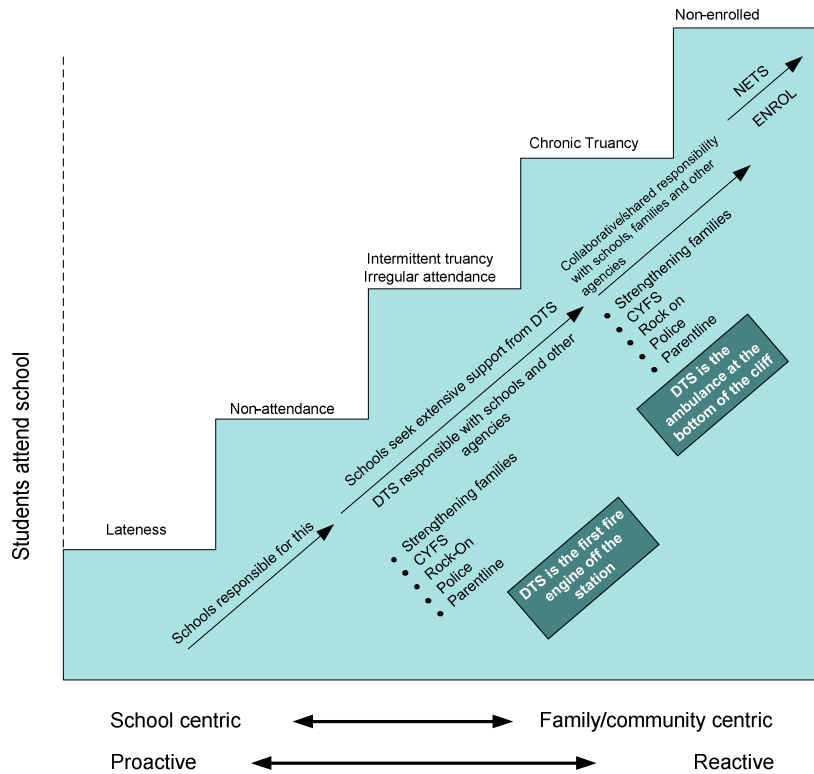


Our assessment of effective practice is based on feedback received from providers, school principals, parents and families of truants, truants and wider community/social service agencies. Their reflections and observations have clearly identified particular practices that appeared to make the difference and support the achievement of outcomes. For instance, school principals acknowledged that practices such as setting of attendance targets or proactively reviewing school attendance systems had focused their attention on the problem and helped identify the problem early. Parents of truants interviewed stated that it was the non-threatening, enabling style and approach of truancy officers that led to their engagement with schools on the issue when all previous attempts by the school failed. Such feedback gathered during the interviews forms the core of our analysis presented in the main report. While there is no evidence to show any causal link between particular practices and outcomes there is sufficient evidence to show that these practices collectively created favourable conditions for outcomes to be achieved.

Part 4: Implications for the future

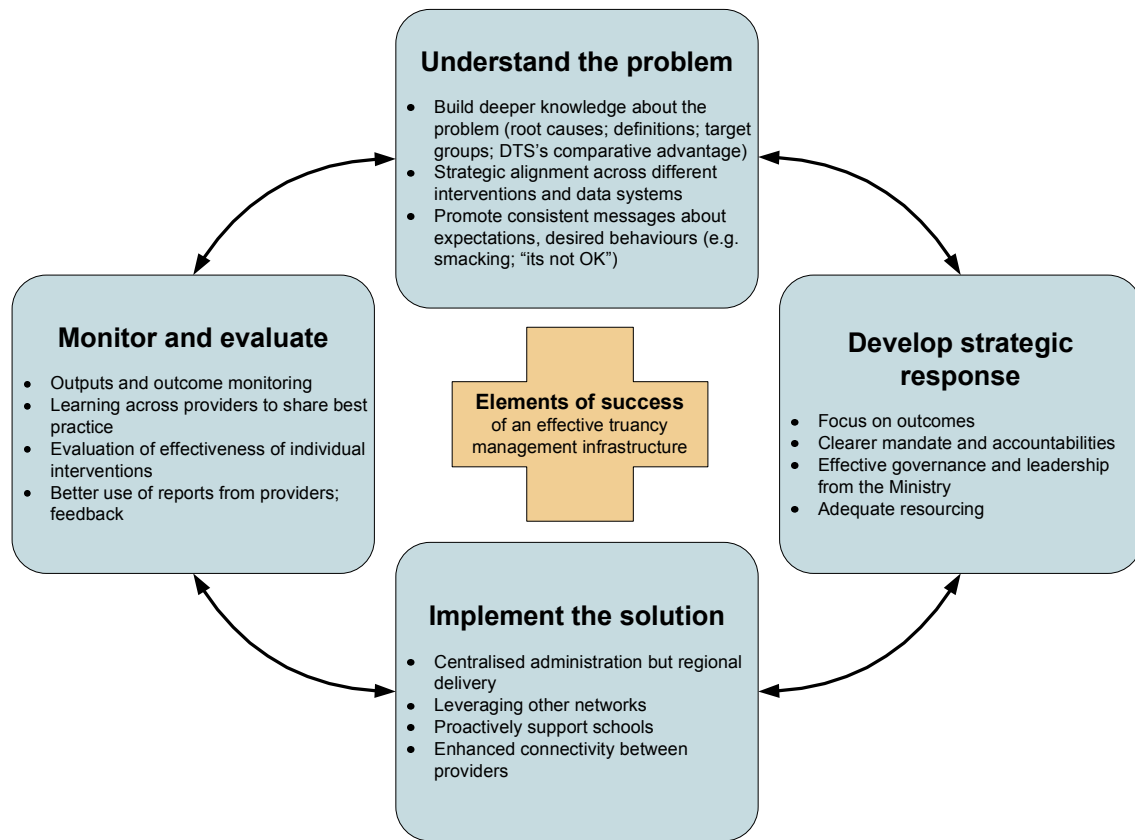
Given the complexity of the problem, any response to address truancy needs to be developed in collaboration with a number of players who operate in this space. Truancy services have established strong community networks over the years and this allows them easy access to information to support their students and their families. However the roles and responsibilities of these agencies often overlap causing confusion and administrative inefficiencies which needs to be addressed. There is also a lack of synergy between various systems and initiatives within the Ministry resulting in some students falling through the cracks. For instance, there is ENROL, eAR, NETs, DTS, and seven different Student Management Systems and these systems did not always speak to one another placing an administrative burden on the school. The following

figure illustrates the truancy continuum and the different players involved and their roles and responsibilities.



Drawing on the principles underpinning effective processes for policy development, the lifecycle of any intervention or a programme of interventions can generally be described by the following four phases: understanding the problem (problem definition; environmental scan), developing a response (strategy or policy initiative), implementing the response (implementation) and reflecting on and learning from the intervention (monitoring and evaluation).

During the course of this evaluation and our interviews with various DTS personnel and other stakeholders, it became apparent that each phase in an intervention’s lifecycle has a number of ‘elements of success’. The following diagram illustrates the high-level elements of success that have to be in place in order for interventions to have a good chance of achieving their intended outcomes.



Based on our findings the most important priorities for the Ministry are:

Understanding the problem

Underpinning the Ministry's strategies and interventions, there needs to be a very clear understanding of what the problems and issues are that need to be addressed and why. Undertaking research to delve into the root causes of truancy will provide an up-to-date understanding of:

- what causes truancy and what are current perceptions of the problem amongst the population
- what factors contribute to truancy
- the groups that are most at risk
- definitions around truancy.

In short, the objective will be to arrive at a clear definition of the problem. An element of good problem definition is to have a good understanding of the target populations that need to be influenced. This includes the priority populations that DTS and the Ministry has already identified. Several interviewees, including principals, providers and parents, commented that different people respond to different triggers and motivators. By implication, actions and

strategies to change the behaviours of one group may not work well for other groups. As a result, effective interventions need to be targeted in nature and adaptable to the different circumstances and motivators of different groups. In turn, this means that environmental scanning needs to be both broad (i.e. covering many different populations) as well as deep (i.e. capable of informing a sophisticated understanding of the characteristics of specific populations).

There is a strong need to describe a relationship between the theory and the evidence to support effective interventions as this will enable resources to be used more effectively and establish stronger alignment between the different initiatives that have similar objectives. There is also need for promoting consistent messages about expectations, desired behaviors (e.g. smacking, “it’s not OK”) so as to build a shared understanding of the problem across the different stakeholders.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, our key recommendations are:

- Initiate research to delve into root causes of truancy to deepen our understanding of the problem.
- Initiate research to explore effective strategies for affecting change amongst particular sub-population groups.
- Creating stronger strategic alignments across the different Ministry initiatives.

Developing a strategic response

Central to any strategy or response is having a clear sense and articulation of the goal or outcome that the organisation or service is working towards. In the context of truancy the evaluation indicates that there is a need for the Ministry to shift the focus from outputs to outcomes. This will ensure that solutions designed to address truancy take a broader view of the problem and are more proactive. Solutions will need to be supported by a range of strategies within the Ministry to ensure that truancy management practices are aligned to these expectations. Therefore any shift to an outcomes approach needs to be supported by clearer mandates and accountabilities.

Effective governance and leadership from the Ministry was also identified as a critical element of success and for strengthening the administrative efficiency of the current system. The level of variability in the current environment is not desirable and needs to be urgently addressed. It is clear that the Ministry has not actively sought to influence or lead the direction and shape of the DTS, resulting in a service that appears ad hoc. Effective governance and management relies on sound plans. Goals need to be clear and realistic. The Ministry needs to reflect on its role within a truancy management infrastructure and build its internal process/capability to manage these processes effectively.

There needs to be durable structures to support truancy management as a lot of the work will involve establishing alignment across Ministry initiatives (e.g. alignment across NETs, ENROL, eAR). This means that groups with representation from relevant portfolios will need to be established and roles and responsibilities need to be clearly assigned with accountabilities to match.

Development of a strategic response needs to be matched with adequate resourcing. While it appears that the service is successfully responding to referrals, the service is being compensated by a number of other stakeholders through formal and informal channels. The nature and role of truancy officers and expectations from truancy services have also widened considerably and current resourcing levels do not reflect this.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, our recommendations to support the development of a strategic response are:

- Strengthen governance and leadership from the Ministry by providing clearer direction and expectations from a truancy management infrastructure.
- Shift the focus from outputs to outcomes and design truancy management services that are geared to deliver on outcomes.
- Review resourcing to allow truancy management services to balance reactive and proactive aspects of their role.
- Establish formal partnerships with other agencies that operate in the truancy area so as to establish cohesion across the different agencies.
- Clearer mandates and accountabilities.

Implementation of the strategic response

A key issue coming through from the interviews relates to the desirability of ceding control to those who are best placed to drive the initiative. Furthermore, and consistent with one of DTS's working principles which is "working with communities to find local solutions to local issues", it is important to allow regions to innovate and not try to force them into centrally determined frameworks and processes. The trade-off for giving more degrees of freedom to providers is the need to strengthen governance and management arrangements at the centre to ensure that effective accountability is maintained, particularly relating to training, guidelines and templates, and other forms of administrative support.

While sound structures, policies and processes can all support effective governance and management, the role that individual providers play will directly impact on how well these work in practice.

The nature of the issues surrounding truancy is such that any meaningful response requires collaboration across a wide range of agencies on a day-to-day basis. This requires truancy management services to maintain an effective array of networks. The effectiveness of these networks is an element of success because it helps identify opportunities to leverage off, or assist, the work of others; and it reduces the risk of truancy management services pursuing initiatives that cut across the work of others.

The range of initiatives and actions taken by current providers to respond to their regional context offers useful lessons for truancy management across the country. Therefore creating opportunities to share across services requires effective management of knowledge and information. Several providers commented that there are opportunities to undertake analysis of what works and use this to inform or drive effective practice across the service nationally. Having mechanisms and processes in place to promote such discussion and dialogue will go a long way in enhancing connections across providers.

Recommendations

Based on above discussion, our recommendations for ensuring successful implementation of truancy management services include:

- Balancing national and regional interests – while sound structures, policies and processes all support effective governance, the role individual providers play will directly impact on how this will work.
- Encouraging and supporting collaborative approaches to implementation.
- Investment in training and professional development of all actors within the truancy management infrastructure so as to promote consistent messages and understandings.
- Creating knowledge networks or hubs to promote sharing of best practice and continuous learning.

Monitor and evaluate

The overarching purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to inform understanding of:

- the level and rate of change in the desired outcome
- whether activities are having the impact intended, and
- what is working well, what is not and why.

Tracking progress towards outcomes is an essential way to inform the ongoing development, refinement and improvement of an intervention. Given the complex nature of the social change environment, the ability to respond to issues and opportunities as they arise is essential in ensuring that risks are minimised and opportunities leveraged.

Given the complex nature of truancy and the myriad of factors that contribute to achieving desired change, it is by implication often difficult to 'unpack' the impact of individual strategies and interventions. However evaluation of a small number of initiatives can contribute to the growing knowledge base about what works to reduce truancy or improve attendance.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, our recommendation for improving the monitoring and evaluation environment requires the Ministry to put in place the following:

- Clarity of desired impact – outputs and outcomes level.
- Meaningful performance measures which combine to tell the performance story.
- A framework within which to evaluate and analyse findings.

Background and context

Truancy, or more precisely unjustified absences from class, is a key policy priority for the current government owing to its adverse effects on educational achievement of students – students not only miss out on class work but face greater risk of dropping out of the school system entirely. A New Zealand study (Hughes, 1999) found student attendance during Year 11 to be one of the most significant variables influencing student achievement in senior secondary school. Longitudinal studies of Christchurch and Dunedin children have also found that truancy is a strong predictor of negative outcomes in later life including violence, delinquency, substance abuse, unemployment and early parenting. Truancy is therefore of utmost concern to the Ministry of Education, and the District Truancy Services set up in 1996 is one of a range of programmes that offer the Ministry some leverage to effect change in the truancy landscape. The evaluation was initiated to understand aspects of the current response that works/does not work with a view to informing decisions about future truancy management services that may be considered by the Ministry.

The District Truancy Service was essentially set up to support schools to keep students in school by improving day-to-day attendance. The DTS assists schools by locating students, returning them to school, providing the school with possible reasons for the student's truancy and referring students to other support agencies where required. The Ministry has 78 contracts with a diverse set of DTS providers. DTS Crown funding is ongoing at \$4.305 million per annum. In Budget 2009, a further \$16 million was allocated towards truancy management over the next four years. Decisions regarding the investment of the additional funding are yet to be made.

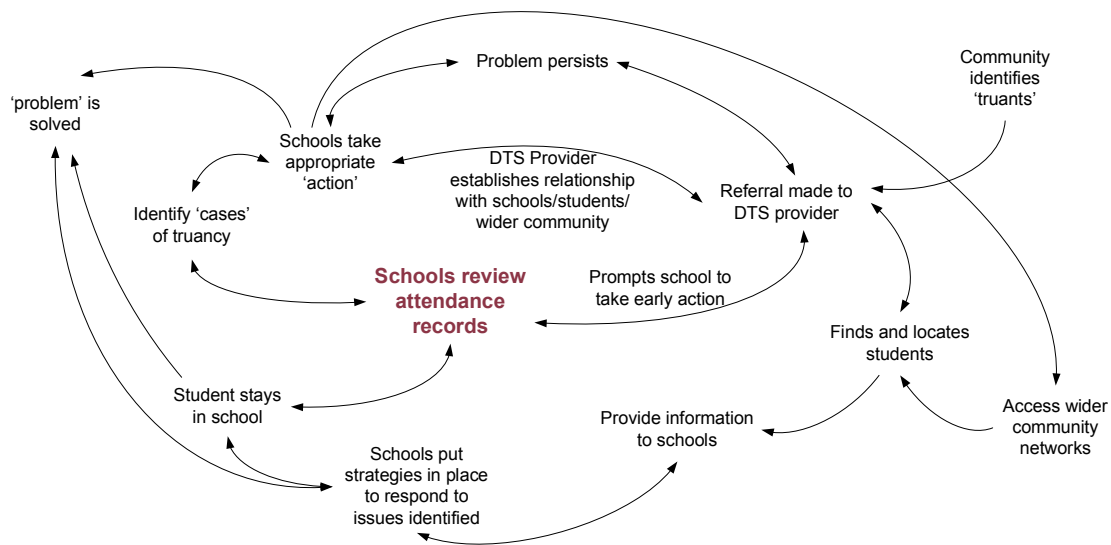
According to the contract the main function of DTS is to 'act as an extended arm for the school and provide the school with meaningful information about why a student is not at school'. In summary each DTS provider is contracted to:

- contact the schools listed in their contracts in the first term to explain the service offered and how they can be reached
- receive and immediately acknowledge all referrals from schools of students who are truant
- return the truant to the school
- inform the school when the student is returned or if they are unable to locate or return the student
- liaise as appropriate with the school, family/whānau and other agencies in order to identify the likely reasons for a student's non-attendance
- maintain accurate records of all referrals
- report to the Ministry any school-age children found, who are not enrolled at a registered school

- work with schools, community groups, business, family/whānau and other agencies to support schools to reduce truancy within their community
- submit four milestone reports (one per term) to the Ministry against these activities.

The contracts are output oriented and the milestone reporting processes have also been set up to track progress against these outputs. It is the school that holds the responsibility for engaging students and ensuring that students attend regularly. Figure 1 illustrates how the DTS operates on a day-to-day basis to fulfil its obligations under the contract:

Figure 1: How DTS works



Defining the role, critical success factors, and responsibilities of those involved in addressing truancy is not easy and as such identifying a natural 'home' for the resolution of truancy is difficult. Whilst schools and parents have legal obligations in regards to attendance and enrolment of children aged 6 – 16 years in school, there are many other organisations that contribute to achieving successful outcomes. Consequently, DTS was initially designed to tap into existing services. In the mid-nineties a more structured approach to truancy was taken in order to ensure that nationwide all schools had access to organisations that provided support to manage truancy. Since then the effectiveness of the truancy programme has been reviewed periodically. In 2007, significant changes were made to the programme resulting in fewer providers based on TLA regions with funding allocated based on population and a range of other need factors.

Below is a broad outline of the major events that have impacted on the development and monitoring of DTS:

- 1989 Tomorrow's Schools including bulk-funding schools with an operational grant to support schools to budget according to their needs to address truancy.
- In the mid-nineties truancy was increasing and this led the Ministry to fund a limited number of existing community providers addressing the issue in their respective region.
- A decision to address truancy at a nationwide level led the Ministry to tender services out so as to ensure all schools have access to a DTS service. Contracts were picked up by some existing and some new organisations and overall up to 140 providers received funding to support schools to address truancy.
- 2004 Education Review Office reported that 'current system not as effective as possible'.
- The 2007 review resulted in a reduced number of contracts in an effort to streamline the system. The Ministry combined funding for providers based on TLA boundaries in combination with the school population being served; some regional exceptions were made.
- 2007 providers given three-year contract and role rationalised to locate, return and inform. Contract holders required to provide monitoring information back to the Ministry.

Alignment with strategic policy intent of *Ka Hikitia*, Māori Education Strategy and Pasifika Education Plan

An evaluation of truancy management service needs to consider the Ministry's strategic context and ensure that educational strategies and initiatives are designed to ensure students stay engaged in learning. The understanding gained will help inform decisions about the future of truancy management in New Zealand.

Ka Hikitia and *Pasifika Education Plan* (2008 - 2012) are two strategic documents that set the direction for achieving successful education outcomes for Māori and Pasifika learners in New Zealand. The educational success of Māori and Pasifika students is critical to Aotearoa New Zealand success and both these plans emphasise the need to provide schools with relevant support and resources to increase their capability to use student attendance data to strengthen student engagement practices in schools. The plans also focus attention on the collective responsibility of parents, students and communities to ensure students are engaged in learning at school. These goals highlight an implicit focus on truancy and the need for interagency, collective response to address truancy and non-attendance in particular.

Methodology and objectives

This section outlines the evaluation objectives, scope and methodology used. A more detailed discussion of the methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

Evaluation objectives and approach

The overarching evaluation questions were:

- What evidence exists to demonstrate that DTS practices support schools to improve the day-to-day attendance of all students, particularly those at risk of truancy?
- Which DTS practices appear to contribute to strong or promising outputs and which appear to be linked with adequate or low outputs?

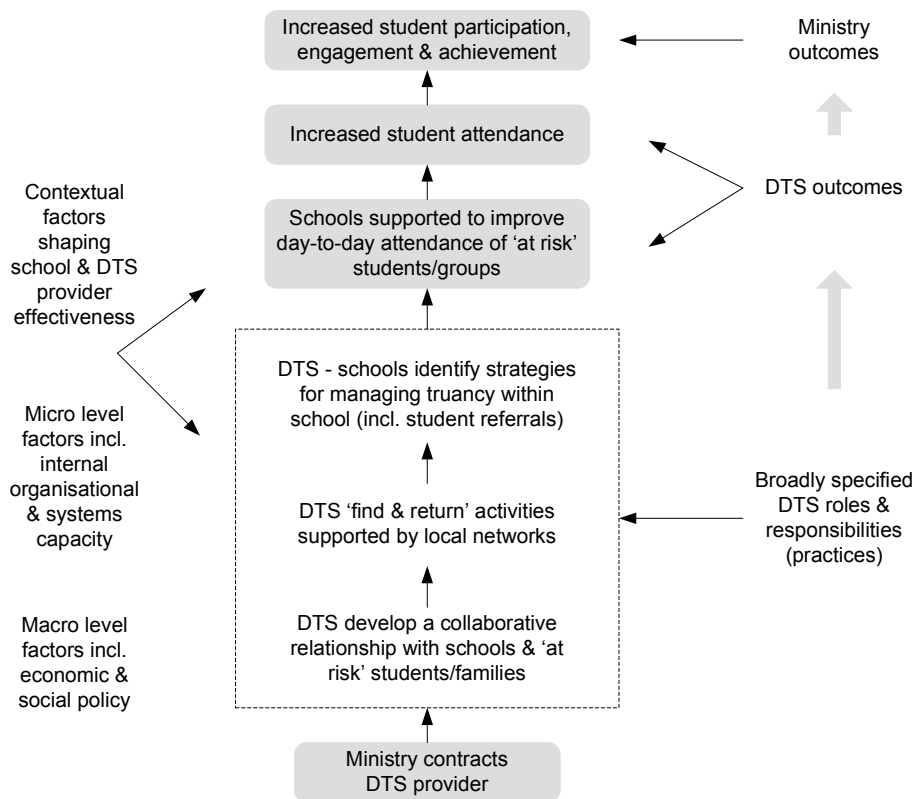
These were broken down into the following sub-evaluation questions:

- How is the DTS positioned within the current context to effect change?
- What systems, processes, policies and resources are in place to effect change?
- What factors influence the effectiveness of DTS practices?
- What could be done to maximise the effectiveness of DTS practices?

From an evaluation perspective, it was important to anchor the outcomes evaluation of DTS in a conceptual framework as this provided the context and a focus for the evaluation inquiry.

Figure 2 illustrates our initial understanding of the DTS theory of action i.e. how DTS contracts are intended to contribute towards outcomes. In the theory of action model DTS is considered to be the *intervention* for change and acts as the *mechanism* through which the Ministry expects to reduce truancy/unjustified absences in schools. By providing support to schools (e.g. locating and returning students, referring students where appropriate, providing insight into the reasons for unjustified absences, etc) DTS providers enable schools to improve students' day-to-day attendance thereby reducing sustained absences from school. The model helped identify the key areas of focus for the outcomes evaluation and surfaced assumptions about how DTS providers could be expected to bring about improvements in students' attendance at school.

Figure 2: A plausible theory of change



Applying this model provided the basis for our approach and rationale for the evaluation.

Scope

The focus of the evaluation was on DTS and the evaluation was expected to generate a fuller understanding about truancy management in New Zealand and the role and contribution of DTS within the broader education system. Understanding the positioning of DTS in this broader system was vital in order to identify effective practices. However it is beyond the scope to look at the practices and effectiveness of other actors or the overall effectiveness of the *system* as a whole on addressing truancy.

During the scoping phase, consideration of value for money was originally identified as a priority for the evaluation. Early interviews with Ministry personnel and a sample of providers highlighted significant challenges in this regard, particularly challenges associated with:

- unpacking the contribution of DTS to reducing truancy from the contribution made by other actors in the broader truancy system. This was difficult as there was considerable variability in the extent and nature of involvement of actors in the broader system at a regional level. There was also little definitive information on which to draw conclusions

about changes in truancy/attendance levels. (The 2009 attendance survey will provide some assistance in this area)

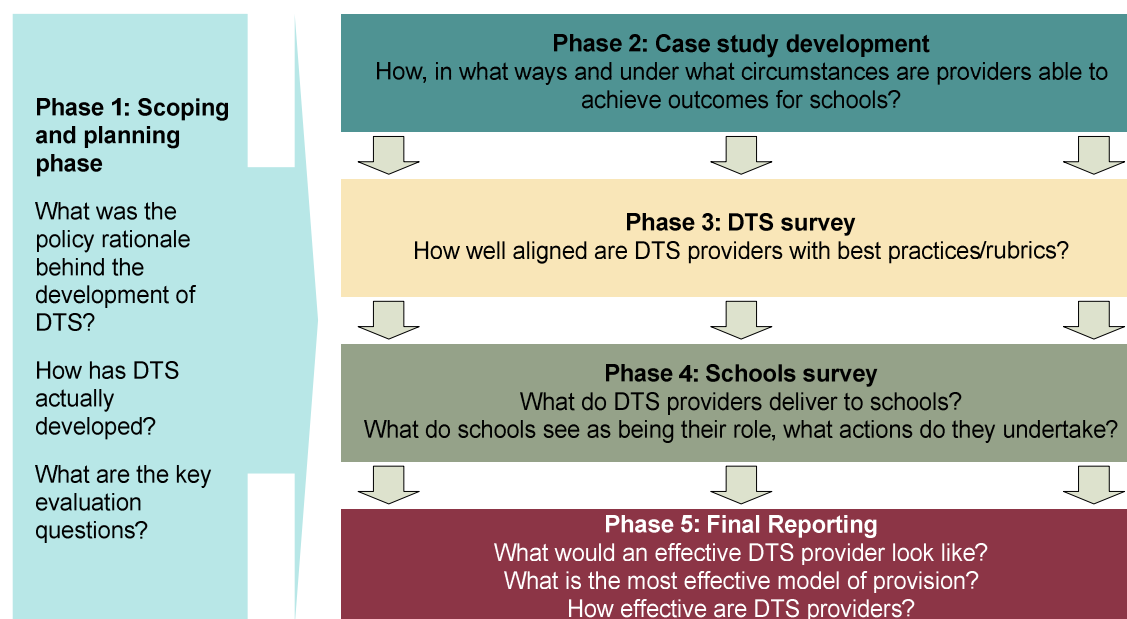
- understanding the mix and level of activities being undertaken by DTS and how these impact on truancy rates. Again this was difficult as there was widespread variability in the size; funding and operational function of how each DTS operates, and limited data that enabled a link between individual actions and desired outcomes
- understanding the full extent and scale of investment in the service, as the service was heavily cross subsidised by other formal and informal mechanisms
- lack of information to help determine the effectiveness of DTS vis-à-vis other potential solutions. Again this was complex and required a systems level focus rather than a DTS specific focus.

In light of these challenges, value for money has not been considered in this evaluation. The evaluation does provide the Ministry with insight into the ‘inputs’ required for an effective service. However in the future there is a need to understand the level, mix and cost effectiveness of the inputs in the context of truancy management in the broader education system.

Methodology

A five phased approach was adopted in order to answer the overarching and sub-evaluation questions. Figure 3 outlines the approach undertaken and shows the broad objective of each phase.

Figure 3: Evaluation Approach



Following is a summary of the objectives and activities undertaken in each phase of the evaluation.

Phase 1: Planning and scoping

The focus for this phase was to develop a shared understanding and agreed approach to the evaluation. This was achieved through:

- Interviews with key Ministry staff at head office (2), within the regional MOE offices (8) and DTS providers (2) to build an understanding of the structures in place to implement the service and expectations from the service.
- Review of internal Ministry documents including the DTS contracts to understand how the service was developed, funded, and the contractual obligations of providers, and a review of the milestone reports to gain an understanding of the extent and quality of the information already available about the service.

As part of this phase a detailed evaluation plan was developed in order to guide the future phases of the research.

Phase 2: Case studies

This qualitative phase of the research was designed in response to an urgent need to develop a rich picture of what good practice looks like and how at an overall systems level a DTS provider may function within the broader truancy management network. The overarching question for this phase of the work was:

‘How, in what ways and under what circumstances are providers able to achieve outcomes for schools?’

This question was investigated by focusing attention on seven providers identified as being *effective* or *high performing* by Regional Ministry offices and the wider stakeholder community. By diving a bit deeper into these provider organisations and talking to schools and the wider community serviced by them, the evaluators were able to build a picture of the ways in which providers were working to reduce truancy. This in turn informed phase 3 of the evaluation i.e. a survey of all DTS providers and, phase 4, a survey of a sample of schools across New Zealand.

The purpose of this phase was two-fold:

- To gain breadth and depth of understanding in relation to how DTS providers operate within their contexts to reduce truancy, and
- To provide a range of measures and an understanding of the terminology used by DTS providers to inform the development of the two quantitative surveys.

A 'case' was defined as the DTS provider and Appreciative Inquiry² was used in order to put the spotlight on what was working. The evaluation team spent one to two days visiting each of the seven DTS providers to understand how they organise themselves to respond to truancy in their region. The discussions covered topics such as:

- their models of delivery
- the range of activities undertaken
- the systems and processes put in place to respond effectively to the problem
- resource levels
- funding structures
- the interrelationships between these various aspects that impact on their service.

In each 'case' a range of stakeholders were spoken to including truancy officers, contract holders, principals, Truancy Committee members, community stakeholders (e.g. Parentline), Police, Child Youth and Family, parents of truants and truants, and regional Ministry staff. Talking to such a broad range of stakeholders allowed the evaluation team to gather a wide range of opinions and also explore any contradictions in the data to build a meaningful picture of the service.

The seven providers selected had the following characteristics:

- 5 North Island, 2 South Island
- 1 Major Urban, 3 Minor Urban, 3 Rural
- 4 School-held contracts, 3 Community Organisation-held contracts
- funding ranged from less than \$20,000 per annum to over \$100,000 per annum
- 1 truancy officer in the provider through to over 5 truancy officers within the provider
- all were in areas where truancy was a 'significant' problem.

The findings from the 'qualitative' phase are woven throughout the report, including four case study narratives that appear in boxes. The case study findings were also used to inform the surveys undertaken in phases 3 and 4 of the evaluation.

² Appreciative Inquiry is a way of thinking, seeking and acting for bringing about powerful change and shifts in organisations and communities. By putting the spotlight on what is working and asking questions that seek to unravel 'what is going well around here', 'what ideas can you tell me about your initiative I can share with others', and 'how can we document excellence and success stories', it allows the evaluators to surface important positive themes of success. David Copperrider (1996) in "Appreciative Inquiry in Organisational Life", in Woodman and Pasmore (eds.) *Research in Organisational Change and Development*, Vol.1, JAI Press.

Phase 3: Survey of DTS Providers

This phase of the research was designed in response to the need to understand what DTS providers are doing and how they are positioned vis-à-vis the characteristics of effective practice identified in the case studies.

The purpose of the survey is to quantify the findings from the case studies in order to understand where DTS providers sit on the spectrum of performance and how well they are placed to move towards good performance. The overarching evaluation question can be summarised as

“how well aligned are providers with best practice? ”

In order to answer this question an online survey of all 78 DTS providers was undertaken. 62 providers responded to the survey (15 Community providers and 47 School providers) resulting in an overall response rate of 79%. Providers were given two weeks to complete the survey between the 22nd of June and the 5th of July, with two reminders being sent during this period. The survey:

- was piloted with four of the providers from the case studies to ensure the questionnaire flow was appropriate, that the issues covered were relevant and that the language was appropriate
- consisted of mainly multiple choice questions
- took approximately 15 minutes to complete
- was emailed to the contract holder and it was requested that the District Truancy Officer complete the survey, a screening question was also put in place to ensure the District Truancy Officer was the respondent
- link for each provider was unique allowing security to be put in place to ensure only one response per provider and that only those with a valid link could respond to the survey.

The Ministry provided the sample for the survey including email addresses and information on each provider such as amount of funding, type of provider (school or community).

Analysis of the data has been undertaken in SPSS; the results of the survey are woven through the report and are referred to as the ‘provider survey’.

Phase 4: Schools survey

Schools play an important role in diagnosing, preventing and treating truancy by using information from DTS providers, the wider community and from their own systems. As such there was a need to understand how schools operate in the current truancy management system. The overarching evaluation question can be summarised as:

“What do DTS providers deliver to schools and how does this effectively meet the needs of schools in relation to the management, prevention and treatment of truancy?”

The purpose of the schools survey is:

- to validate and complement the findings from the provider survey
- to gain a schools perspective on the truancy management system.

As with the provider survey an online methodology was used. The Ministry provided a list of all schools. In order to reduce the overall burden on schools a sample was selected, 1 in 3 primary schools and 1 in 2 secondary schools were selected to participate in the survey. Where possible schools that had been selected for the recent attendance survey were not selected to take part in this survey. A stratified approach was undertaken to sampling based on type of school, decile and location and sorting for size to ensure a representative cross-section of schools were invited to take part.

The target respondents for the survey were principals whose schools had used the DTS this year (i.e. in the past 6 months). 904 schools were invited to take part and 543 responded, resulting in a response rate of 60%. Of these 293 (54%) had used DTS in 2009. The survey was emailed to principals on the 13th of July (to coincide with the last week of the school holidays) and remained open for three weeks until the 3rd of August. This timeframe was selected based on feedback from principals and the advisory group and to avoid overlap with the attendance survey. Two reminders were sent during this period of time. Respondents were sent a personal link to the survey to ensure only one response per school and to ensure only those with a valid link could respond to the survey. The survey took 10 – 15 minutes to complete and consisted mainly of multiple choice questions. The table below shows the population profile in comparison to the survey profile and the profile of those who had used the DTS this year.

Consideration was given to weighting the results. However as the table below shows, the sample achieved was closely matched to the national school population and thus representative. Furthermore it was not possible to weight either the user or non user groups individually as at a national school population level, it was not possible to identify the profile of users/non-users by decile, type and location.

Table 1: Response profile for schools survey

		Used DTS in 2009		Not used/Don't know if used DTS in 2009		Total schools sample		National School population	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Location	Main Urban	175	59.7%	107	42.8%	282	51.9%	1296	52.4%
	Not Main urban	118	40.3%	143	57.2%	261	48.1%	1177	47.6%
Type of school	Composite	19	6.5%	14	5.6%	33	6.1%	106	4.3%
	Contributing	93	31.7%	79	31.6%	172	31.7%	794	32.1%
	Full Primary	73	24.9%	132	52.8%	205	37.8%	1077	43.6%
	Intermediate	27	9.2%	4	1.6%	31	5.7%	121	4.9%
	Secondary Yr 7-15	16	5.5%	8	3.2%	24	4.4%	94	3.8%
	Secondary Yr 9-15	65	22.2%	7	2.8%	72	13.3%	240	9.7%
	Special	0	.0%	6	2.4%	6	1.1%	41	1.7%
Decile	1&2	81	27.6%	37	14.8%	118	21.7%	527	21.3%
	3-8	179	61.1%	144	57.6%	323	59.5%	1472	59.5%
	9&10	33	11.3%	69	27.6%	102	18.8%	474	19.2%
Total		293	100.0%	250	100.0%	543	100.0%	2473	100.0%

Phase 5: Final reporting phase

The evaluation intentionally combined a range of methods to generate fuller and broader insights about the effectiveness of DTS. On completion of the evaluation and research activities, the evaluation team undertook in-depth analysis of the findings and tested the validity and coherence of the analysis with the Evaluation Advisory Group. The insights from these meetings were used to formulate specific, feasible and well-founded recommendations for truancy management services in the future. This final report is a synthesis of the findings from *all* data gathering activities and provides a rich commentary on what an effective truancy management service would need to offer to be of value to schools, students and their families and the wider community.

Advisory Group engagement

The Ministry brought together and managed an Advisory Group to advise the evaluation team at critical points in the evaluation. During the evaluation the Advisory group met three times:

- following the scoping phase in order to discuss the findings from the internal Ministry interviews and agree on the scope, timing and methodology for the evaluation
- at the completion of the case studies to validate the findings and confirm the key issues for measurement in the quantitative phase and to review timings
- at the completion of both quantitative phases to discuss the fully triangulated results validating the overall evaluation findings and confirming the structure of the report.

The Advisory Group consisted of:

- from MOE
 - Cathye Haddock – Operational Policy Design
 - Alison Adlam* – Implementation Planning
 - Brian Annan – Schooling Improvement
 - Tara Campbell – Implementation Planning
 - James Addy – Schooling Policy
 - Nila Lemisio Poasa* – Pasifika
 - Heleen Visser – Research and Evaluation
 - Lisa Ng – Research and Evaluation
 - Graham Parker* – Regional Ministry Office
- from DTS providers
 - Terry Lenihan – South Wairarapa Safer Communities
- from schools (also contract holders)
 - Rob Mill – Wainuiomata High School
 - Geoff Lovegrove* New Zealand Principals Federation, Lytton Park Primary School.

*Indicates the member was not involved at the scoping phase of the evaluation.

The Ministry was responsible for bringing together and managing the Advisory Group on a day-to-day basis.

Part 1: Describing the current state of play with respect to truancy

In this section we discuss the nature of the *problem* and commonly identified reasons for truancy and the extent to which key stakeholders have noticed any changes in truancy patterns over the years. This section provides a critical backdrop for the analysis of the survey data and provides a direction for guiding the future shapes and structures of truancy management.

Truancy is of growing concern

Truancy continues to be 'of concern' for schools and the wider community owing to its detrimental effects on a child's educational and longer term life outcomes. The more time a child spends out of school, the greater the opportunity he/she has to engage in negative behaviours. As noted by a truancy officer

Not all truants are criminals but all criminals have been truants.

Although concern is growing, principals and truancy officers suggested that the reasons for truancy remained similar. At primary school, the responsibility for attending school was usually with the parent(s), whilst at secondary school the student may be making an active 'choice' not to come to school. The reasons commonly identified by principals and truancy officers for non-attendance were:

- **At primary school** – students looking after younger siblings; frequent absences relating to bereavement or tangi; transience; illness at home of parent or student; impact of parents' lifestyle as they were unable to get child ready for school; poverty; and children not going to the nearest school which increased reliance on the adult to take the child to school.
- **At secondary school** – in addition to the above, reasons often included student looking after a parent/family/whānau member; peer group pressure; lack of initiative or inertia; boredom; poor academic performance; conflict with teacher(s)/school; and drug or alcohol problem of student. Parents of truants also mention difficulties associated with their child making the transition from primary to secondary school as a key factor.

The trouble started from the time he moved to third form, high school. He went from a 60 pupil school to a school with 400 kids. The transition was mind boggling for him. He was out of his depth. He had to get used to moving between classes, there was also a bit of bullying. That's always there in a school. He refused to go and as we live out in the country I sort of let him just do his thing. Since the truancy officer has been in I have attended lots of meetings and now realise that he does have to go to school, education is a good thing.

The reasons identified through the case studies are broadly confirmed by the reasons provided in the milestone reports of providers and the ERO report reviewing *Truancy Management in Six Territorial Authorities* (2004). The report noted that:

The reasons for truancy that are most often cited are:

- **Personal** – such as illness, peer pressure or laziness
- **Family** – such as parent-condoned, holidays in school time, dysfunction, no support
- **Schools** – such as bullying, non-engagement, inappropriate curriculum, relationships with teachers.

Respondents interviewed within the current evaluation noted that while the reasons for truancy have not changed, there was a sense that the problem has intensified over the years. Truancy officers, principals and community organisations, Police and Child Youth and Family representatives interviewed in the case studies believed there were a number of reasons:

- They noted that the problem was now starting earlier. In the past, truancy was more commonly seen in older students from years 10 and 11, whereas now patterns of poor attendance were forming in year 9 and 10 students. As a result, students were spending more time out of school over the duration of their schooling. This heightened the need to 'nip the problem in the bud' and ensure early identification and addressing attendance problems.
- Many believed the number of justified or condoned absences was increasing and principals reported cases where students were out of class but the absence was condoned or justified by teachers and parents.
- There was a sense that more students were experiencing mental health issues which prohibited them from attending school for sustained periods of time or limited their ability to engage meaningfully while at school.
- Older students were also aware of the systems in place and utilised these as a way to gain sanction for their truancy (e.g. a student deliberately taking actions that lead to suspension in order to have time away from school; avoiding NETS by turning up every 19th day).
- The systems and people in place to prevent, diagnose, address and monitor truancy were numerous and not well co-ordinated across and within regions (e.g. eAR, SMS, ENROL, NETS, DTS, Schools, Business, Police, Child Youth and Family, Community organisations and other NGOs).

These reasons have combined to create a level of complexity around the problem, and students today present multiple reasons for truancy at any given point in time. As a result increasingly a community wide, multi-faceted response is being sought to address the problem and a more co-ordinated approach across the different actors and systems within the broader truancy management infrastructure. There has also been an intensification of the truancy problem as the systems in place have not adapted to the changing nature of the problem. As one school counsellor put it:

It's not a huge problem in numbers at our school but it is significant and ongoing, incessant and bleeding school resources. The other problem of truancy is the knock on effect to other boys – there are students at our school who don't want to be there and they see others making the choice not to attend. It is also a society and community problem – when they are not at school it involves and affects all of us. (School counsellor)

Lack of clear definitions around truancy

The Ministry officially defines truancy as the sum of unjustified and intermittent unjustified absences where 'unjustified absences' are those which are not explained or not explained to the satisfaction of the school. On the face of it this definition seems clear. However applying this was difficult as each school determined what a satisfactory explanation for an absence was. Both truancy officers and principals noted that across and within schools, the definition was applied differently. For example, some schools in a cluster saw overseas travel as a 'justified absence' while other schools did not. In other situations what was coded as 'justified absence' for one student (e.g. on holiday with family) was likely to be coded as 'unjustified absence' for another student, creating confusion and inconsistencies within the school.

These decisions impact on the quality and consistency of a school's attendance data and calculating rates of truancy. Only one third (38%) of schools using the DTS had set attendance targets for the cluster. The evidence gathered from the case studies suggests that the practice of setting attendance targets was quite variable and an ad-hoc process. In one case the DTS had set regional targets across all schools in their cluster, whereas another DTS had set the attendance target at a school level independent of other schools in the area. Overall, attendance rates are a critical aspect in monitoring and diagnosing the problem of truancy, yet only half of schools using the DTS report to the Board of Trustees regularly on attendance (52%) or link attendance data to achievement in order to convey to parents the importance of attendance (54%).

There were many terms used to describe absenteeism such as truancy, non-attendance, absence and lateness. More often than not these terms were used interchangeably and this was particularly true in relation to truancy and non-attendance. However respondents understood these terms differently and sometimes used the term truant to also describe non-enrolled students.

With non-attendance it is more about the student having a number of barriers to getting to school, then we have our real truants – you go into the home they have food, clothing, a supportive family, a warm home, they have it all going on but they refuse go to school. With non-attendance it is about students and families with a number of barriers to getting to school, they may be social or economic. (Truancy Officer)

They are one and the same, but I think non-attendance can lead to truancy – at the end of the day the result is the same – the child isn't attending school. (Principal)

A key factor in using the terms truancy and non-attendance interchangeably appeared to be the negative connotations associated with the word truancy. Providers and school principals felt that the term non-attendance was a positive way of framing the problem and did not stigmatise the student in any way. Consequently they preferred to reserve the term truant for *chronic* truants. Such providers also tended to refer to themselves as 'attendance officers' as it helped them to establish a more positive relationship with the student and parent community. It reflected the positive, strength-based approach that some providers operated within.

This variability in definition influenced a school's response to absences. The school survey showed that users of DTS displayed considerable variability in the time taken to refer a student to the DTS – 58% of schools admitted that time taken for referring a student to DTS varied significantly depending on the student, with 16% saying that they referred 'immediately on the day of the absence' whereas the remaining 26% took between '1 and in excess of five days to refer the student on to the DTS'. This was despite the fact that three-quarters of schools who used the DTS believed they had clear guidelines from DTS on when to refer and providers confirm this.

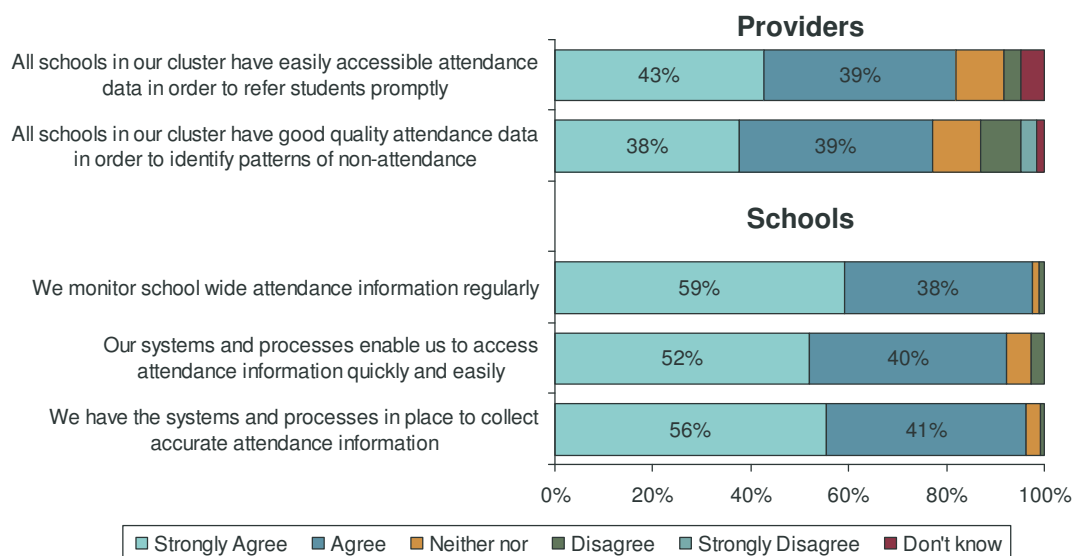
Variability also existed in the use of the DTS, with around half of schools surveyed using the DTS and of those who didn't use the DTS, half of the schools didn't believe they had a truancy problem. The lack of a clear working definition and thresholds impedes early and consistent identification of the problem.

School systems and processes for monitoring attendance

Schools had a range of systems in place to monitor, collect and store attendance information. Nearly all schools have a student management system³ (SMS) which contained valuable attendance information; some had eAR (electronic attendance register) as an add-on to their SMS; others had a paper-based attendance register; and all schools had ENROL. Each school also had its own processes in place to facilitate populating the different data collection systems.

In the two surveys, principals and providers were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements about school systems and processes in relation to collection and access to attendance information. The findings (see figure 4) showed that principals and truancy officers believed that schools have systems in place to capture and access attendance information. This was particularly true of schools, with over half of the principals that responded 'strongly agreeing' that they monitor attendance information regularly; that they can access attendance information easily, and that they have systems and processes in place to collect accurate attendance information. There were indications that principals of lower decile schools were not as confident about their data collection systems and processes. While 97% of principals from decile 9 & 10 schools believed they had the systems in place to collect accurate attendance information, only 87% of principals from decile 1 and 2 schools 'agreed or strongly agreed' with this statement.

³ There are currently seven approved SMSs being utilized by schools throughout the country.

Figure 4: Effectiveness of school and provider systems to monitor attendance

Q9/22 How strongly do you agree or disagree
 Base: Respondents who had used the DTS this year (n=292), All providers (n=62),

At a primary school level there was a high degree of consistency in how data is collected and recorded. At secondary schools by contrast there was considerable variation across schools in terms of their processes and how data is recorded. This variation was attributed by principals to the increased complexity of attendance information at a secondary school level requiring the administrative staff to pool together information gathered from many teachers across many short duration classes.

Principals interviewed as part of the case studies said that their schools had in place systems and processes and emphasised that they monitored attendance regularly. However they also noted that there was a mismatch between the theoretical capability these systems afforded them and the real life practicalities of collecting, monitoring and interpreting school wide attendance information effectively. This mismatch occurred for a range of reasons:

- A lack of detail in the codes used to mark attendance – principals noted attendance was recorded at a relatively aggregated level which inhibited their ability to pick up more subtle changes in attendance.
- Teachers and schools used the attendance codes differently – principals said within their schools, teachers' used the attendance codes differently and that they believed there was widespread variation across schools. This made it difficult for principals to interpret their attendance information and to compare attendance information across schools. There are opportunities to improve this through training and better information about definitions and exemplars, showing their application in different settings.

- When rolls were not called, it ‘muddied the waters’ and schools were not always able to capture this information in their systems. A number of schools reported that when a roll was not called the student was automatically marked with a question mark in the attendance register which then influenced attendance rates – however principals were uncertain about how to manage this.
- Lateness was missed and if picked up could result in increased absence rates depending on how schools coded the information. This was raised particularly amongst primary principals from the perspective of early diagnosis, and amongst secondary schools as it added complexity to the system.
- Communication between teachers was not always as timely as required. This was raised specifically by secondary principals where students were more likely to be out of class for valid schools reasons e.g. attending extra curricula activities. In some situations communication between teachers occurred after the fact (this may occur for many reasons), resulting in incorrect information being recorded in the attendance register.

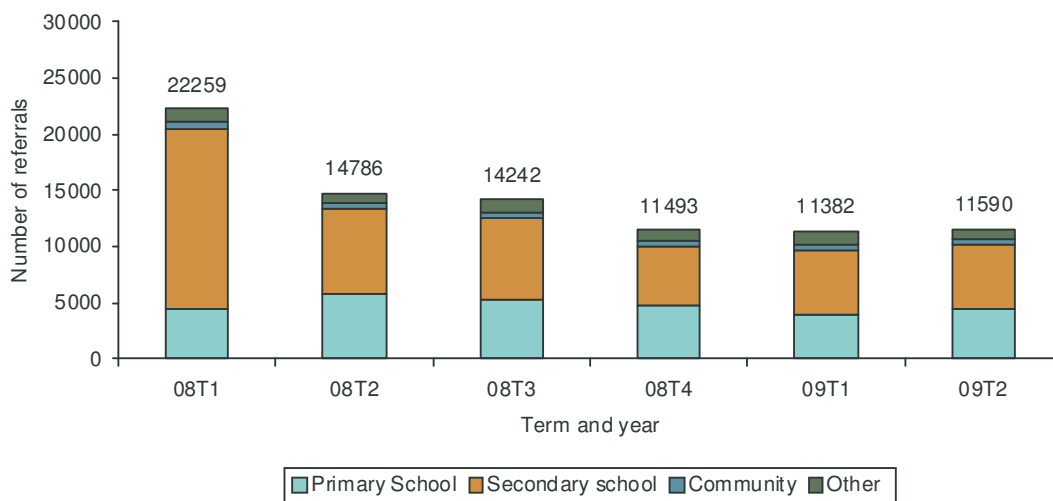
As a result principals indicated there was a sense that the systems and processes in place were not as sensitive as they could be in order to identify attendance issues early.

Milestone reports suggest referrals have reduced since 2007

The provider contracts stipulated that every term providers submit a milestone report to the Ministry. These reports were linked to provider payments and contained a range of output information including number of referrals received and responded to, number of actual students referred to the service that term, time taken to respond to referrals, number of schools in the cluster and number of schools who had used the service in the reporting period. The Ministry stored this information in the Furzehill database which provided relatively easy access to individual provider reports and was summarised across all providers.

Figure 5 has been generated from analysis drawn from the information in the milestone reports. The analysis looked at the number of referrals received each term across all providers, broken down by the source of the referral i.e. primary school, secondary school, community or other sources (e.g. parent requesting help). Since 2008 the indications are that the number of referrals being made to the DTS is reducing and this reduction has come from all sources i.e. referrals from primary schools, secondary schools, community and others have all dropped at similar rates.

We have been unable to make comparisons with the period prior to 2008 as during 2006 and 2007 the service underwent significant change – providers were consolidated and were also transitioning during this period from old contracts to new ones. As such, results are not directly comparable.

Figure 5: Number of referrals over time

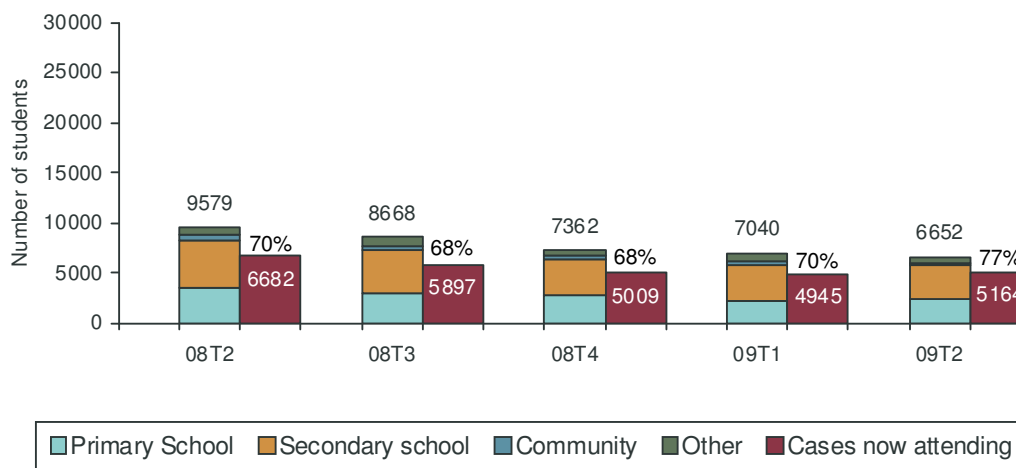
Source: Milestone reports

Base: DTS providers who had returned a report 08T2: n=75, 08T3: n=69, 08T4: n=67, 09T1: n=66, 09T2: n=57

The bar on the left in Figure 6 overleaf shows the number of actual students referred to all providers in 2008 and 2009, broken down by referral source. In line with the referrals diagram (figure 5) we see a corresponding drop in the number of actual students being referred to the service. The average number of contacts the DTS received per student was stable (at around 1.7⁴ per student since 2008). The red bar on the right shows the number of cases that were successfully resolved (success is defined as a student returned by the DTS that is now attending school in that term). Based on this information there are clear indications that DTS has been achieving significant success: while in 2008 only 70% of cases were successfully resolved, in 2009 77% of cases have been successfully resolved – an improvement of 7% of cases over two years.

⁴ This has been calculated by dividing the number of referrals by the number of students referred during the same period. It is not possible to trace an individual student's referral information to identify the proportion which have only one referral vs. the proportion of students which take 2, 3 etc referrals to a provider.

Figure 6: Number of students being referred and success rate



Source: Milestone reports

Base: DTS providers who had returned a report 08T2: n=75, 08T3: n=69, 08T4: n=67, 09T1: n=66, 09T2: n=57

Drawing on the findings from the surveys and case study interviews, we believe that the reduction in referrals can be interpreted in a variety of ways:

- Schools did not know if they had a problem and therefore did not refer students – the evaluation found that while many schools reported that *in theory* they have the systems and processes to track attendance, *in practice* their systems were often not sensitive enough to pick up the problem early. Principals were also loathe to admit that they had attendance issues, as illustrated by the following quotations:

I have a range of schools in my region that are in complete and utter denial and will claim that they don't have an attendance problem. Whether this is real or just in their mind is difficult to determine as we don't always have access to the attendance data. It is not a good look for them to have truancy officers come in and out of the school. The town is small and people talk. (Truancy Officer)

There are schools that should be using it but they don't. It is not compulsory for a school to use it, so it gets to be very episodic. (Regional Ministry staff)

- Schools that acknowledged that they did have a problem, did not consider it a priority – school principals acknowledged that attendance issues were not always a top priority particularly in secondary schools (unlike primary schools where safety was of primary concern and so received greater attention from the school) and this could be a possible reason for lower referrals.
- Schools managed the problem themselves. This could be due to two reasons: first, principals viewed this as part of their core role and therefore took the lead in managing the issue. Secondly, principals saw that with consolidation, the DTS was operating on a thin budget and limited resources and so they responded to this scenario by managing the 'light' issues themselves and only referring on the difficult cases. They managed this

through their own attendance officers making phone calls to the parent or sending text messages to the parent to let them know that the student was absent.

We find that we are still doing a lot of the work ourselves because the service is simply not able to meet demand. So a lot of schools are employing people in their own schools to try and deal with the problem. We only refer cases on when our efforts get us nowhere. (School principal)

The number of truancy officers we have is just not enough to meet the needs of our region. I feel that the truancy team should meet and work with schools on a regular basis and help us in ensuring our systems are effective in tracking non-attendance. But they are not available to do this with all schools. They are very effective and we would like to use them more often.

- The introduction of Rock On presented intermediate and secondary schools with an alternative that was more action-oriented, for dealing with chronic truants. Rock On programme defines its aims as to “reduce truancy and youth offending” and “increase engagement in education” which overlaps with the aims of DTS. The programmes were Police-led and it is positioned as a multi-agency response which was developed in collaboration with health, education and social service agencies. Schools that had a significant number of chronic truants consequently were choosing to escalate to Rock On, by-passing DTS.
- There was a ‘loss of referrals’ as the period leading up the 2007 quarter 2 had seen a lot of upheaval due to the consolidation process that was implemented in DTS. During this period, schools were unsure as to who their provider was and so did not refer.
- Schools were dissatisfied with DTS – however this is not borne out by the school survey which showed that over 80% of principals were in fact satisfied with the quality and timeliness of service offered by their DTS provider.

It should be noted that in 2008 National Student Numbers (NSN) were allocated to all students. This presented a huge opportunity for both the Ministry and DTS providers, allowing them to track individual students across and within providers. It also enabled the Ministry to link truancy information to other sources of information held by the Ministry in order to aid early identification of the problem and the development of targeted initiatives in relation to truancy. Currently this potential is untapped by both providers and the Ministry.

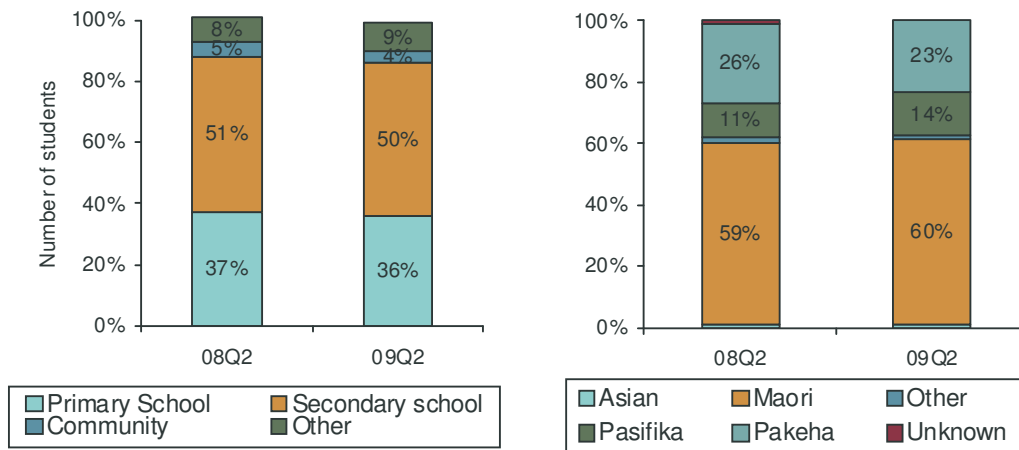
Profile of truants

Analysis of the milestone reports laid out below in figure 7 indicated that secondary schools account for half of all referrals, with primary schools accounting for just over one-third of referrals (36%). The remainder of referrals was made up of community (4%) and other (9%)⁵ sources. This spread remained stable despite the overall reduction in referrals.

⁵ Refers to figures from T2 2009 based on milestone reports available at the time of analysis.

Looking at ethnicity across referrals also showed there was very little change in the profile of those being referred. The majority of students referred to the DTS were Māori (60%) with Pakeha being the next largest referral group at a 23% and Pasifika at 14%.

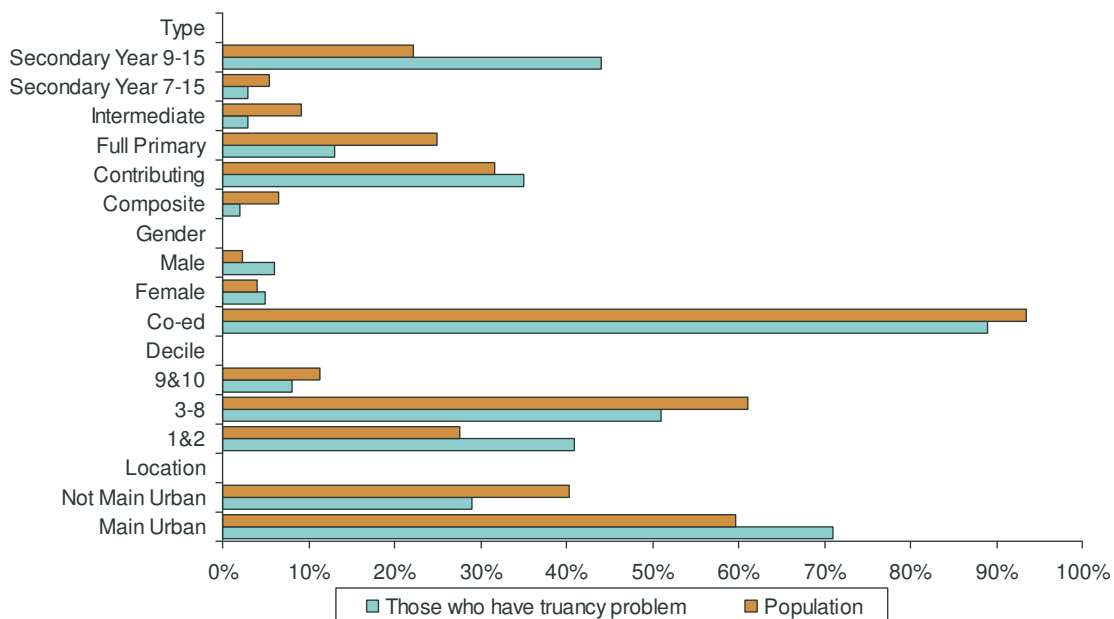
Figure 7: Referrals by ethnicity and source



Source: Milestone reports
 Base: Number of students 08T2: n=9579, 09T2: n=6652

Twenty-two percent of principals who responded to the schools survey and had used DTS this year indicated that truancy was a problem at their school. The profile of these principals suggests that the problem was of particular concern in secondary, low decile, urban schools.

Figure 8: Profile of principals that believe truancy is a problem at their school



Sample information for profiling

Q 23: How strongly do you agree or disagree truancy is not a large problem at this school?

Base: Respondents who strongly disagree or disagree (n=63). Respondents who have used the DTS (n=293).

What schools do about truancy and their attitudes towards truancy management

School principals acknowledged that they had a role to play in proactively preventing, diagnosing and resolving truancy. The Ministry's website summarised their responsibilities as:

They are mandated by government to do so under section 25 and 31 of The Education Act 1989 which requires every board to take all reasonable steps to ensure students attend school when it is open. There are some practical requirements associated with this, including the maintenance of accurate daily attendance registers, but it is largely a matter for individual principals and schools to identify the scope of 'all reasonable steps' in their own attendance policies and for the board to provide support when issues around attendance arise.

School boards, principals, individual teachers, parents and whānau are responsible for ensuring students regularly attend school.

Principals were aware of and recognised their responsibilities in relation to attendance. Principals interviewed in the case study research indicated a willingness to work collaboratively to address the problem of truancy but found it was often a balancing act between differing priorities at a school and individual student level.

Whilst I hate to say this and I know it may sound bad but it is a reality of being a principal. There are some kids that are missing a few days and you just don't have the time or in some situations the inkling to chase them. (Principal)

In a resource-constrained environment decisions were being made about which students to help. Some principals/teachers admitted that they focused attention on those students for whom they believed they had the best chance of achieving a positive outcome.

The principals who had used DTS this year echoed these sentiments, indicating that they had committed significant resources into ensuring they managed truancy in their school. This is evidenced by the high levels of agreement with statements such as:

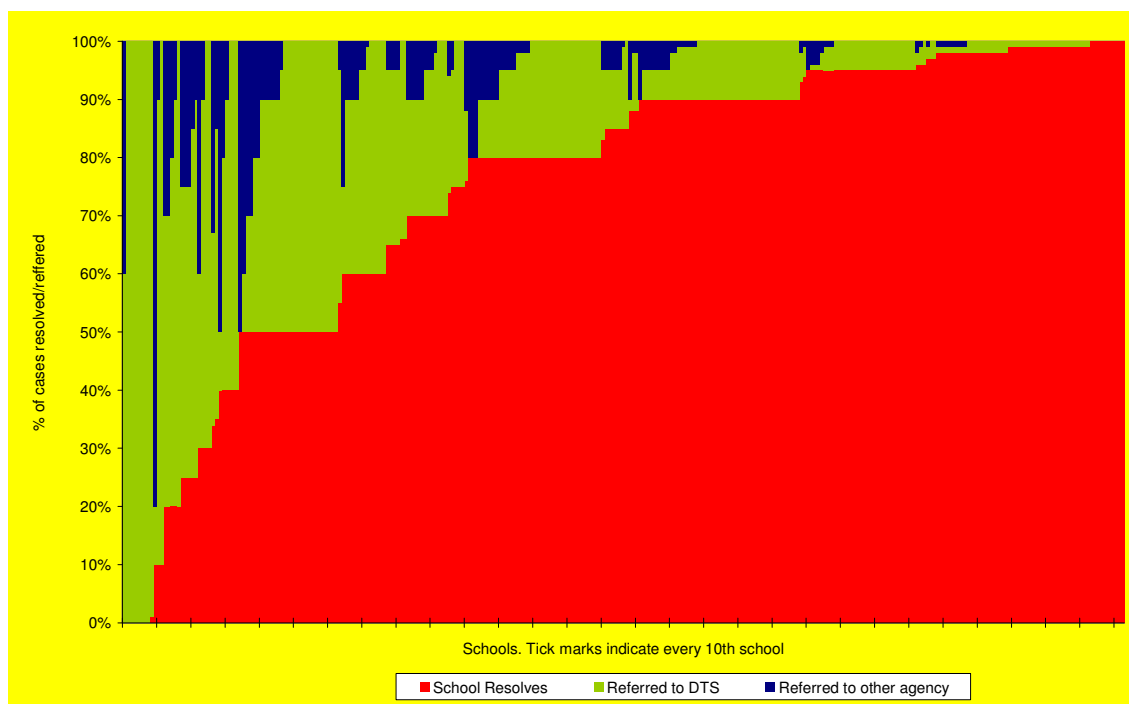
- It is important for the school to resolve attendance problems quickly (98% strongly agree/agree).
- We invest significant resources, staff time and dollars into managing truancy effectively (69% strongly agree/agree).
- We work with teachers to ensure they are able to effectively engage with students on the issue of truancy (77% strongly agree/agree).
- We work with teachers to ensure they are able to effectively engage with parents and the wider community on the issue of truancy (74% strongly agree/agree).

- We have the skills required to manage truancy effectively in our school (76% strongly agree/agree).

It was also evident from the school survey that schools were balancing priorities and believed that the problem largely resided within the community, family and whānau and not within the school.

- 4% of principals who had used DTS this year agreed that truancy at their school was driven primarily by *school-related problems*.
- 75% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that truancy at their school was driven primarily by *community/parental problems*.
- 72% of all schools in the survey had a member of staff who in addition to their day-to-day role also had the responsibility for managing truancy. Very few schools (18%) had their own dedicated truancy or attendance officer in addition to the DTS.

Principals were asked on average what proportion of attendance problems they resolved themselves, what proportion was referred to DTS or referred directly to other agencies. Principals reported they were able to resolve around three-quarters of cases themselves without intervention from other agencies. A further 20% were resolved by DTS and the remainder of cases (4%) were resolved by other agencies. However there was widespread variability with some schools referring 100% of cases, through to schools referring less than 1% of cases on to DTS. Figure 9 below illustrates this variability in referring and how cases were resolved. The red area shows the proportion of cases schools reported resolving by themselves, whilst the green and blue areas show the proportion of cases the school referred to DTS and other organisations respectively. At the left of the figure are schools that referred all cases to DTS or other organisations, whilst at the right hand side of the chart are schools that on average resolved all cases without referring to DTS or other organisations.

Figure 9: Distribution of how schools resolve and refer non-attending students

Of those principals whose schools had used DTS:

- 88% said DTS was the first place they would go for help to resolve cases they had not been able to resolve satisfactorily
- around 1% went to Police or Child Youth and Family, whilst 10% went to alternative social service providers (e.g. Rock On).

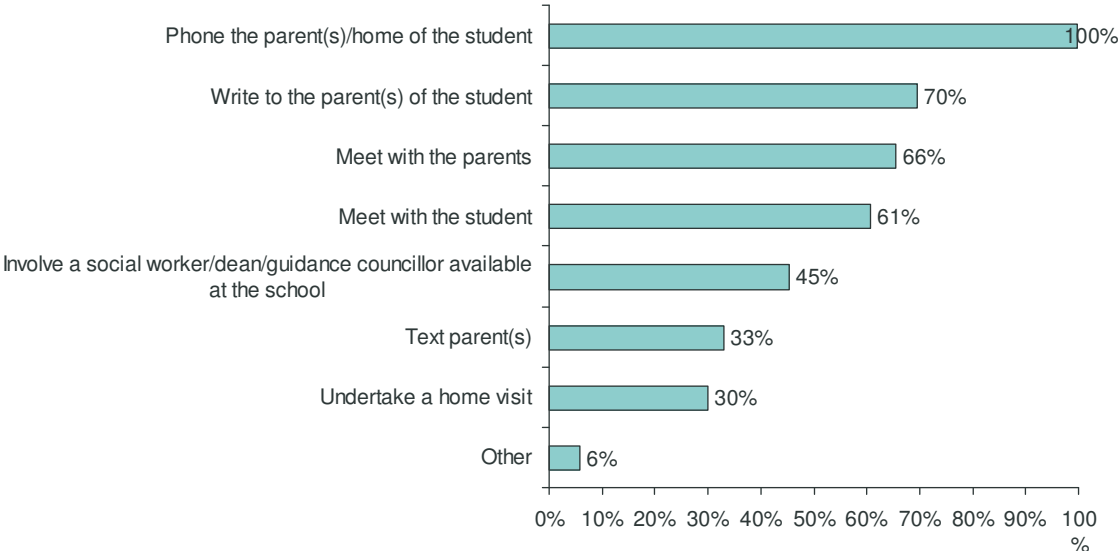
In order to achieve these results schools undertook a number of actions and put in place all sorts of interventions. Following are just a few examples of the types of things principals said they did to increase the engagement of students with attendance problems:

- Rewarded good attendance through play-station credits – schools allowed children to earn time on a play-station for good behaviour/attendance; student and parent BBQs to celebrate achieving attendance targets in partnership with DTS.
- Part-time apprenticeships with local trades people allowing students to earn or develop a career in parallel to attending school.
- Offered national and international travel or adventure activities in partnership with organisations such as Spirit of Adventure.
- Work experience for short periods of time to demonstrate relevance of education and the opportunities that are available.

- Made attendance information publicly available to all students, helping schools and students to take responsibility for the accuracy of attendance information.
- Produced parent information and guidelines about attendance and the importance of attendance.
- Allowed students to change classes to address the existence of teacher conflict or conflict with other students.
- Located and provided assistance with uniforms and food.

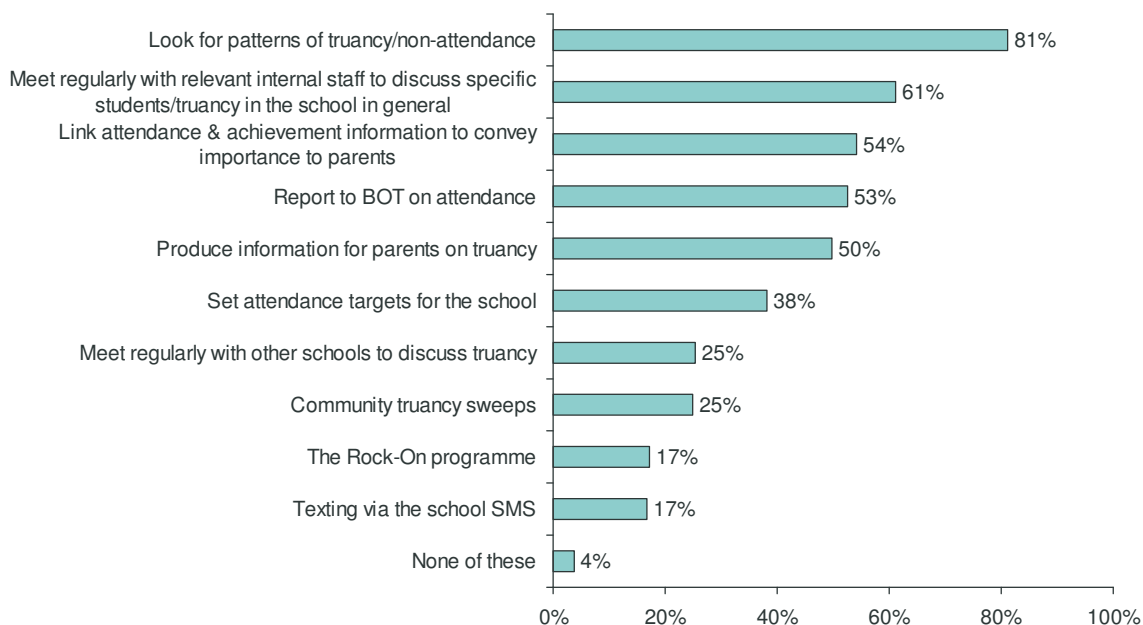
In addition to these, a range of relatively routine practices used by schools were also identified in the case studies. Principals in the survey were then asked which of these activities their schools undertook routinely before referring to DTS, and what other activities they undertook or had access to in order to manage truancy. Figures 10 and 11 below summarise the results from these two questions.

Figure 10: Actions schools report they routinely undertake before referring to DTS



Q14: Before referring a student to the District Truancy Service which of the following actions, if any, does your school *routinely* undertake?

Base: Schools that has used the DTS (n=293)

Figure 11: Other actions/systems schools use or access to combat truancy

Q15 Which of the following, if any, does your school do/have/access to help combat truancy?
Base: Schools that has used the DTS (n=293)

Positively all schools made an initial call to the parents to find out the reasons for the student's unexplained absence. Following on from this there was a high degree of variability in what other actions were taken by the schools before referring to DTS. The case studies indicated this variability occurred for a number of reasons including:

- School's interpretation of the information gained from the call in the context of other information from the school. A judgment about what the next step should be for that student's specific circumstances and who should be involved is then made.
- A school's response was tempered by the resources available at the time of the problem.
- A school's response was also a reflection of how the school framed the cause of truancy i.e. as a school problem, community problem or family/whānau problem.

Surprisingly only a little over half of schools (53%) reported regularly to the Board of Trustees on attendance rates or analysed and linked attendance and achievement information in order to help convey to parents the importance of attendance (55%). Whilst 81% of schools undertook analysis of attendance information to look for patterns of truancy/non-attendance, this still meant that one in five schools did not actively monitor attendance.

Part II: District Truancy Services – How did they operate?

The case studies indicated that providers' systems capability reflected the level of support and funding they received. As such there was widespread variability across providers, and on the whole providers were confident they had the systems and processes in place to deliver an effective service. We reviewed these systems during our case study visits to a few sites and were impressed by the systems, their ease of use and quality of analysis undertaken to feed back to schools.

This section outlines the structure of DTS services and how they operated on a day-to-day basis. In total, there are 78 provider contracts; 58 of these contracts are held by schools and the remaining 20 contracts are held by community organisations. Our review of documents suggests that there is a preference towards funding schools and this preference is reflected in the allocation of the contracts. The preference towards schools is in line with the Ministry's values and beliefs that schools are best placed to manage truancy and attendance. In areas where no school wanted to take on the contract or no schools were seen as capable of managing the contract, a community provider was contracted.

Each contract holder worked with a cluster of schools that included primary and secondary schools. The size of these clusters varied significantly with the smallest cluster consisting of 4 schools and the largest cluster consisting of 163 schools. The geographic area that a cluster covered was also quite broad. In rural areas a provider covered up to 500 kms, whilst in urban areas this was as little as 20 – 30 kms.

This variability in cluster size was also reflected in referral rates, with around 20% of providers receiving less than 30 referrals a term; 30% respectively receiving 30 – 100 and 100 – 300 referrals a term and 20% receiving more than 300 referrals a term.

Over half of providers had only one truancy officer and a further 38% had two or three truancy officers. All truancy officers were 'local' people and lived in the community. During the case studies this was identified as a critical contributor to their effectiveness as they knew and understood the socio-economic context of those they were helping and were a familiar face in the community.

Dargaville High School

The contract for this region is held by Dargaville High School who took on the contract over 13 years ago initially voluntarily and then as a joint venture between all the schools in the region and the secondary school. All schools were experiencing significant truancy problems due to the unique social and geographic context of this community. The region also has a high proportion of recidivist families where all siblings from one family have been truants at some point in their schooling years. The region is characterised by high unemployment, extensive drug problems, and limited job opportunities for young people, a geographically dispersed population and high crime rates. More recently the high school has also attracted a large number of foreign teachers, which poses unique challenges to the school in terms of its own truancy management responses – these teachers are not familiar with the socio-cultural context of their community or the geography and are therefore unable to engage meaningfully with families of truants or truants themselves. They also have different attitudes to the problem and its management. The truancy management service offers the schools a consistent and appropriate response.

The service receives a little over \$18,000 (less GST) per annum from MOE and there are 14 schools in the cluster. It also encounters the Correspondence school students. All schools use the service. The schools also exchange attendance information in order to assess the problem more effectively.

The service employs one truancy officer who is well know to schools, families, the Māori community in the area, students and support organisations in the region e.g Police, MOE, Group Special Education, the Northern Truancy Council, local iwi. This local knowledge is seen as a critical factor in the service being effective, and also in maintaining the safety of the truancy officer. These connections enable the service to be effective by sharing information which facilitates faster location of students and by triangulating information from all sources to pick up early on potential problems and to diagnose the underlying problem. As a result the service is empowered to be intuitive. The truancy officer's local knowledge and connections also help maintain his safety as it was noted that there were some areas that were 'no-go zones'. The Ministry advice that in such instances the truancy officer should be accompanied was unlikely to work in this context due to inadequate resourcing. Therefore trade-offs were made to ensure safety of truancy officers and some regions were left alone. Police, schools, families/whānau and businesses shared information with the truancy officer to ensure that he was aware of the potential danger before undertaking a home visit.

The service meets every week with the deans and principal of the local high school to discuss cases. At this meeting it is agreed which cases the school will lead on and which will be referred to DTS. This meeting also ensures a full exchange of information about a student and the family background prior to the school or truancy officer contacting/visiting them. However a significant number of truants are also picked up by chance.

Despite the limited funding and the severity and complexity of the cases managed by the service, they have had significant successes. The service's connections within the education sector and the community have enabled the securing of apprenticeships for students, the use of alternative learning environments to allow a suitable re-integration of a student into mainstream schooling, close working relationships with schools that result in innovative relevant solutions like 'play-station credits'. As a result of the service, a number of young people have been referred to Child Youth and Family and many families have been referred to the Strengthening Families co-ordinator. Many families and their children have been able to attend appropriate programmes as the truancy officer was able to connect them with suitable programme providers.

Why providers took on the DTS contracts

In the case studies, contract holders put forth a range of reasons for taking on the DTS contracts. Central to these reasons was their strong belief that truancy was an important problem that needed to be addressed for the good of young people and their community. All providers displayed a high degree of concern about the problem of truancy and dedication and passion to resolve truancy and ensure a better future for their people.

If we lost the contract it wouldn't be the end of the earth, it is so little money for what we do. We took the contract because it fits with our organisation's goals, we are a youth organisation. We are well placed to work in this area and we often picked up kids through other work that we do.

There were other reasons too and these varied by provider type and included:

- **Community providers** - Truancy management was well aligned to the organisation's objectives; the provider was well placed to provide wrap-around service through existing networks and it strengthened the organisation's service offering to the wider community.
- **School providers** – As a way of subsidising existing services at the school; it allowed the contract holder to secure additional on-site resources (e.g. truancy officer located in the school) to manage truancy for just their school.

Funding

In 2006 DTS underwent a significant rationalisation of providers. The service was aligned to territorial local authority (TLA) boundaries reducing the number of providers where practical to one per TLA in order to gain efficiencies and economies of scale across providers. Coinciding with this change the funding allocation model was also adapted using a population-based model with some adjustments made for risk factors and prevalence of truancy in the area. Whilst the model of allocation and the number of providers changed, the level of funding has remained stable at around 4.5 million for the last ten years. These changes also led to a three-year contracting cycle which gave the services some certainty and allowed them to take a longer-term view of their services. These three-year contracts are due to conclude in December 2009.

Most of the resourcing for each DTS comes from the MOE's contract with the DTS – in other words the only input for a DTS is monetary. The differential funding for DTS reflects the fact that some DTSs serve larger areas, a greater number of students and greater number of schools. At one extreme the largest provider receives \$400,600 whereas the smallest provider receives \$6,400 per annum. However there was a strong sense amongst providers that the funding levels did not adequately reflect the differing workload by region nor did it reflect the extent and quality of services provided. These sentiments were unanimously echoed by principals and all stakeholders who participated in the case studies.

Consequently providers have found a range of ways to work around the 'funding deficit'. Nearly all services received some form of subsidy through:

- Their contract holder – For example free supervision, free office space, access to accounts and payroll, computers and cars. There were indications that community providers were more likely to access a wider range of cross-subsidies because of their co-location with other services.
- Volunteer labour – While the provider survey indicated that only 13% of the providers had volunteers working specifically for them, the case studies revealed that all 7 providers used co-workers from other agencies or the school to assist them as required. This was particularly true of school-based providers where teachers, parents and other stakeholders associated with the school provided ad-hoc support to the service.

We have taken on board two social work students this year from the local polytechnic. They see the value of sending their students and we can see the skill and knowledge they have to share with us too. Our officers get to know more about what is going on and learn a bit about current research. They are with us for three months in a year.

- Community donations/sponsorship – Some providers had partnerships with local businesses that provided goods and services in kind, for example a local garage providing petrol or servicing of vehicles, car yards providing courtesy vehicles.
- The good will of the truancy officers – Nearly all truancy officers worked additional hours and/or flexible hours to ensure the needs of families were being met; some officers paid for their own training and used their own cars when working.
- School subsidies – 15% of schools in the schools survey made a contribution to their local DTS. The case studies suggested this contribution was usually nominal and voluntary ranging from per head cost (one DTS set this at \$1 per student), a nominal flat fee (e.g. \$250), a sliding fee based on usage (in one instance a school was paying approximately \$7,000 to DTS).

Whilst providers have worked hard to secure 'additional' funding, a number of providers spoken to in the case studies noted the only way they had been able to provide staff with a pay rise was to reduce the number of hours they worked per week, holding their wages at the same level. (74% of truancy officers were paid \$20 or less per hour).

Where DTS were located

The case studies revealed that where the DTS was located significantly influenced how they operated. We observed that providers that were co-located with other services were better able to provide a 'wrap-around' service and were often well-connected to other services available in the community. They also tended to be more proactive in working across all schools in their cluster. In recognition of this, some school providers deliberately set themselves up to operate in this manner. Student Attendance Services Hamilton (SASH) was an excellent example of a school-based provider operating in ways traditionally associated with community-based

organisations. In order to achieve positive results, SASH was set up as a charitable trust with a view to ensuring stronger connections with other agencies and all schools in their cluster. Consequently even though Fraser High School was technically the contract holder and provides accommodation to SASH, it was still treated as one of the many schools in the cluster that SASH was responsible for.

Student Attendance Service Hamilton (SASH)

The School Attendance Service Hamilton (SASH) was formed in 1993 to respond to high incidences of absenteeism from schools. The service is a community organisation (even though it is categorised as a school provider in the Ministry's database, as the contract holder is Fraser High School). It operates with paid and voluntary staff. It is located at Fraser High School but caters to 70 schools in the cluster (58 primary schools and 12 secondary schools). Of the total number of schools in the SASH cluster, 38 primary schools and 9 secondary schools use the service. The geographic area is mainly within the Hamilton boundaries. However undertaking home visits to their student population could require them to cover areas such as Horsham Downs, Koromatua, Puketaha, Rotokauri, Rukuhia, Tamahere, Tauwhare, Whatawhata and Ngaruawahia.

Interestingly, analysis of their referrals shows that in 2007 they responded to 9,892 referrals and in 2008 they received 10,055 referrals. The increase in the referrals is due to the proactive work they have been doing with schools whereby they have worked with schools to review their attendance systems and identified problems in understandings and coding. SASH believes that referrals numbers can go up or down depending on individual school focus and process. For the first quarter in 2009, SASH received and responded to 1,906 referrals.

SASH receives \$129,500 each year as part of the DTS contract. In addition, SASH receives funds from school contributions, Hamilton City Council, WEL Energy Trust, Trust Waikato and Community Organisation Grants from the Department of Internal Affairs. As a result the total budget for SASH for 2009 is approximately \$278,800.

The organisation has a well defined management structure. The Management Committee has representatives from local schools, an iwi representative and community representatives including CYF, Police and Parentline. This ensures clear accountability and oversight of the work of the organisation and linkages across other community initiatives in the region. As a result, the organisation is well networked and has the relationships to ensure seamless delivery of their services to their community. Training is an ongoing issue and SASH invests in training for its staff in order to ensure they are equipped to respond to the needs of the community.

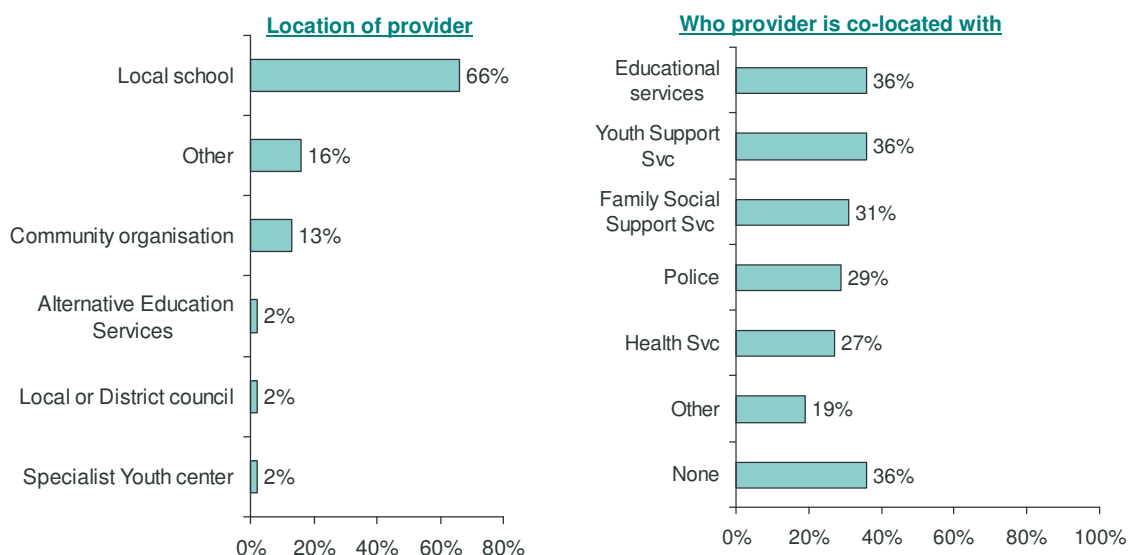
The database systems developed by SASH are outstanding as it allows them to track patterns at an individual student level, at an individual school level and across schools. This has allowed SASH to take a more proactive approach to their service and provide valuable feedback to schools identifying patterns in their referrals. The organisation has also initiated a pilot project with three schools in their cluster. The pilot project aims to work with schools to ensure that their attendance system is rigorous. While this is a sensitive issue given the self-managing environment schools operate in, SASH has been able to work proactively with a sample of schools due to their strong personal relationships with these schools. SASH has also set attendance targets for the region along with the Regional Ministry office and have promoted these expectations in the region so as to build momentum as a community.

School-based providers tended to have an excellent understanding of how schools worked and formed very strong relationships with their ‘home’ school, allowing them access to school attendance data and raising the profile of truancy in the school in which they were located. However they were often not as well connected to other services in the community and they accepted that there was little incentive for them to work across all schools in the cluster in an equitable way. Consequently the service was ‘captured’ by schools that acknowledged they had a problem with truancy and used the service frequently.

We also noted that context mattered as well. The case studies showed that locating providers in a school worked well for smaller clusters in a rural setting, whereas providers co-located with other services worked well for larger clusters in an urban setting.

As part of the provider survey, truancy officers were asked where their DTS was located and what other services it was co-located with and figure 12 below summarises the results. Two-thirds of providers (66%) were located in schools, with the remainder located in a range of community settings. One-third of providers were not co-located with any other services. Of those who were co-located with other services, there was a high degree of variability in what services they were co-located with. There were some indications that community providers were more likely to be co-located with other services.

Figure 12: Location of providers



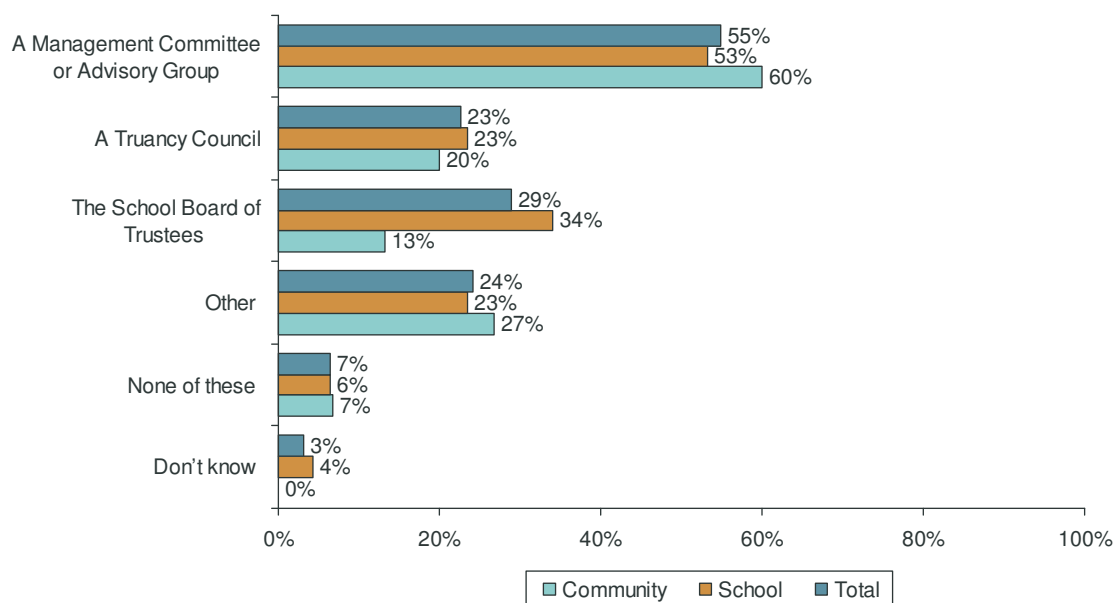
[Q3 Is your truancy service located within a...](#)
[Q4 What other organisations or youth services are you co-located with?](#)
 Base: All respondents (n=62)

How are DTSs managed?

Both school and community providers tended to have a management committee or a Board that supported them and to whom they were accountable. These groups provided an oversight role and usually consisted of a few principals from the schools in the cluster, the contract holder, other stakeholders (e.g. Police, Child Youth and Family, youth/teen organisations) and social workers. The management committee or Board often helped with the following activities:

- Defining the scope of the service and how best to spend the available resources.
- Addressing resourcing issues and how cases should be prioritised if necessary.
- Discussing more broadly about truancy and management of truancy in the region.
- Discussing and identifying in what ways and how DTS could reinforce local activities such as truancy sweeps with Police (even though the contracts no longer require providers to do this).
- Approving and identifying training needs for truancy officers.
- Employing truancy officers.

Figure 13: Management structures in place to support DTS providers



Q5 Are you supported by any of the following structures?
 Base: All respondents n=62

Forty-seven percent of providers had more than one truancy officer. This required providers to put in place processes for managing workload across officers and the case study findings showed that providers did this in one of two ways:

- Truancy officers were allocated to specific schools in their cluster. Schools appeared to prefer this approach as it allowed them to form a strong relationship with the truancy officer allocated to their school. This was clearly a school-centric approach.
- Truancy officer was allocated to a specific area and when a referral came in to DTS it was allocated to the officer that worked in that particular area or part of town. This was clearly a student and family-centric approach and in this instance, the truancy officer built a strong relationship and understanding of the family context and setting and used this when developing solutions for responding to truancy.

In practice DTSs tended to use a combination of both approaches.

Promoting the service

Providers were contracted to contact all schools at the beginning of the year to introduce the service to schools and provide information on how and when to access the service. The milestone reports clearly showed that all providers did contact the schools in their cluster at least once per year. The case studies revealed that how this contact was made varied significantly and included the following:

- Personal visit to each school in the cluster.
- Phone call.
- Email or posted letter.
- A collective meeting of all schools in the cluster hosted by the provider.

Not only did the type of contact vary but also the level of contact – 77% of the providers indicated they contacted non-referring schools at least once a term. Again the type of contact varied quite significantly. Principals were asked as part of the schools survey if they had been contacted by the DTS, only 69% of principals recalled being contacted this year, 15% couldn't remember and 16% said they were not contacted by the DTS. This difference can be due to a number of reasons – providers were contacting staff at the school other than the principal; it may also reflect that more personal forms of contact have a higher resonance than less personal forms of contact. From the milestone reports it was evident that in any one term, around half the schools in the cluster would have used DTS and hence have had some contact. This is confirmed in the schools survey where 54% of principals said they had used DTS this year.

The case studies also highlighted that the level and type of contact reflected funding, contractual obligations, skills and resources of a provider. For example services that felt most stretched (i.e. resources not matched to need) were less likely to engage in personal contact

with schools over and above what was contractually required. There was also very little incentive for providers to proactively engage with schools in order to address and identify the problem early, or proactively put in place preventative measures. As a result the service had grown to be reactive in nature i.e. set up to respond to referrals rather than a proactive service, and this meant promotion of DTS was largely tied into the schools network rather than the broader community. Initiatives such as truant-free shopping zones or Everyday Counts did help in raising the profile of addressing truancy in the community. The case studies also demonstrated that providers were taking necessary action to ensure the service was well promoted both amongst schools and in the wider community. For example one provider had organised a private screening of the recently released New Zealand movie *Trouble is my Business*.

As the problem is huge in our area, we decided to come up with initiatives that would be relevant for all schools and parents in our region. We had a programme called Everyday Counts which has been a focus for younger kids. Rather than wait for three days before a referral comes in, we said let's do something to stem the problem at the earliest. The day the child did not turn up to school, the truancy officer would be at their doorstep; not on the third day. So this way we were able to promote the message that every day counts at school and every day is important. (Provider)

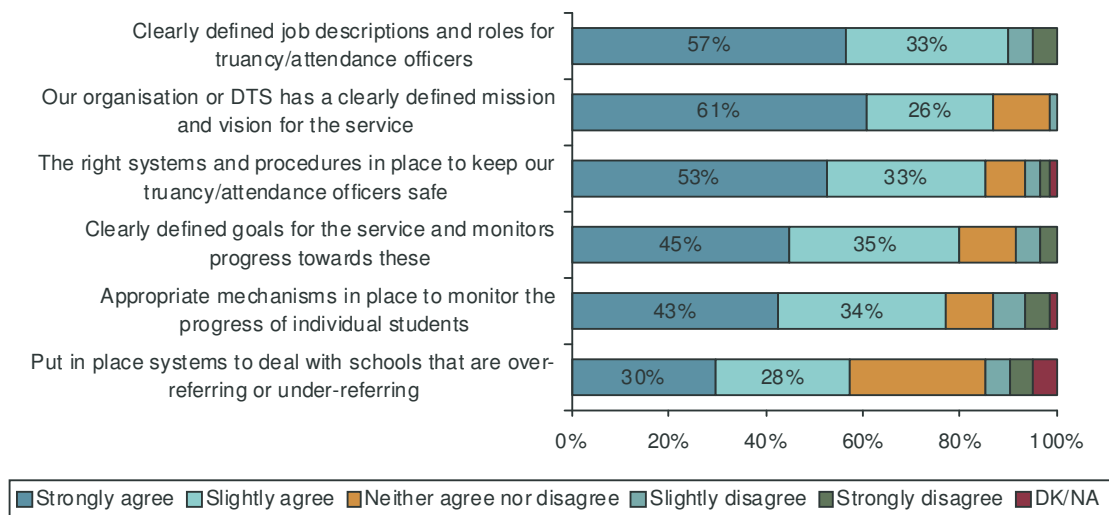
One school in our region had a 20% absence rate on any given day. They were capturing our time and focus as every day there would be huge number of referrals from that one school alone. So we put an incentive in place with the teachers, students, parents and everyone else. They would get a huge reward if they would be able to bring it down to 5%. And they did. We organised an interschool competition and they all had charts up on the wall for the kids to see and when a kid was absent everyone would pull that kid up. They would go to the kid's house and say come up, you are dragging the chain and bring him to school the next day. It was fantastic. We got Mad Butcher to give us a whole lot of sausages and we did barbecues for the whole school. It was a positive way of framing the problem and gets everyone on board. (Provider)

Processes that are in place to run the service

Organisation systems and processes

The case study component of the evaluation identified that the provider organisation's systems and processes were critical in addressing truancy as it allowed them to take a more structured approach to planning, prioritising and responding to referrals. Figure 14 below shows that the majority of truancy officers believed their service had clearly defined mission, vision and job descriptions along with appropriate systems and procedures in place to support them in doing their work.

Figure 14: Levels of agreement/disagreement with statements regarding provider policy and procedures



Q11/12: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following?

Base: All respondents n=62

Systems to deal with over-referring or under-referring schools

The most revealing data from Figure 14 is that only 30% 'strongly agree' that 'they had systems in place to deal with over-referring or under-referring schools' and 43% 'strongly agree' that 'they had appropriate mechanisms to monitor the progress of individual students'. This is important as these systems and procedures are critical to delivering a proactive service as they allow providers to analyse patterns of usage and follow up with schools to look for patterns of attendance. However providers often did not have access to school attendance information and consequently, the service was described as 'lacking teeth'. Providers also identified the lack of national attendance data as a problem as it did not allow them to monitor the overall impact of the service or the rate and severity of truancy. Many providers noted the need for a centralised database of truants to enable:

- monitoring of progress towards a reduction in truancy over time
- monitoring the impact of specific initiatives on truancy over time
- identification of patterns of truancy in specific subgroups to facilitate the development of targeted initiatives for those at risk.

We have realised that in order for us to be really effective we need to see the attendance information of schools. We need to get into their heads and understand how they code the information, are they doing it consistently, are they missing anything. We should not have to wait for the referral as some schools do not know they have a problem. So we have started this initiative and invited three schools to be part of our pilot project. We are doing a roll audit for them. We went through every year 9, 10, 11 student on their roll and looked at their attendance at an individual level. We highlighted ones that we felt had patterns – taking Mondays off; lots of medicals; lots of

justified absences etc. We look at the whole range. We may also find that some teachers had more justified absences than others. So how do we explore that? We then discuss this information with the school management team and it really helps the school to take a more objective, bird's-eye view of their school. It has been fascinating and the three schools are really on board. (Provider)

In the absence of national level information and the focus on completing milestone reports, providers to varying degrees had developed their own data collection mechanisms. Three-quarters of providers recorded their referrals and outcomes electronically in some form. The complexity of these systems varied significantly with some providers having invested in customised, fit-for-purpose databases, whilst others stored this information in Excel spreadsheets. Each provider had developed their own unique system and a majority of providers believed their system allowed them to:

- access individual student information easily (87% strongly agree or agree)
- create reports about individual schools (74% strongly agree or agree)
- produce the milestone reports (82% strongly agree or agree).

63% of providers were confident that they could create reports to understand trends in truancy across the schools in their cluster. However, one in four providers strongly disagree or disagree that their systems allowed them to do such fine grain analysis. This demonstrates the variability which in turn impacts on the *effectiveness* of the systems that are in place.

Defining role of truancy officers

Providers noted that in practice defining the role of a truancy officer was often difficult and many of the truancy officers discussed how hard it was to 'draw the line' on where the role ended, particularly in relation to the area of 'counselling', or supporting families/whānau to access other organisations. Truancy officers we spoke with were confident in their ability to identify when additional support services were required and when to escalate a situation (e.g. finding children home alone caring for even younger siblings). Following are some examples from the case studies of where a truancy officer's work goes beyond their job description in order to facilitate a satisfactory outcome for the student:

- Truancy officers provided food to families whilst they came to terms with the need to utilise food banks or access food vouchers.
- For illiterate parents they read letters from organisations such as WINZ and CYFS until the parent(s) were ready to speak to the respective organisations to let them know they were unable to read and hence needed a different level of support to access the service.
- They visited students regularly at school to keep encouraging them until they were ready to seek help from appropriately qualified confidential and discreet counselling services.

Interagency meetings

In order to enhance communication with other agencies and provide a holistic solution to the problem, providers organised and facilitated interagency meetings in their region. All providers participated in interagency meetings. The frequency and nature of these meetings varied significantly by provider. Two-thirds (61%) had formal, planned meetings at least once a month while 16% met once a term. 19% of providers said they did not have regular meetings and tended to meet on an ad-hoc basis as and when required.

A broad range of stakeholders participated in these meetings and the composition reflected the local context and need. All providers tended to have a close relationship with Police and/or Youth Offending Teams (79% of providers noted Police attended these meetings). Two-thirds of providers also identified family and social support services (44%) and education services (66%) as attending interagency meetings. In other instances youth support services, NETS and Regional Ministry staff also attended these meetings. In certain circumstances representatives from schools also attended these meetings. However in general schools did not attend these meetings and this allowed a level of independence to be maintained.

The manner in which these interagency meetings were run differed, but typically an agenda would cover off the following types of issues:

- New initiatives being considered by the agencies – e.g. Police truancy sweeps, DTS speaking with business about truant-free shopping zones.
- Resourcing constraints or organisational changes that could impact on relationships between services (e.g. changes in case managers at CYFS; changes in approach to case management; introduction of new systems).
- Summary of the state of play with regard to truancy and observations and reflections of any changes noticed by the agencies (e.g. issues such as the impact of weather conditions; emerging new areas or pockets that appear to attract truants; implications of events like swine flu).
- Detailed discussion on specific cases – this allowed the agencies to informally exchange relevant information about individual cases. This meant that DTS officers were aware of other agencies that were working with their families/whānau, in what capacity and any safety issues they needed to be aware of. Where meetings were more informal and ad-hoc, the main focus was generally on specific cases. These meetings were seen to be an invaluable source of information for all services and helped to ensure a high degree of co-ordination across the different actors in the truancy system.

Training support offered to truancy officers

The majority of truancy officers employed by providers (55%) had no qualifications beyond secondary schooling. This highlighted that there was a strong need for providers to ensure truancy officers had adequate training and support to undertake their role. However 51% of truancy officers indicated their organisations had a training budget and 21% said they did not

know. The case studies revealed that most providers made general training available to their staff e.g. first aid courses, police dog handling skills, courses on personal safety, talks from social workers. More formal training was usually undertaken with other agencies as and when they were offered.

In the absence of training budgets:

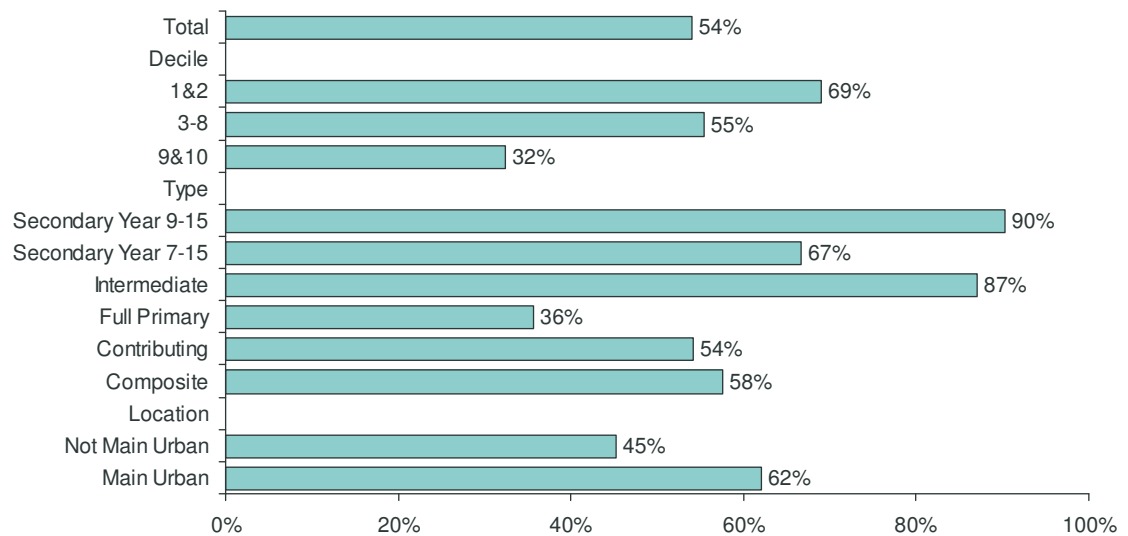
- some truancy officers undertook activities such as social work courses in their own time and at their own expense
- providers in some situations were forced to prioritise training options based on cost rather than quality, relevance or need.

DTS Managers indicated a strong need for appropriate and relevant training such as computer skills, working in a professional environment, writing for professionals and more advance training such as working with adolescents, conflict management and resolution, negotiation skills to support their officers in their role. However in the absence of training budgets, these were often neglected.

Providers also noted that in the absence of any national training programme, professional development was often overlooked, that providers approach training very differently and that there was no consistency in the level and quality of training that could be accessed by truancy officers.

Who uses DTS

As part of the schools survey, principals were asked if their school had used DTS this year (i.e. in the first six months of 2009). The findings showed that 54% of schools had used the service and this figure is validated by the milestone reports. Figure 15 below provides a profile of those who had used the service and the findings show that secondary schools were more likely to use the service than primary schools; and within secondary schools students from years 9 – 15 are more likely to have used the service than those from years 7 – 15; intermediate schools were also relatively high users of the service. Not surprisingly, lower decile schools were more likely to use the service, as were schools in urban areas.

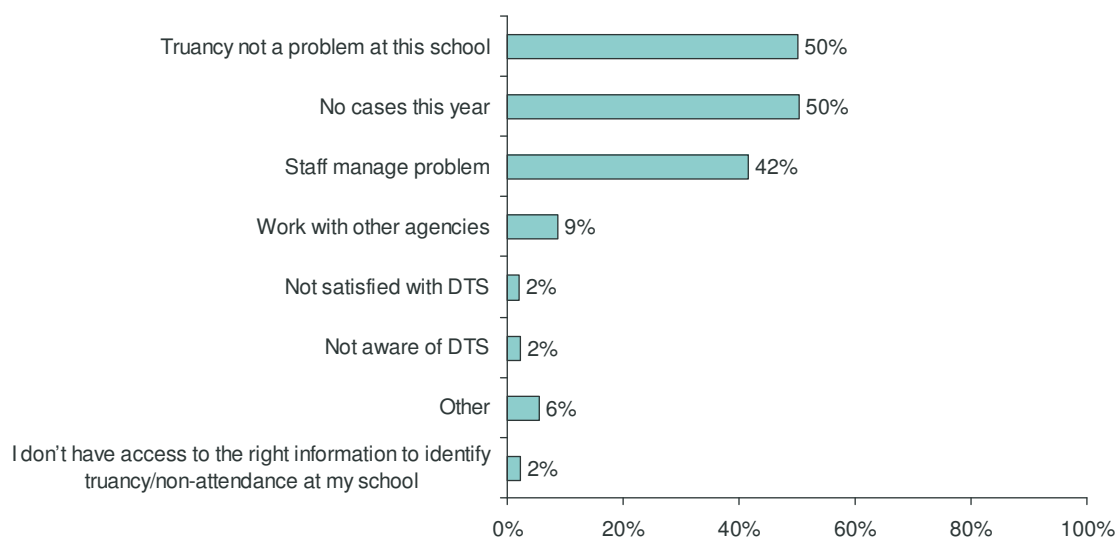
Figure 15: Profile of those who use DTS

Q1 Has your school used the DTS this year?

Base: All respondents (n=293), varies for each bar, refer sample breakdown for counts

Schools that did not use the service tended to believe truancy was not a problem for their school or reported that they did not have any cases this year, and 42% of those not using the service indicated they managed cases of truancy themselves. Case studies also revealed that some schools did not use the service because it was 'not a good' look for the school to have a truancy officer come in and out of the school, or that the school was in denial about the problem. Without access to attendance information, it is difficult to judge the real reasons why and the extent to which this occurred. On the positive side, the survey findings showed that awareness of DTS was not a barrier to use (only 2% of non-users were unaware of the service) and dissatisfaction with DTS was also not a factor in non-use.

Figure 16: Reasons for not using DTS



Q8 Which of the following describes why you have not used the DTS this year?

Base: Respondents who had not used the DTS (n=250)

Perceived role of DTS

Provider perceptions of role

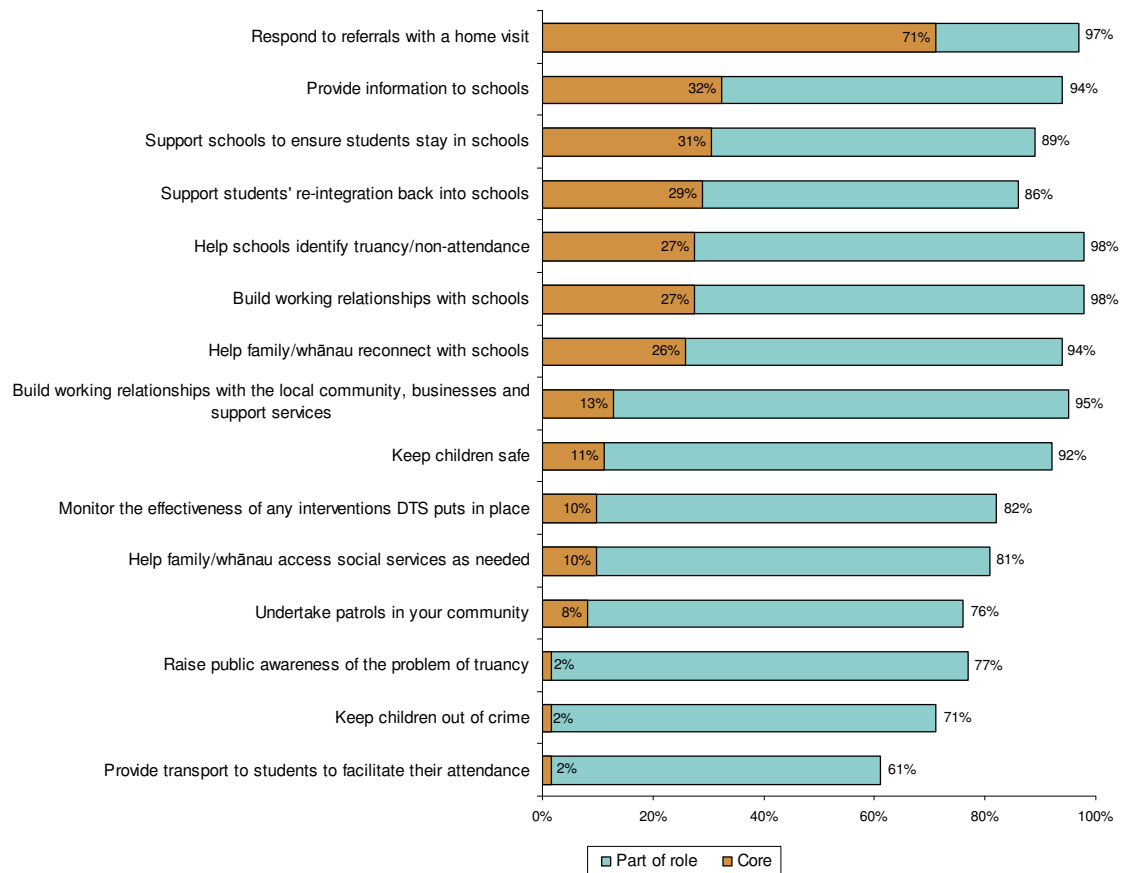
Our interviews with stakeholders and our review of relevant documents indicated that the role and purpose of DTS was seen as ‘supporting schools to find and locate truants’. As per the contract, its main function was defined as ‘acting as an extended arm for the school and providing the school with meaningful information about why a student is not at school’. Our review of the contracts showed that each DTS provider was contracted to:

- contact the schools listed in their contracts (school cluster) in the first term to explain the service offered and how they can be reached
- receive and immediately acknowledge all referrals from schools of students who are truant
- return the student who is truant to the referring school
- inform the school when the student is returned, or if they are unable to locate or return the student
- liaise as appropriate with the school, family/whānau and other agencies in order to identify the likely reasons for a student’s non-attendance
- maintain accurate records of all referrals
- report to the Ministry of Education any school-aged children found who are not enrolled at a registered school
- work with schools, community groups, business, family/whānau and other agencies to support schools to reduce truancy within their community

- submit four milestone reports (one per term) to the Ministry of Education against these activities.

Providers saw their key role as supporting schools but the type of support offered varied significantly, as illustrated in the following charts:

Figure 17: How providers perceive their role



Q1: which of the following do you see as part of your role as a District Truancy Service provider?
 Q2: Of these which best summarise the **three** core aspects of the DTS provider's role?
 Base: All respondents n=62

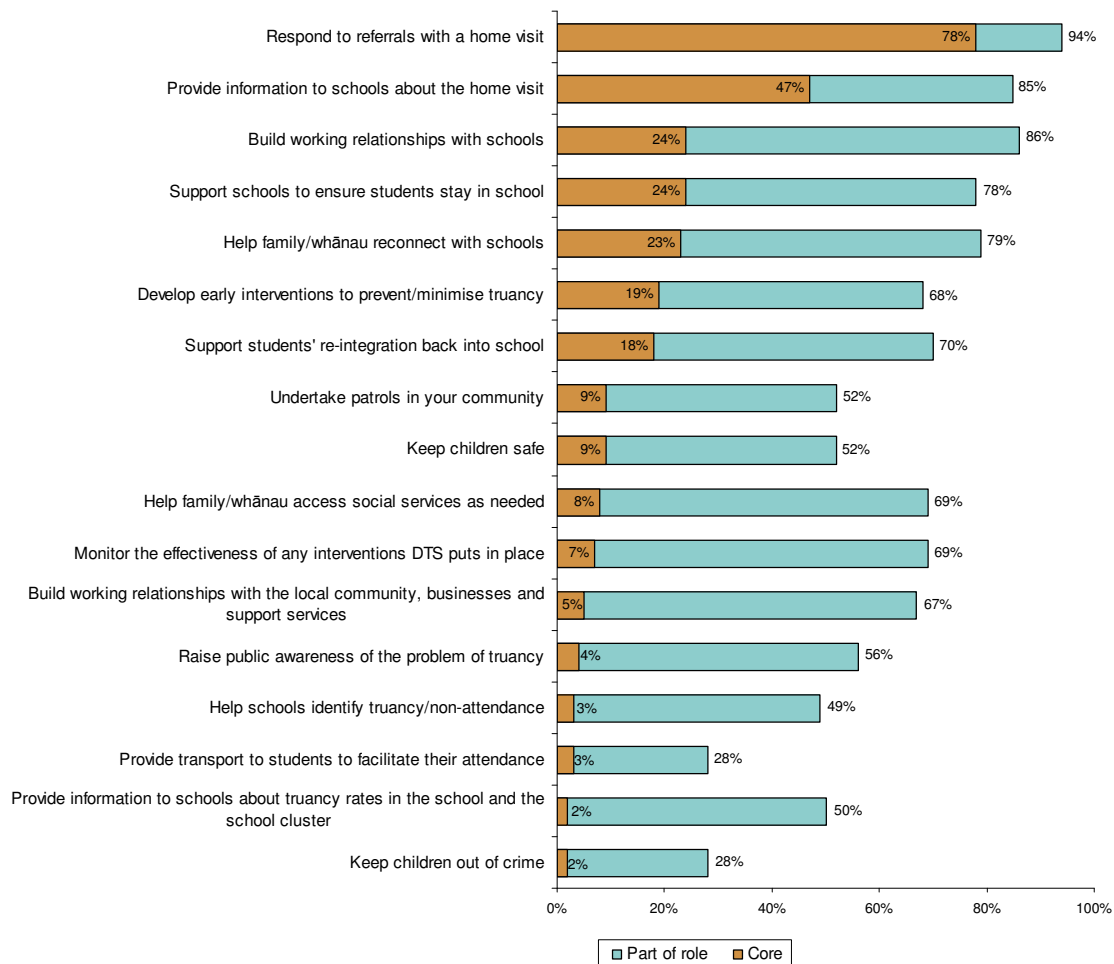
Providers were also asked what activities they perceived to be part of their role and of these, which three they believed were *core* to their role. There was significant variation across providers as to what they viewed as being core to their role. There was a higher degree of consistency in what providers saw as being part of their role, with all providers viewing the role quite broadly. It was interesting to note that providers were less likely to associate transport with their role and yet during the case studies this was clearly a major aspect of the role that was often a critical step in getting a student back to school.

All providers believed that working with families and the wider community was critical to achieving positive outcomes for students.

Schools perceptions of role of DTS

Like providers, schools perceived the role of any truancy management service to be very wide but were focused on activities to support and respond to the needs of schools. Schools were considerably less likely than providers to associate the role with the broader community aspects such as raising public awareness of the problem and building working relationships with the community. Schools were also less likely to see the DTS role as assisting with the diagnosis and monitoring of the problem. Figure 18 below shows what schools believe is part of and core to DTS's role.

Figure 18: How schools perceive the role of DTS



Q16 Which of the following do you see as being part of the role of the DTS provider?
 Q17 Of these which best summarise the **three** core aspects of the DTS provider's role?
 Base: Respondents who had used the DTS this year (n=293)

Truancy officers' perceptions of the role

Truancy officers appeared to take a student-centric focus and saw their role as providing all necessary support to a student to enable them to achieve enduring educational outcomes. This included working with their family/whānau and/or schools to break down barriers to attendance and learning. Ultimately truancy officers saw their role as much broader than just ensuring students attend school. As a result many officers took a longer term focus and saw the role as enabling students to secure their future (i.e. education leading to the prospect of a job; ability to contribute to society and care for themselves).

Truancy officers were often from the local community and this meant that they understood the local context, knew the families, and had strong local networks in their communities. This level of local knowledge was viewed by all (students, families, principals, truancy officers, Police and other stakeholders) as a critical factor in contributing to the effectiveness of the officer. However as a result officers had difficulty in cutting off from the role and tended to go beyond the call of duty.

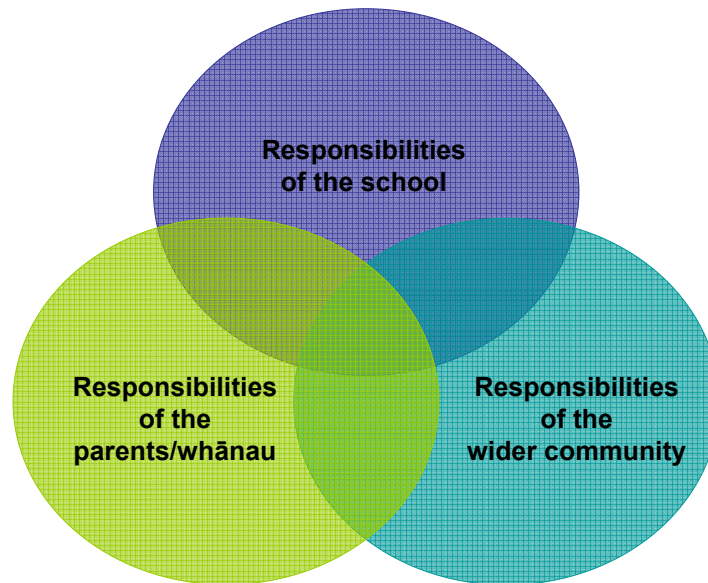
Accountability and responsibility of providers

Providers were accountable to:

- the Ministry as a funder of the service – provided milestone reports in order to justify their funding
- schools as users of the service – fulfilled this through responding to referrals and providing information in a timely manner
- students as receivers of the service – providers located, returned students and worked with students to reduce barriers to attendance and followed up with additional initiatives to sustain attendance
- parents/family/whānau as receivers of the service – providers referred parents to other agencies and followed through on their actions to ensure relevant support had been implemented
- community – through responding to referrals from the public and ensuring that their community was free of truants and crime.

The following diagram illustrates the interrelationships between these and the challenges this poses for addressing truancy. An effective response requires that all actors in the system take ownership and understand their responsibilities for reducing truancy.

Figure 19: Shared accountabilities



Despite the breadth of accountability, providers had an unequivocal focus and sense of responsibility for students receiving an education. Case studies revealed many examples of truancy officers looking for innovative and creative solutions to get students educated, including working with businesses, training providers and schools to develop part-time study and work options, providing incentives to students to attend through different rewards schemes and working with parents to help them help their children.

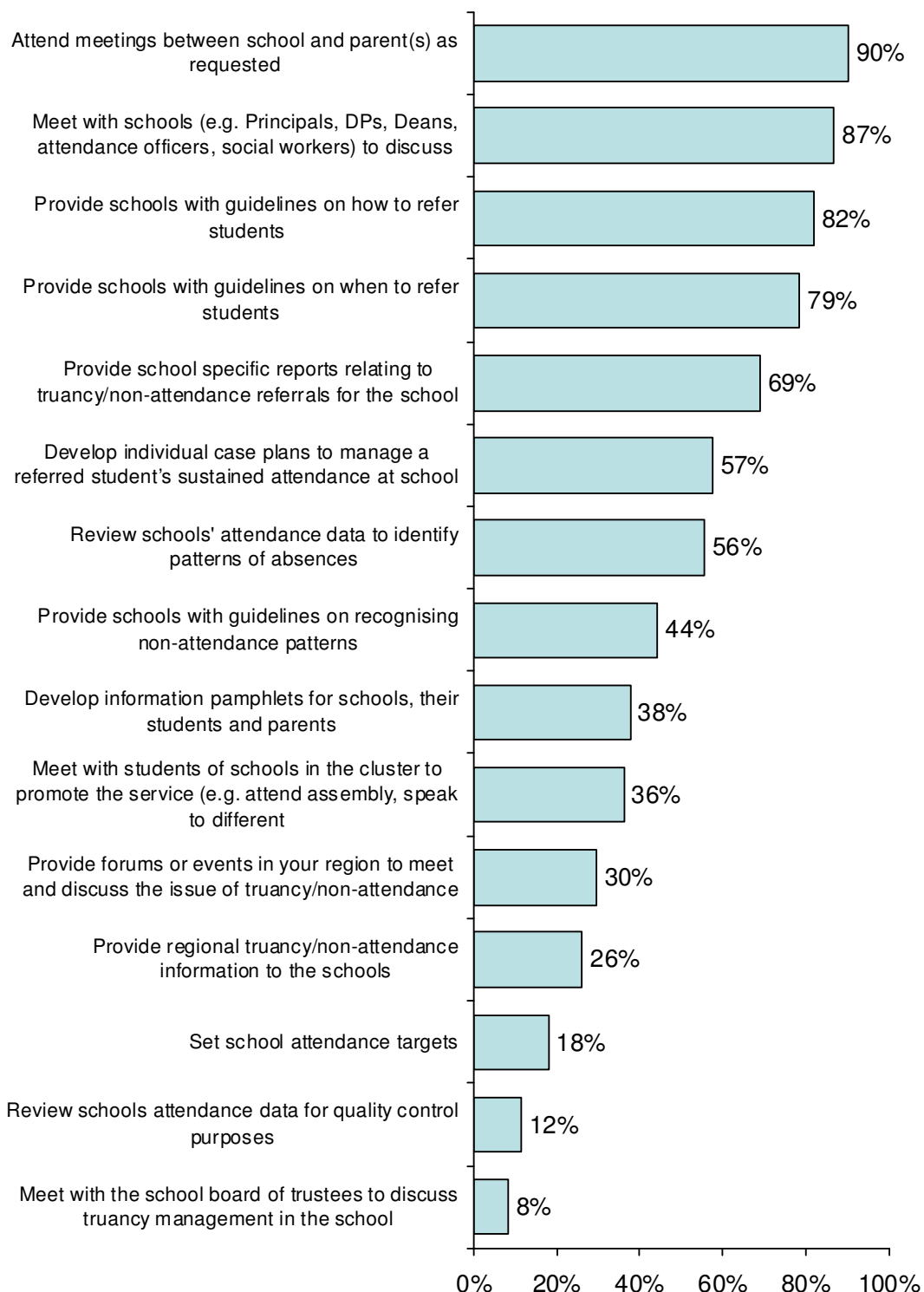
Services provided to schools, the community, truants and their families

In response to the high expectations of schools and the broad definitions of the role and the diverse lines of accountability, it was not surprising to note that providers tended to offer a wide range of services to the school, the community, the truants and their families.

In the survey, providers were asked what services they provided to schools, truants and their families. They were asked to select from a predetermined list and were encouraged to indicate as many or as few as they provided. Figures 20 to 22 below show what providers believed they offered.

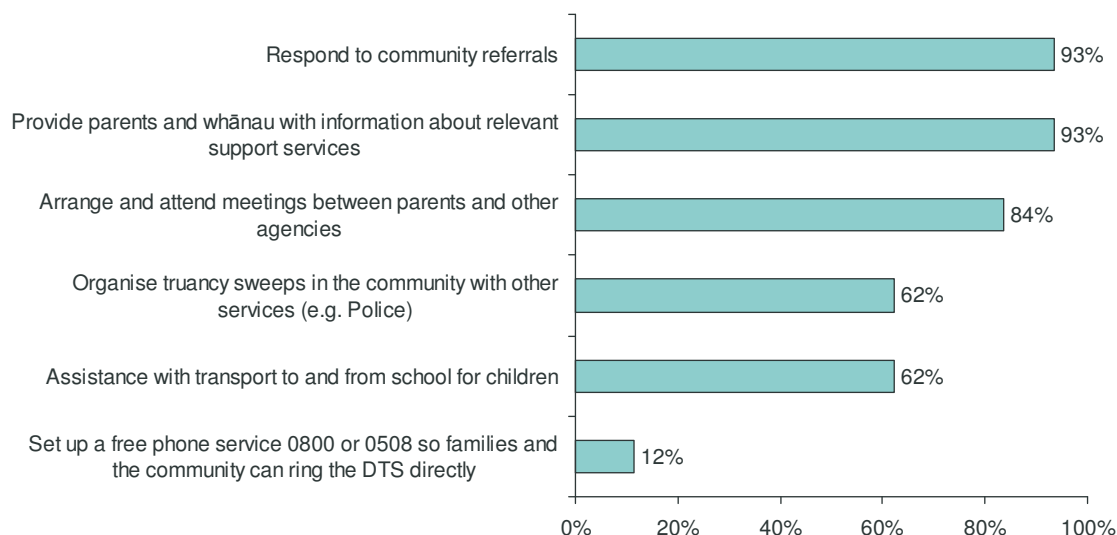
Given the contractual arrangement, funding constraints and passive national management of the service it was not surprising that only few providers offered some of the more proactive services such as meeting with students to promote the service, providing guidelines on recognising non-attendance patterns, providing regional truancy/non-attendance information to schools, meeting with schools boards of trustees. Most tended to adhere to the requirements as per the contract and undertook additional initiatives on an ad hoc basis.

Figure 20: Services DTS provides to schools



Q21 Which of the following services activities do you routinely undertake with or for schools in your cluster?
 Base: All respondents who answered n=61

Figure 21: Services DTS provides to truants and their families/whānau



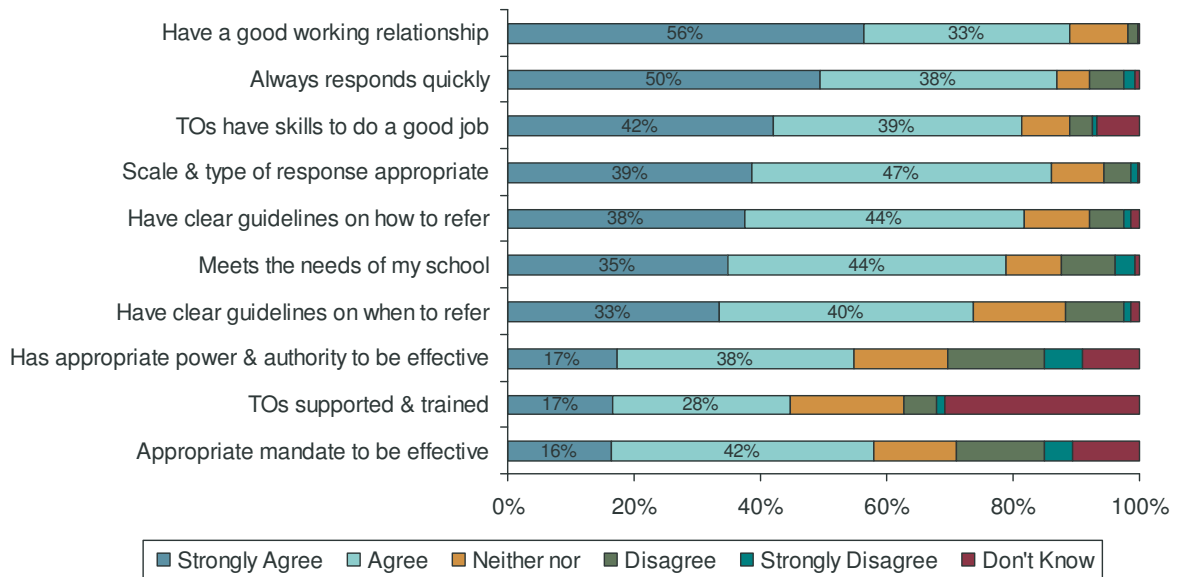
Q23 Which of the following services activities do you provide to families of truant/truants/community?
 Base: All respondents who answered n=61

Schools perceptions of DTS performance

Principals who had used the DTS were asked how satisfied they were with the service overall and it was heartening to note that 84% were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the service and only 7% were ‘dissatisfied’ or ‘very dissatisfied’.

Principals interviewed in the case studies suggested that speed of response and relationship were key factors that influenced how they felt about DTS. Therefore the schools survey specifically asked principals about how strongly they ‘agreed’ or ‘disagreed’ with a range of statements about the DTS, including speed of response and their relationship with schools. Figure 23 below outlines the results. In line with the high levels of satisfaction, we also see high levels of agreement with statements regarding relationship with providers, speed and appropriateness of response and skills of the truancy officers. Schools identify weaknesses in the service with regards to mandate and the power/authority of the service to be effective. This reinforces providers’ notions of the system lacking teeth and highlights that they were constrained in their role by a number of factors beyond their control.

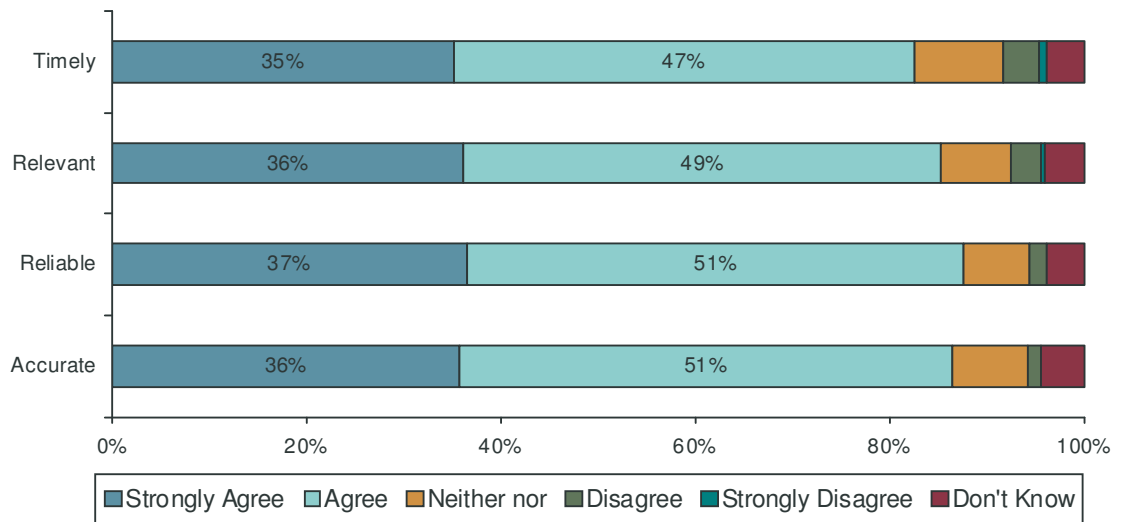
Figure 22: How schools perceive the performance of DTS



Q20: How Strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements
 Base: All schools who had used the DTS this year (n=293)

Principals were also asked about their perceptions relating to the quality of the information provided to them following a home visit across four dimensions: timeliness; relevance; reliability and accuracy. Principals indicated they had high levels of ‘agreement’ on these dimensions, as summarised in figure 24 below.

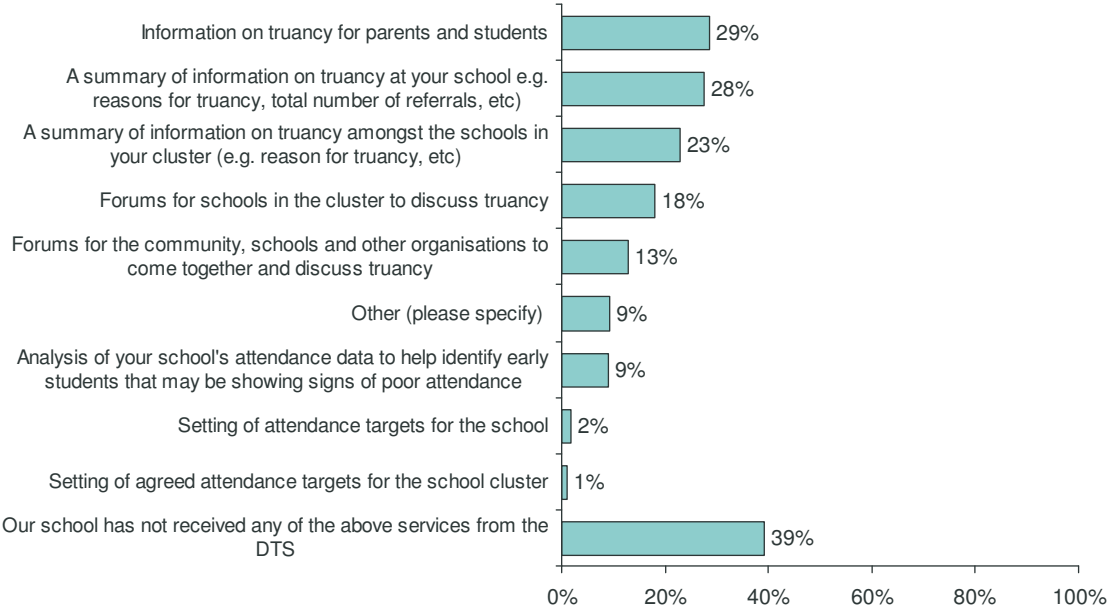
Figure 23: Schools’ perceptions regarding the information DTS provides following a home visit



Q21: Thinking specifically about the information the DTS provides about a student’s absence, how strongly do you agree or disagree that the information provided to you is
 Base: All schools who had used the DTS this year (n=293)

Principals were also asked about the range of other services they received and figure 25 below summarises these results. The findings showed that four in ten schools were not receiving any of the additional services listed, despite many providers claiming that they offer these services. The case studies indicate that the extent to which these additional services are offered is a reflection of the nature of their relationship with schools. In instances where the relationship was close and had been built over time, the schools tended to access greater levels of support from DTS, whilst those schools who shared a more functional relationship with DTS tended to keep DTS at arms length and used them only sparingly. Providers found this situation frustrating as they had limited ability to influence how schools in their cluster responded to truancy or how schools chose to work with DTS.

Figure 24: Additional services schools recall the DTS providing to their schools



Q22 Which of the following, if any, does the DTS provide to your school?
 Base: Respondents who had used the DTS this year (n=293)

Otara Boards Forum, Auckland

The Otara Boards Forum (OBF) was formed to help raise student achievement in Otara, and to work with parents, the community, the Ministry of Education, principals, teachers and any others, to form a united front against under-achievement. In 2008 they received 4,500 referrals.

OBF is the organisation that holds the contract with the Ministry for truancy and runs the Manukau Truancy Service (MTS) covering Papatoetoe, Mangere, Manurewa and Otara. The region is home to 184 different cultural groups, has the largest Māori population in New Zealand and less than a third of the population live in areas rated highest on the Social Deprivation Index. The Service caters to approximately 94 schools (105 including Alternative Education) and a significant number of these schools are low decile schools. The Service is one of the largest DTSs and employs 6.5 FTE as truancy officers. The truancy officers are multi-lingual and are based in the community.

The Manukau Truancy Services has well-developed structures and systems for ensuring the smooth running of the service. The relationship with OBF has been a core strength for the truancy service as since the Otara Boards Forum began, there has been a drop in Māori truancy rates and a rise in student achievement – a shift that the organisation attributes to the strong focus on unified school governance. The truancy officers in MTS firmly believe that truancy is only ‘the tip of the iceberg’ and that more often than not schools and school practices are only a small part of the problem. As a result they spend a fair amount of their time connecting families to other social service agencies and following up with other agencies to ensure that problems have been addressed. Conversations with parents indicated that the fact that MTS is independent of the school was an important factor and enabled them to engage more openly with the officers. They commented on their reluctance to engage with schools as they often felt ‘ashamed’, ‘embarrassed’ or ‘intimidated’ in that environment.

MTS has implemented a range of innovative practices including promoting messages around attendance (through the Everyday Counts campaign) and streamlining their processes to enhance the efficiency of their operations (e.g. 0508 free phone number; templates to ensure consistency in referrals). In addition they have proactively initiated relationships with local businesses and retailers to get wider community buy-in and ownership of the problem, and created truancy-free zones in the community. Through the Otara Boards Forum, the Service also has access to schools and can ensure that truancy stays on the radar for schools and the parent community in this region.

Part III: What works? Dimensions of effective practice

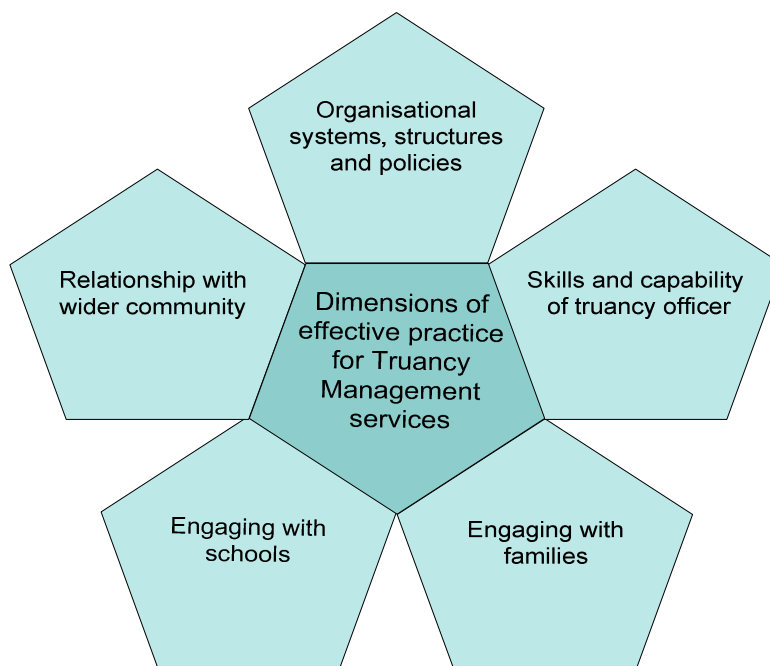
A key question posed for this evaluation was to identify dimensions of effective practice across the providers with a view to developing the Ministry's knowledge base about what constitutes effective practice in provision of truancy services. Evaluators were tasked with gathering the data to identify strong, adequate and poor providers. The scoping phase revealed that it was challenging to do this owing to the strong output focus of the DTS contracts. If one was to determine effectiveness of providers on the basis of their ability to deliver and meet contract obligations, all providers can be deemed as being successful. Investigating this a bit further revealed that there were other characteristics of effective practice evidenced by providers and these can be broadly categorised into five areas:

- Organisational systems and processes – structures, systems, policies and processes in place to enable the organisation to track and respond to referrals.
- Engagement with schools – ways of working with schools to promote use of the service and achieve successful outcomes for students.
- Relationship with the wider community – ways of working with other agencies to meet needs of their students, families and the school.
- Skills and capability of the truancy officers – qualities and attributes of the officers that enables them to achieve positive outcomes.
- Engagement with families – ways of working with parents so as to support them to play their role as parents and support schools and students.

Our assessment of effective practice is based on feedback received from providers, school principals, parents and families of truants, students and wider community/social service agencies. Their reflections and observations have clearly identified particular practices that appeared to make the difference and support the achievement of outcomes. For instance, school principals acknowledged that practices such as setting of attendance targets or proactively reviewing school attendance systems had focused their attention on the problem and helped identify the problem early. Parents of truants interviewed stated that it was the non-threatening, enabling style and approach of truancy officers that led to their engagement with schools on the issue when all previous attempts by the school failed. Such feedback gathered during the interviews forms the core of our analysis presented in this discussion. While there is no evidence to show any causal link between particular practices and outcomes there is sufficient evidence to show that these practices collectively created favourable conditions for outcomes to be achieved.

These dimensions of effective practice can be diagrammatically represented in the following way:

Figure 25: Dimensions of effective practice



The following section unpacks what effective practice looks like in the context of each area and identifies the 'exceptions' – i.e. providers that had developed unique solutions or practices for their regions. These practices were specifically tailored to the context of their community and therefore cannot be generalised or imposed across all providers.

Organisational systems, structures and policies

It was clear from the contracts and milestone reports that there was a great variety in the way providers were organised. There was no consistent structural model that could be said to be the 'ideal' type, as provider groups had evolved over the years in ways that reflected the needs of their communities. Overall, the provider survey showed that most providers have the organisational systems, structures and processes that enable them to operate effectively and efficiently with schools in their cluster. These findings were supported by the case study visits where documents and data collection systems were also reviewed. However providers found significant challenges in implementing these systems systematically and consistently owing to the lack of resources and the varying levels of capability within their own organisations.

Table 2: Effective practice relating to organisational systems, structures and policies

Effective practice	Some exceptions	Challenges faced by providers
<p>Providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have clearly defined mission and vision for the service • have clearly defined job descriptions, templates and guidelines for ensuring consistency of service • have systems and processes for tracking referrals and strategies for dealing with over or under-referring schools • have quality data management systems to analyse patterns (student, family, school) • monitor progress towards outcomes regularly • review effectiveness of individual interventions • provide training and PD for their staff • cluster level analysis to ensure regional focus • uniforms and formal identification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proactive approach e.g. everyday counts; ongoing monitoring; 0508 reporting line; Literacy Day; lollipops; working weekends and evenings • setting of attendance targets for the cluster to ensure focus on outcomes • market and promote the service through seminars on truancy to students, parents and the wider community • safety protocols and procedures to protect TO and students (working in pairs) • database information used to inform strategic planning for the service; develop strategies for particular families in their region • provide individual reports to schools to lift awareness and understanding of the problem within their school • team meetings are used as a learning forum to promote sharing and learning • link with SMS providers to support analysis of attendance data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding constraints severe limitation to ensuring effective practice across all providers • varying levels of capability within provider organisations • 53% employ one TO – challenging from a safety point of view • mismatch between what providers say they do for schools and what schools say they receive • systems capability of providers variable and administratively inefficient

Skills and capability of truancy officers

Local knowledge and networks was identified as a critical success factor for a truancy officer and providers strived to retain their experienced staff against the backdrop of dwindling resources. For instance in Dargaville, the truancy officer was well known and had historical knowledge about the community, the families in the community and the relationships between them. As a result he was able to make connections and inferences that kept him safe and also made him highly effective in tracking truants. Schools accepted that these skills and understandings were what made the difference and were valued most by them.

Table 3: Effective practice in relation to skills and capability of truancy officers

Effective practice	Some exceptions	Challenges faced by providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear understanding of roles and responsibilities • multi-lingual • skilled facilitators, conflict resolution, discreet • knowledge about adolescent behaviour • mana, credibility in the community • in-depth understanding of family and local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek out additional funding opportunities through community grants, sponsorship, business donations in cash or in kind • find opportunities to link in with training offered by other social service agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as TO come from the community they find it difficult to detach from their work • driven by a strong social conscience and therefore maintaining boundary is hard for some • levels of pay are low • limited access to appropriate and relevant training • limited access to sharing across other providers • the nature of the problem requires that they often visit the family on weekends and/or evenings • lack of training and professional development opportunities means that they end up training at their own expense • use their own vehicles

Engagement with families

Establishing strong relationships with families of truants posed significant challenges for providers as they were often mistrustful of any support services. Clearly their previous experiences with these agencies influenced and contributed to these perceptions. Families of truants also had negative experiences during their own schooling years and therefore did not see value in engaging with schools when faced with the problem. As illustrated in the following quotation, families are usually at a loss to deal with the problem and if approached in a non-confrontational manner may be grateful of the support and engage with it:

He refused to go to school and I let him hang around the house. I didn't know what to do. We live out in the rural countryside and so it was not like he was getting into any trouble. He just did his own thing. I also didn't see the point as he was 16 and so not really engaged with school that much anyway. Now that I have worked it through with the truancy officer, I can see how I may have contributed to the situation. He took the time to come and see me, and explain to me why it was important that he attend school. I get it now. (Parent)

School based providers found this aspect of their role the most challenging as they often did not have the skills or experience to engage with families of truants. Parents described approaches by teachers as ‘talking at very high level’ and ‘unable to come down to my level’ as part of their reasons for disengaging with efforts made by the school. In contrast the truancy officers of the DTS were seen as ‘like us’ and approachable and accessible and parents allowed them into their homes.

Table 4: Effective practice in relation to engagement with families

Effective practice	Some exceptions	Challenges faced by providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to communicate in their language or plain English • ability to communicate with young people • non-judgmental; non-threatening; neutral • truancy office belongs to the community • connect parents to other agencies based on need • supporting families by transporting them and attending meetings with school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follow up with families • attend meetings with parents and other agencies • following up with other agencies on behalf of the family • providing basic amenities to families (uniforms, food, blankets, kitchenware, transportation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • families of truants usually also have negative experiences with schools and other services • difficult to engage with teachers (e.g. presenting written documents to illiterate parent; parents feel judged) • focus on attendance and educational outcomes but unable to provide wrap-around services to support positive outcome on all fronts • wrapping prosecutions within the role of TO undermines the trust and relationship with families

Engagement with schools

In order to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of their service, DTSs needed to develop strong relationships with their schools, and the high levels of awareness of DTSs in the school survey indicated that DTSs were successful in this regard. The extent to which DTSs engaged with non-user schools was the only exception to this – while they marketed and promoted the service to all schools, there was a tendency to focus on schools that used the service. In instances where the DTS contract was held by the school, it was more likely that the service would focus on users than non-users. Therefore working with over-referring schools and under-referring schools can be said to be an indicator of effective practice by providers.

Effective engagement with schools did allow providers access to attendance information to help track and monitor data more closely and work proactively with schools to identify problems early. However schools operate in a self-managing model and were not always willing to share this information openly with providers. This impacted on the provider’s ability to be effective.

Table 5: Effective practice in relation to engagement with schools

Effective practice	Some exceptions	Challenges faced by providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • market and promote service to all schools • maintain focus on schools not referring • ease of referral through templates • invest in building ongoing relationships with schools • respond to referrals in a timely manner • provide relevant information to schools about reasons for non-attendance • undertake home visits • support schools to ensure students stay in school (attend meetings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locate truancy officers in secondary schools • work with schools that over-refer or under-refer • allowing student input to ensure accuracy of information (student taking responsibility) • attend school events e.g. school fair, sports events to forge relationships with school; sharing highs and lows with school; image of TO • proactively review school attendance data to support schools to identify problems early 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providers rely on schools to track and monitor attendance data • in theory schools have systems to monitor attendance data; in practice, there are a number of problems: teachers do not input or input incorrectly; data is not synthesised to identify patterns, etc • lack of communication between who refers and who holds information about student • schools that are in denial that they have a problem • lack of system incentives to work with under-referring schools

Relationships with the wider community

The DTS contract clearly states the Ministry's expectations in this regard. It requires providers to work with schools, community groups, businesses, family/whānau and other agencies to identify likely reasons for truancy and support schools to reduce truancy within their community. It is therefore not surprising to note that providers have actively built relationships with other agencies to find longer term solutions to the problem. The approaches taken by the providers were quite different – while some actively included representatives from other agencies as part of their management committees, others engaged with them on an as-needs basis. This is reflective of their philosophical approach to the issue of truancy and their beliefs about what works best for achieving sustainable solutions. Providers place the needs and interests of the student and the family in the centre and as a result, most work undertaken in this regard goes beyond the call of duty and is not 'paid' for by the DTS contract.

Table 6: Effective practice in relation to engagement with the wider community

Effective practice	Some exceptions	Challenges faced by providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong relationships with wider community agencies, businesses, church groups in the region • management committee has representatives from other agencies • ensure focus on truancy in the wider community • refer families to other agencies as appropriate • truancy sweeps; truancy free zones; spot checks; locating community constables at school entrances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one-stop-shop • support other agency efforts on truancy • attend meetings of other agencies to be in the know with what is going on with a view to serving their community better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most work undertaken by providers in this regard goes beyond the call of duty • driven by personal commitment and philosophy of providers – unpaid work • recognition that problem needs a collective response – but funding does not permit that • referring case may not be the priority for the other agency and needs to fit the criteria to avail service

To sum up

We believe that it is possible for the Ministry to use the data and evidence generated from this evaluation to support and drive effective practice across the service nationally e.g. through the design and development of self-assessment tools or templates building on the information available on effective practice through this evaluation. It also shows that there are aspects of the current response that work and are effective in achieving the desired outcomes for truancy for the Ministry. However it also identifies aspects of practice that are effective and must be integrated within truancy management services in general and are not limited to DTS in its current form. The findings in this section also point to the need for the Ministry to build the systems and processes and capability of truancy services going forward to ensure a more coherent and consistent service across the country.

Determining effective practice for particular sub-population groups posed some challenges. The evaluation was focused at a provider level and aimed at generating aggregate level information about effective practices. It did not for instance focus particularly on what works for Māori or Pasifika groups. However providers that worked in communities with large Māori and Pasifika populations (e.g. Auckland, Dargaville) noted that the key to successful engagement with these groups was language skills; the open, facilitative, enabling style of the truancy officers; a family/student-centric approach and an approach that reflected the understanding of the socio-cultural context of these families. Most families we spoke with stated that the schools in their community had teachers who were unable to establish a strong, personal relationship with them and this was a barrier to achieving positive outcomes for their kids.

Part IV: So what? Implications

Drawing on the findings from the different research strands within this evaluation, the picture that emerges can be summarised as follows:

- Truancy is a complex social problem and one that is growing, reflecting the increasing levels of transience in our society. Regional Ministry of Education staff, schools and providers described truancy as the ‘tip of the iceberg’ and alluded to the pervasive underlying factors to truancy. The relationship between truancy and crime is also emerging as a clear priority for most regions, resulting in a stronger involvement of Police in dealing with issues of non-attendance. While the evaluation has been able to identify some of the most common reasons for truancy, the underlying causes of truancy are far more complex and not fully understood.
- Truancy management services such as DTS play an important role and act as an extended arm for schools in dealing with problems of non-attendance and chronic truants. As the services are located within the community, the service providers are able to use their depth of understanding and knowledge about the needs of their community – students, their families, schools, businesses and retailers and other social service agencies working in their community. Schools admit that it is difficult for them to develop and maintain such strong community networks and relationships – their teachers do not necessarily come from the same community; there have been an increasing number of overseas trained teachers particularly in remote communities like Dargaville. It is also difficult for schools to develop community networks due to time and workload constraints; because of inadequate skill levels in dealing with confrontational or aggressive parents; and due to safety considerations.

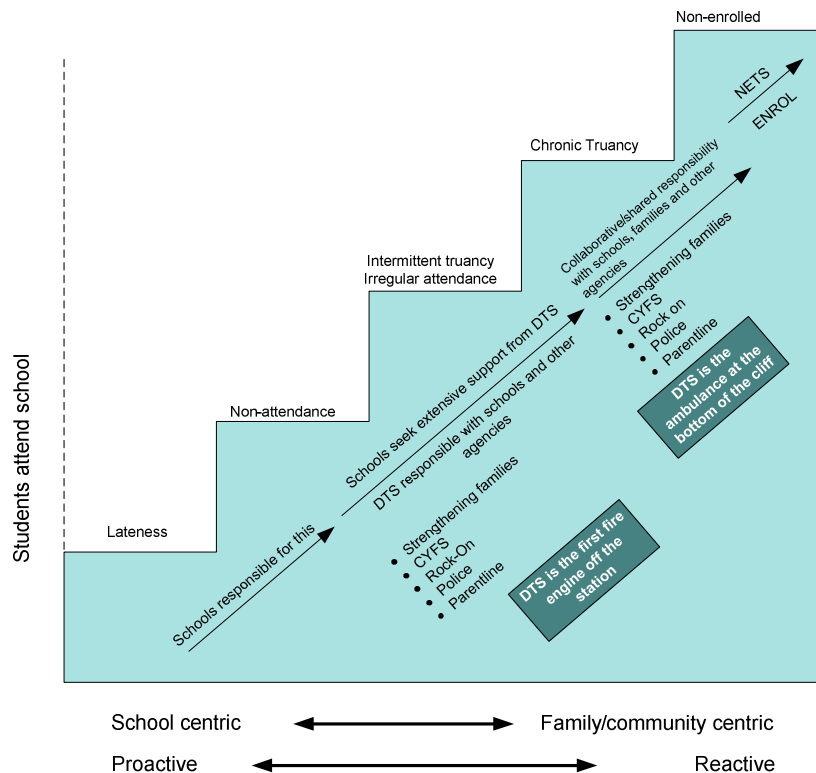
However, the output focus of the contract and funding levels has meant that the service as it is structured currently has been unable to keep pace with the changing nature and complexity of the problem. This has resulted in schools perceiving the service as ‘passive’ and has led schools to supplement the efforts of the DTS with their own efforts. The evaluation has identified some positive aspects/features of the current response which need to be considered by the Ministry as it moves forward with its plans for developing and designing effective solutions for addressing truancy. These have been discussed below:

- Truancy management services offered through the DTS in the current context are uniquely placed to serve the needs of the school for two reasons: first, the truancy officers are accessible and non-threatening and place the student and their family at the centre of their efforts. Consequently they take a broader approach to the problem and aim to support the student and the family *in every way possible* to help the student to attend school. Parents and school principals talked about how invaluable the truancy officer had been in helping them work through a range of problems – not just attendance. Secondly, they are one step removed from the school and bring an external, neutral perspective to the discussion on non-attendance. They in fact act as a bridge between the school, the parent, the student

and wider community and use their unique position to generate alternative, innovative, meaningful solutions.

- Providers have in place systems and processes to ensure they are able to respond to referrals as well as undertake proactive work with schools to identify problems early. This is critical to their success. However the evaluation findings showed a high level of variability across providers in terms of their systems and processes and also a high degree of variability in their ability to extract relevant information from the system quickly. This variability needs to be managed in any future policy response to address truancy.
- Given the complexity of the problem, any response to address truancy needs to be developed in collaboration with a number of players who operate in this space. Truancy services have established strong community networks over the years and this allows them easy access to information to support their students and their families. However the roles and responsibilities of these agencies often overlap causing confusion and administrative inefficiencies which needs to be addressed. There is also a lack of synergy between various systems and initiatives within the Ministry resulting in some students falling through the cracks. For instance, there is ENROL, eAR, NETs, DTS, seven different Student Management Systems and these systems also do not speak to one another placing an administrative burden on the school. The following figure illustrates the truancy continuum and the different players involved and their roles and responsibilities.

Figure 26: A truancy continuum



Current funding levels do not reflect the referral load, the geographical area covered by the provider nor have they been adjusted for inflation. This posed huge challenges for providers in attracting and/or retaining skilled staff and forced them to seek alternative sources of funding to deliver an effective service. There were many instances where the vehicle used by truancy officer was subsidised by an umbrella organisation which held the DTS contract, or training and development grants were sought for ensuring ongoing professional development of the truancy officers. This indicates that the 'success' of DTS cannot be solely attributed to the Ministry and that in fact a number of agencies were contributing to its success which can cloud the picture.

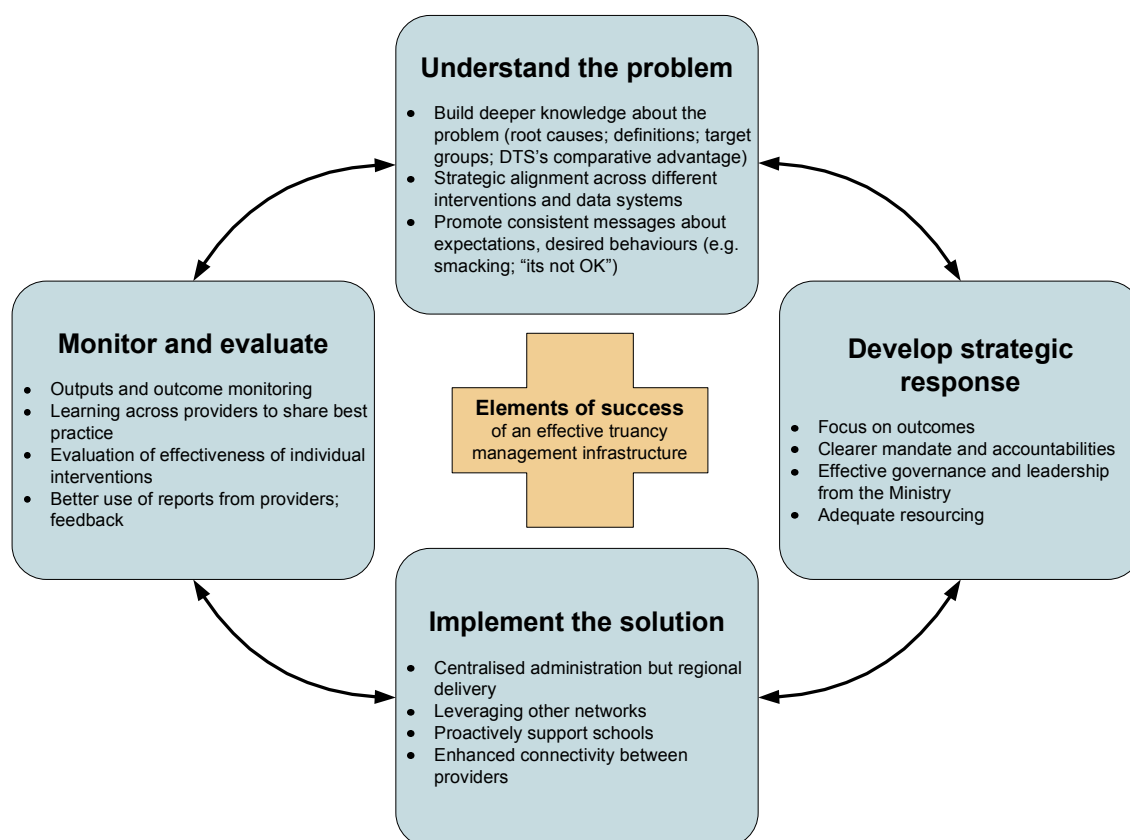
From the above discussion it is apparent that current truancy management 'system' i.e. DTS does offer significant value to all concerned and can be described as an effective and efficient service. However the *system* has not been nurtured or supported since its inception. This needs to be addressed in any response in the future.

A way forward

Drawing on the principles underpinning effective processes for policy development, the lifecycle of any intervention or a programme of interventions can generally be described by the following four phases: understanding the problem (problem definition; environmental scan), developing a response (strategy or policy initiative), implementing the response (implementation) and reflecting on and learning from the intervention (monitoring and evaluation).

During the course of this evaluation and our interviews with various DTS personnel and other stakeholders, it became apparent that each phase in an intervention's lifecycle has a number of 'elements of success'. The following diagram illustrates the high-level elements of success that have to be in place in order for interventions to have a good chance of achieving their intended outcomes.

Figure 27: Elements of success for an effective truancy management infrastructure



The following caveats however are important:

- If the elements of success are in place, they will not necessarily guarantee the desired effect. The underlying causes of truancy and the mix of interventions needed to address truancy are complex in nature. Moreover, DTS is only one of many agencies involved in dealing with truancy even though not much is known about the root causes of truancy. For these reasons, there is not a perfect or complete relationship between the interventions that DTS has influence over and the achievement of its outcomes.
- If the elements of success are not all in place, it is still possible to have a successful intervention (albeit not necessarily due to good planning and management).

Based on our findings the most important priorities for the Ministry are:

Understanding the problem

Underpinning the Ministry's strategies and interventions, there needs to be a very clear understanding of what the problems and issues are that need to be addressed and why. Undertaking research to delve into the root causes of truancy will provide an up-to-date understanding of:

- what causes truancy and what are current perceptions of the problem amongst the population
- what factors contribute to truancy
- the groups that are most at risk
- definitions around truancy.

In short, the objective will be to arrive at a clear definition of the problem. An element of good problem definition is to have a good understanding of the target populations that need to be influenced. This includes the priority populations that DTS and the Ministry has already identified. Several interviewees, including principals, providers and parents commented that different people respond to different triggers and motivators. By implication, actions and strategies to change the behaviours of one group may not work well for other groups. As a result, effective interventions need to be targeted in nature and adaptable to the different circumstances and motivators of different groups. In turn, this means that environmental scanning needs to be both broad (i.e. covering many different populations) as well as deep (i.e. capable of informing a sophisticated understanding of the characteristics of specific populations).

There is a strong need to describe a relationship between the theory and the evidence to support effective interventions as this will enable resources to be used more effectively and establish stronger alignment between the different initiatives that have similar objectives. There is also need for promoting consistent messages about expectations, desired behaviors (e.g. smacking, “it’s not OK”) so as to build a shared understanding of the problem across the different stakeholders.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, our key recommendations are:

- Initiate research to delve into root causes of truancy to deepen our understanding of the problem.
- Initiate research to explore effective strategies for affecting change amongst particular sub-population groups.
- Creating stronger strategic alignments across the different Ministry initiatives.

Developing a strategic response

Central to any strategy or response is having a clear sense and articulation of the goal or outcome that the organisation or service is working towards. In the context of truancy the evaluation indicates that there is need for the Ministry to shift the focus from outputs to outcomes. This will ensure that solutions designed to address truancy take a broader view of the problem and are more proactive. Solutions will need to be supported by a range of strategies within the Ministry to ensure that truancy management practices are aligned to these

expectations. Therefore any shift to an outcomes approach needs to be supported by clearer mandates and accountabilities.

Effective governance and leadership from the Ministry was also identified as a critical element of success and for strengthening the administrative efficiency of the current system. The level of variability in the current environment is not desirable and needs to be urgently addressed. It is clear that the Ministry has not actively sought to influence or lead the direction and shape of the DTS, resulting in a service that appears ad hoc. Effective governance and management relies on sound plans. Goals need to be clear and realistic. The Ministry needs to reflect on its role within a truancy management infrastructure and build its internal process/capability to manage these processes effectively.

There need to be durable structures to support truancy management as a lot of the work will involve establishing alignment across Ministry initiatives (e.g. alignment across NETs, ENROL, eAR). This means that groups with representation from relevant portfolios will need to be established and roles and responsibilities need to be clearly assigned with accountabilities to match.

Development of a strategic response needs to be matched with adequate resourcing. While it appears that the service is successfully responding to referrals, the service is being compensated by a number of other stakeholders through formal and informal channels. The nature and role of truancy officers and expectations from truancy services have also widened considerably and current resourcing levels do not reflect this.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, our recommendations to support the development of a strategic response are:

- Strengthen governance and leadership from the Ministry by providing clearer direction and expectations from a truancy management infrastructure.
- Shift the focus from outputs to outcomes and design truancy management services that are geared to deliver on outcomes.
- Review resourcing to allow truancy management services to balance reactive and proactive aspects of their role.
- Establish formal partnerships with other agencies that operate in the truancy area so as to establish cohesion across the different agencies.
- Clearer mandates and accountabilities.

Implementation of the strategic response

A key issue coming through from the interviews relates to the desirability of ceding control to those who are best placed to drive the initiative. Furthermore, and consistent with one of DTS's working principles which is "working with communities to find local solutions to local issues", it is important to allow regions to innovate and not try to force them into centrally determined frameworks and processes. The trade-off for giving more degrees of freedom to providers is the need to strengthen governance and management arrangements at the centre to ensure that effective accountability is maintained, particularly relating to training, guidelines and templates, and other forms of administrative support.

While sound structures, policies and processes can all support effective governance and management, the role that individual providers play will directly impact on how well these work in practice.

The nature of the issues surrounding truancy is such that any meaningful response requires collaboration across a wide range of agencies on a day-to-day basis. This requires truancy management services to maintain an effective array of networks. The effectiveness of these networks is an element of success because it helps identify opportunities to leverage off, or assist, the work of others; and it reduces the risk of truancy management services pursuing initiatives that cut across the work of others.

The range of initiatives and actions taken by current providers to respond to their regional context offers useful lessons for truancy management across the country. Therefore creating opportunities to share across services requires effective management of knowledge and information. Several providers commented that there are opportunities to undertake analysis of what works and use this to inform or drive effective practice across the service nationally. Having mechanisms and processes in place to promote such discussion and dialogue will go a long way in enhancing connections across providers.

Recommendations

Based on above discussion, our recommendations for ensuring successful implementation of truancy management services include:

- Balancing national and regional interests – while sound structures, policies and processes all support effective governance, the role individual providers play will directly impact on how this will work.
- Encouraging and supporting collaborative approaches to implementation.
- Investment in training and professional development of all actors within the truancy management infrastructure so as to promote consistent messages and understandings.
- Creating knowledge networks or hubs to promote sharing of best practice and continuous learning.

Monitor and evaluate

The overarching purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to inform understanding of:

- the level and rate of change in the desired outcome
- whether activities are having the impact intended
- what is working well, what is not and why.

Tracking progress towards outcomes is an essential way to inform the ongoing development, refinement and improvement of an intervention. Given the complex nature of the social change environment, the ability to respond to issues and opportunities as they arise is essential in ensuring that risks are minimised and opportunities leveraged.

Given the complex nature of truancy and the myriads of factors that contribute to achieving desired change, it is by implication often difficult to 'unpack' the impact of individual strategies and interventions. However evaluation of a small number of initiatives can contribute to the growing knowledge base about what works to reduce truancy or improve attendance.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, our recommendation for improving the monitoring and evaluation environment requires the Ministry to put in place the following:

- Clarity of desired impact – outputs and outcomes level.
- Meaningful performance measures which combine to tell the performance story.
- A framework within which to evaluate and analyse findings.

Being able to clearly articulate the results that the intervention is seeking to achieve is paramount in delivering meaningful monitoring and evaluation. The desired impact of a truancy management service should build on the outcome of the intervention identified in the strategy phase and link back to the intervention's overarching strategic objectives.

Appendix 1: Interview guide for case study research

Introduction

We have been contracted to undertake the evaluation of District Truancy Services for the Ministry of Education. There are three parts to this evaluation:

- Part 1: Case study research into 6 provider organisations to examine their practices
- Part 2: Survey of all DTS providers
- Part 3: Survey of a sample of schools

In addition we have been offered the opportunity to add a few relevant questions on provision as part of the attendance survey being carried out across all schools in New Zealand by the Ministry. This is due to go out in mid June at this stage, but the timeline is yet to be confirmed.

Focus of the evaluation

The focus of the evaluation is on examining the effectiveness of DTS. We hope to draw on multiple sources of evidence to tell the story of performance. This interview and visit is linked to the case study component of our evaluation strategy. Later this month you will also be invited to participate in a survey of all DTS providers which will aim to capture current practices across *all* providers. The data collected from the case studies will help us in designing a robust questionnaire.

Case study visit

We have identified the provider as the 'case' and would like to meet with the staff in the DTS organisation that has responsibilities for delivering on the contract. This will involve interviews with contract managers and/or truancy officers. We would also like to meet with other social service agencies/community organisations and a few schools and where possible 1-2 students and their families. We propose to undertake a two-day visit to your organisation and would seek your support and advice in setting up some of these meetings and conversations.

Participation is voluntary

Your participation in the case study is voluntary. If there is any aspect of this work or our process that you are not comfortable with, please ring us on 04 499 6130 and speak with either Meenakshi Sankar, Manager, Evaluation and Research on 021 621 433 or Marinka Teague, Consultant at MartinJenkins on 021 533 092 and we would be happy to talk through your concerns.

Main interview questions: Schedule 1

DTS provider

- Can you talk to me about why you decided to apply for DTS funding? Is truancy a problem in your region? How significant a problem is it?
- On the whole, would you say truancy has gone up or down in the region? What is driving this pattern?
- Is *truancy* the problem? Or is it something else? To what extent does your contract for DTS allow you to explore or investigate these issues?
- How would you describe the main role and purpose of DTS? What are the boundaries of your role? Where does your responsibility begin and end? How easy or difficult is it to maintain these boundaries?

Organisational structures and processes

- Can you talk to me a bit about how you have set up your service in order to respond to the expectations of the contract?
- How do you promote your services? At what point of the academic year? Why?
- How is truancy reflected in your strategic plan, if at all? (seek copies of strategic plan documents; role descriptions etc)
- How many truancy officers do you employ? How long have they worked for you? How did you recruit them? What do you expect of them? How do you assess their performance/ contribute to their effectiveness?
- Do they receive any training to help them in defining or doing their job?
- To what extent would you say the skills and capability of the truancy officers has kept pace with the changing nature of the problem? What helps/impedes this?
- Do you have relationships with other providers? Nationally and regionally? Who facilitates these and how does this help you in your work?
- How well known are you in your region? What do you do to build visibility with schools and the wider community? Why is this important?
- We have heard that there is significant variability in how DTS providers approach their work. What are the reasons for this?

School related factors

- Of the schools covered within your contract, what would you say is the pattern of use of your services? Do some use you more than others? What does that reflect – size of the problem or the mindset of the school?
- How do you engage schools that do not use you? Have these strategies worked? When do they work?

- Usually how long does it take for a school to refer a problem to DTS? Is it often too late? What is too late according to you?
- Are some schools better than others? What is the reason for this?
- In order for the school to respond to the problem of truancy effectively what do they need to do? If you had to identify the top three things they need to have in place what would these be?
 - Robust attendance records
 - Teacher and principal attitudes and behaviour that reflects a genuine desire for change
 - Strong relationships with families
 - Strong relationships with community groups and social services, police etc
- How well would you say schools in your region are in meeting these? Why is this?
- What is your role in terms of building school capability to
 - review attendance;
 - encouraging schools to take early action;
 - referring students early;
 - using the information to develop engagement plan with student;
 - follow up with students and schools after they are returned to school
- How well would you say you perform on all of these dimensions? Why?
- Attendance in particular has been identified as a key factor in identifying truancy early – what is your role in working with schools to build more rigorous attendance systems? What holds you back?

Wider community related factors

- In order to be effective your work needs to extend beyond the school – what strategies do you use to get the message to families/wider community?
- What support have you received over the years from the National office in terms of improving your ability to be effective?
 - Training (roles; rights and responsibilities; PD; data skills)
 - National guidelines to support management of DTS
 - Opportunities for networking
 - Online forums for discussions on best practice
 - Improved data to help target efforts

- What information/access to resources/school data do you have to support you in your work?
- If you had an opportunity to create an ideal DTS service – what would it look like?
- How far away from the ideal are you? Why?

Schedule 2 Community organisations/social service agencies in the community

- Can you describe your relationship with the DTS provider?
- What do you see as the primary role of DTS? How easy or difficult would you say it is for the DTS provider to respond effectively to the problem of truancy? Why? Why not?
- In terms of providing an effective solution to truancy in your region, what needs to be done/in place? What aspects of the system are working well now and what aspects are not working well?
- If you had to create an ideal DTS what would it look like?
- How far away are we currently from the ideal?
- If you could change top three things in the current DTS system what would these be?

Schedule 3: School principals

- How significant would you say is the problem of truancy in your school?
- In general is the problem going up or down? Why is that?
- In your view, what are the causes of the problem?
- What are the systems in place in your school to identify the problem early? At what stage in the process do you refer the student on to DTS?
- We have heard that in some instances, schools do not refer them on immediately and attempt to resolve the problem internally and only when that fails that they pass the name on. Is this how you operate as well? What is underpinning rationale for this response?
- Once you hear back from the provider what do you do?
- I am sure there are some situations where the problem is more rampant. What do you do in these situations?
- How satisfied are you with the DTS provider in your region? What aspects of their service are you satisfied with? In which aspects do you think there is scope for improvement? Why? How would this help you in dealing with the problem of truancy?
- How would you describe the skills and capability of the truancy officers employed by DTS? Have they kept pace with the changing nature of the problem?

Schedule 4 Truancy officers

- How long have you been in this job? What motivated you to take up this job/role?
- How do you see your role? How would you describe it to someone who does not know about your role?
- Over the years has your role changed in anyway? In terms of what you do or are required to do; how you work etc? What has led to these changes?
- How well aligned is your role to the problem of truancy? Why do you feel this way?
- How would you describe the problem of truancy in your region? Is it a significant problem or not a significant problem? What about the schools in your region – is it a problem for primary schools or secondary schools or both?
- Do you notice any patterns in relation to which schools access your services in your region? Can you describe these patterns and your sense of what is driving this?
- Would you say there are limitations to your role? What would these be? How do you overcome these limitations?
- There is a growing sense amongst providers that a more holistic approach to truancy is needed and that interagency approaches are likely to be more effective. How do you respond to that? What is your view about what works in relation to truancy?
- How would you describe the nature and level of support that you have received from the following groups to help you manage or perform your role effectively:
 - Your organisation
 - From the Ministry of Education nationally
 - From the regional Ministry office
- What would you like or need to support you in your role?
- If you have to suggest three things to change the way DTS is configured in order to make it more effective what would you suggest?

Appendix 2: Survey questionnaire (DTS Providers)

District Truancy Services Provider Survey

Introduction

MartinJenkins has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education to undertake an evaluation of the District Truancy service. As part of the evaluation seven site visits to different District Truancy services have been undertaken. These visits helped inform the development of this survey and also provided insights into how the District Truancy Service (DTS) operates. During the visits, Truancy officers, Contract holders, Parents and students who had contact with the service, Schools and other stakeholders from within the community were spoken to e.g Police and social services organisations.

The survey will only take 10-15 minutes to complete and is mainly multiple choice questions. **The questionnaire should be completed by a Truancy/Attendance Officer.** If there are many Truancy Officers within your DTS please ask the Truancy Officer that manages the service to complete the questionnaire. Only one response is required from each District Truancy Service.

Your responses will remain confidential and you will not be identified to the Ministry. Analysis will be undertaken at an aggregated level and a final report summarising the results of the full evaluation will be provided to the Ministry.

The survey has four sections covering:

- The role of the DTS
- The structure and governance of your DTS
- Policies and Procedures that have been put in place
- Activities that your DTS undertakes

Role

1 Thinking firstly about the role of the District Truancy Service, which of the following do you see as part of your role as a District Truancy Service provider? (This may cover the work that you do within and beyond the contract)

- Respond to referrals with a home visit
- Provide information to schools
- Provide transport to students to facilitate their attendance
- Build working relationships with schools

- Build working relationships with the local community, businesses and support services
- Keep children safe
- Keep children out of crime
- Support students re-integration back into school
- Support schools to ensure students stay in school
- Help family/whanu reconnect with schools
- Help family/whanu access social services as needed
- Help schools identify truancy/non-attendance
- Raise public awareness of the problem of truancy
- Monitoring the effectiveness of any interventions DTS puts in place
- Undertake patrols in your community

2 Of these which best summarise the three core aspects of the DTS provider's role?

- Respond to referrals with a home visit
- Provide information to schools
- Provide transport to students to facilitate their attendance
- Build working relationships with schools
- Build working relationships with the local community, businesses and support services
- Keep children safe
- Keep children out of crime
- Support students re-integration back into school
- Support schools to ensure students stay in school
- Help family/whanu reconnect with schools
- Help family/whanu access social services as needed
- Help schools identify truancy/non-attendance
- Raise public awareness of the problem of truancy
- Monitoring the effectiveness of any interventions DTS puts in place
- Undertake patrols in your community

Structure and Governance of DTS

3 Is your truancy service currently located within a:

- Local school
- Community organisation (e.g. safer community council)
- Specialist youth centre
- Local or District Council
- Alternative Education Services/Group Special Education (GSE)
- Another type of location please specify

4 What other organisations or youth services are you co-located with?

- Family Social Support services (e.g. Strengthening families; Parentline; Child Youth and Family; Ministry of Social Development; Work and Income)
- Health services (e.g. health nurse; health professionals)
- Youth Support services (e.g. guidance counsellors; drug and alcohol counselling; social workers in schools)
- Youth justice/police (e.g. YOT)
- Educational services (e.g. teen parent unit; Group Special Education Services/Alternative Education; NETTS)
- Other please specify
- None – we are not co-located with any other services

5 Are you supported as a district truancy service by any of the following structures?

- A Management committee or Advisory Group (e.g. a collective of agencies, individuals or schools, who have an oversight role)
- A Truancy Council (e.g. a regional collective of agencies or individuals or schools who have an oversight role)
- The School Board of Trustees
- Other (please specify)
- No, none of these
- Don't know

6 How frequently do you have formal/planned interagency meetings?

- Weekly
- Fortnightly
- Monthly
- Once a term
- Less often
- Never
- No planned meetings. Meet on an ad-hoc basis as and when needed

7 Who regularly attends these interagency meetings?

- Family Social Support services (e.g. Strengthening families; Parentline; Child Youth and Family; Ministry of Social Development; Work and Income)
- Health services (e.g. health nurse; health professionals)
- Youth Support services (e.g.; guidance counsellors; drug and alcohol counselling; social workers)
- Youth justice/police (e.g. YOT)
- Educational services (e.g. Ministry of Education; teen parent unit; Group Special Education Services/Alternative Education; NETTS)
- Other please specify
- None – we are not co-located with any other services

8 How many individuals are currently employed as a paid Truancy/Attendance officer in your District Truancy Service? (Please provide number of people)

9 How many individual unpaid volunteers and/or student placement workers do you currently have assisting the service? (please provide number of people)

10 What types of qualifications do your Truancy/Attendance officer(s)? Please list qualifications held by each truancy officer if you have more than one

Policies and procedures

11 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement.

My organisation or DTS has a clearly defined mission and vision for the service

5 point scale

Strongly agree to Strongly disagree, Don't know

- 12 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your District Truancy Service (strongly agree, slightly agree, neither nor, slightly disagree, strongly disagree, don't know/not applicable)

My district truancy service has...

- ...clearly defined job descriptions and roles for truancy/attendance officers
- ... the right systems and procedures in place to keep our Truancy/attendance officers safe
-put in place systems to deal with schools that are over-referring or under-referring
-clearly defined goals for the service and monitors progress towards these
-appropriate mechanisms in place to monitor the progress of individual students who have been returned to school

- 13 Do you maintain a record of referrals received and the outcomes of those referrals?

- Yes – on paper
- Yes – electronically in a database
- Yes both, on paper and electronically
- We do not keep records of referrals and the outcomes of those referrals

- 14 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your District Truancy Service

- From our database we are able to easily access information about a particular student
- From our database we are able to create reports about individual schools (including things like number of referrals, number of repeat referrals, the reasons for absences)
- We are able to use our database to understand trends in Truancy across the schools in our cluster
- From the database we are able to produce the milestone reports for the Ministry quickly

- 15 Do you have an annual budget for professional development of your Truancy officers?

- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 16 What types of training have your Truancy/Attendance officers undertake, in the last twelve months, to assist them in their role?
- Please specify
 - None
- 17 On average how many hours per week during term time do your truancy officers work?
- 18 What is the average hourly wage for your truancy officers?
- Less than \$15 per hour (Approximate full time equivalent salary \$31,200)
 - \$15 and up to \$20 per hour (\$31,201 – \$41,600 per annum)
 - More than \$20 and up to \$25 per hour (\$41,601 – \$52,000 per annum)
 - More than \$25 and up to \$30 per hour (\$52,001 – \$62,400 per annum)
 - More than \$30 and up to \$35 per hour (\$62,401 – \$72,800 per annum)
 - More than \$35 and up to \$40 per hour (\$72,800 – \$83,200 per annum)
 - More than \$40 per hour (\$83,201 or more)
 - Prefer not to say
 - Don't know
- 19 Do you receive any additional funding from schools in the cluster to help ensure the service meets the needs of the schools in the cluster?
- Yes
 - No

Activities

- 20 Thinking now about the activities that the DTS undertakes with schools, parents and the community
- Of the (insert from MOE sample) schools in your cluster, how many are?
- Primary schools

- Intermediate schools
- Secondary schools
- Other

Must sum to number of schools in the cluster

21 In an average year, how many schools in the cluster refer cases to you?

22 How are the XX referring schools spread across the different types of schools?

- Primary schools
- Intermediate schools
- Secondary schools
- Other

Must sum to number of schools receive referrals from.

23 How often do the truancy officers personally visit the schools that do not refer to you?

- Weekly
- Fortnightly
- At least once a month
- Once a term
- Annually
- Less often

24 Which of the following activities do you routinely undertake with or for schools in your cluster? (You may undertake these activities for primary and/or secondary schools and for all or some schools in your cluster)

- Review schools attendance data to identify patterns of absences
- Review schools attendance data for quality control purposes
- Meet with schools (e.g. principals, deputy principals, deans, attendance officers, social workers) to discuss management of truancy in the school
- Attend meetings between school and parent(s) as requested
- Meet with the school board of trustees to discuss truancy management in the school

- Provide **school** specific reports relating to truancy/non-attendance referrals for the school
- Provide **regional** truancy/non-attendance information to the schools
- Set school attendance targets
- Develop individual case plans to manage a referred student's sustained attendance at school
- Develop information pamphlets for schools, their students and parents
- Provide schools with guidelines on **when** to refer students
- Provide schools with guidelines on **how** to refer students
- Provide schools with guidelines on recognising non-attendance patterns
- Provide forums or events in your region to meet and discuss the issue of truancy/non-attendance
- Meet with students of schools in the cluster to promote the service (e.g. attend assembly, speak to different classes)
- Other please specify
- None of the above
-

25 How strongly would you agree or disagree with the following statements

- All schools in our cluster have good quality attendance data in order to identify patterns of non-attendance
- All schools in our cluster have easily accessible attendance data in order to refer students promptly
- All schools in our cluster welcome our suggestions, and seek help from us to proactively manage truancy/non-attendance at their school
- We have an agreed definition of truancy which is understood by the Ministry, Schools and the District Truancy service
- Our ability to be effective depends on how well schools gather and analyse data on attendance
- Schools have a clear understanding of **when** they should refer a student to the DTS
-

26 Which of the following services, if any, do you provide to families of truants and/or truants and/ or the community

- Respond to community referrals
- Set up a free phone service 0800 or 0508 so families and the community can ring the DTS directly
- Arrange and attend meetings between parents and other agencies
- Assistance with transport to and from school for children
- Provide parents, and whanu with information about relevant support services
- Organise truancy sweeps in the community with other services (e.g. police)

27 Which if any of the following initiatives are being undertaken in your region to reduce truancy?

- Truant-free shopping zones
- Rock On
- Police patrolling/blitzes in combination with schools and DTS
- Formalised principals' meetings to discuss truancy
- Iwi - police meetings
- Other regional initiatives please specify

How the DTS works

28 In responding to referrals, which of the following actions are routinely undertaken by your organisation?

- Home visits
- Speak to or call the principal, deputy principal or any other appropriate person in schools noting reasons for absences
- Document and email or post information about referrals to schools
- Make recommendations to schools about further action
- Put in place agreed monitoring plans for referred students and schools
- Follow up with calls and/or visits to schools to confirm referred students are attending as expected
- Follow up with families' of referred students to confirm their needs have been met as appropriate
- Follow up with schools to confirm that they have responded to the identified needs of the truant's family
- Follow up with referred students to ensure that they are attending

- Acknowledge formally or informally improved patterns of attendance with schools/families' of referred students and/or referred students
- Other please specify

Appendix 3: Survey Questionnaire (Schools)

Introduction

MartinJenkins has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education to undertake a national evaluation of the District Truancy service. As part of the evaluation we have visited a small number of District Truancy Service providers across the country and undertaken a survey of all District Truancy Providers. We are now looking to gather responses from school principals and have initiated this survey of a sample of schools to provide us with school perspectives regarding the service.

The survey will only take 10-15 minutes to complete and is mainly multiple choice questions.

Your responses will remain confidential and you will not be identified to the Ministry. Analysis will be undertaken at an aggregated level and a final report summarising the results of the full evaluation will be provided to the Ministry.

Defining truancy

The Ministry has identified three types of absences:

- **Justified absences (JA)** are absences recorded in the register, and marked as having being satisfactorily explained.
- **Unjustified absences (UA)** are absences, which are not explained, or not explained to the satisfaction of the school.
- **Intermittent unjustified absences (IUA)** occur when a student is absent for part of a morning (or afternoon) or part of a period without justification. For example, a student who arrives 15 minutes late to school without a reason, or with a reason that is not acceptable to the principal.
- **Truancy** relates to and is the sum of unjustified absences and intermittent unjustified absences. For the purpose of this survey please consider truancy in accordance with this definition.

Answering Questions

To respond all you need to do is click on the box or the circle you want to choose. If you change your mind just click on the new response. If your original response is still selected clicking on it again will deselect it.

Saving your answers

To save your answers to date, so you can come back to the survey later click save. To re-enter the survey use your original link and you will be taken back to where you left off. If you have submitted your survey you won't be able to re-enter the survey.

If you have any queries about the survey please contact marinka.teague@martinjenkins.co.nz .

Q1 Has your school used the District Truancy Service this year?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q2 Did the District Truancy service contact you at the beginning of this academic year?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/Can't remember

Q3 Do you make any financial contribution to your District Truancy Service?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q4 Is your District Truancy Service located within a

- Local school
- Community organisation (e.g. safer community council, specialist youth centre, Local or District Council, Alternative Education Services/Group Special Education)
- Another type of location please specify
- Don't know

Q5 Who holds the contract for the District Truancy Service for your school?

- The contract is held by a school from within my school cluster
- The contract is held by a community organisation
- Other please specify
- Don't know

Q6 Which of the following does your school have?

Tick all that apply

- Attendance/Truancy officer with the sole responsibility for addressing attendance/truancy issues at the school
- A member of staff who in addition to their regular role also has the responsibility to manage attendance/truancy at the school
- Guidance councillor
- Social worker

Public Health Nurse
None of the above

Q7 In an average year approximately what percentage of your student roll will turn over during the year? i.e at the end of the year what percentage of students will be different to at the start of the year

If Yes at Q1 go to Q9. ONLY ask Q8 to those who have not used the DTS this year

Q8 Which of the following describes why you have not used the District Truancy Service this year?

Tick all that apply

Attendance/Truancy is not a problem at this school
We have not had any cases of truancy yet this year
Our staff manage cases of truancy/non-attendance themselves
I was not aware there was a District Truancy Service in my region
I am not satisfied with the District Truancy Service so do not use them
We work with other agencies in our community to resolve truancy
I don't have access to the right information to identify truancy/non-attendance at my school
Other please specify

Thank and close

Truancy/Attendance at your school

Whilst undertaking the case studies we spoke to a range of schools about the different things they do, barriers they face and how they interact with the District Truancy Service in order to address truancy at their school. Every school is different and in this section we would like to understand your school's responses and actions in addressing truancy.

Q9 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your school?

Systems and processes

We have the systems and processes in place to collect accurate attendance information
Our systems and process enable us to access attendance information quickly and easily

Activities

We monitor school wide attendance information regularly
The school actively engages with staff to ensure they complete roll calls in all classes each day
We expect students to take ownership of ensuring attendance information we collect is accurate

Skills and resources

We invest significant resources, staff time and dollars into managing truancy effectively

We work with teachers to ensure they are able to effectively engage with students on the issue of truancy

We work with teachers to ensure they are able to effectively engage with parents and the wider community on the issue of truancy

We have the skills required to manage truancy effectively in our school

Scope and nature of the problem

Truancy is not a large problem at this school

Reducing truancy/increasing attendance has been identified as a key priority for this year in our school

It is important for the school to resolve attendance problems quickly

Poor attendance rates are detrimental to the schools image

Truancy at this school is driven primarily by school- related problems

Truancy at this school is driven primarily by community/parental problem

Q10 At your school, on average, how many students per term have an attendance/truancy problem?

11 If the school is unable to resolve a student’s attendance problem satisfactorily, where is the first place you go for help to resolve the problem?

Select one only

- The District Truancy Service
- Community based social service organisation (please specify)
- Child Youth and Family
- Police
- Other please specify

Q12 approximately what percentage of attendance/truancy problems are resolved by the school, referred to the District Truancy Office, referred to other organisations/agencies?

	Number of students
Resolved by the school (with no involvement from other agencies)	
Referred to the DTS	
Referred to other organisation/agencies	
	Must add to 100%

Q13 Generally what is the time taken between a student being absent and your school notifying the District Truancy Service?

- Immediately on the day the student is absent
- Within three days of the students absence
- Within five days of the students absence
- More than five days after the students absence
- It varies significantly depending on the student

Q14 Before referring a student to the District Truancy Service, which of the following actions, if any, does your school *routinely* undertake?

- Phone the parent(s)/home of the student
- Text the parent(s) of the student
- Undertake a home visit
- Meet with the student

Meet with the parents
 Write to the parent(s) of the student
 Involve a social worker/dean/guidance councillor or other suitable resource available at the school
 Other please specify
 No action taken before referring students
 Don't know

Q15 The schools we spoke to identified a wide range of actions that a school may take or systems and processes that schools may have or access to help combat truancy. Which of the following, if any, does your school do/have/access to help combat truancy?

On site campus cop
 Texting via the school SMS
 Produce flyers or publish information in the school newsletter for parents so they know what to do if their child is away
 Set attendance targets for the school
 Report to the board of trustees regularly on attendance rates
 The Rock-on programme
 Participate or support truancy sweeps in the community with other organisations (e.g police, the District Truancy Service)
 Meet regularly with relevant internal staff to discuss specific students/ truancy in the school in general
 Undertake analysis of attendance information to look for patterns of truancy/non-attendance
 Analyse and link attendance and achievement information to help convey to parents the value of attendance
 Meet regularly with other schools in the region to discuss truancy

The Role of the District Truancy Service

Q16 Thinking about the role of the District Truancy Service, which of the following do you see as being part of the role of the District Truancy Service provider?

- Respond to referrals with a home visit
- Provide information to schools about the home visit
- Provide information to schools about truancy rates in the school and the school cluster
- Provide transport to students to facilitate their attendance
- Build working relationships with schools
- Build working relationships with the local community, businesses and support services
- Keep children safe

- Keep children out of crime
- Support students' re-integration back into school
- Support schools to ensure students stay in school
- Help family/ whānau reconnect with schools
- Help family/ whānau access social services as needed
- Help schools identify truancy/non-attendance
- Raise public awareness of the problem of truancy
- Monitoring the effectiveness of any interventions DTS puts in place
- Develop early interventions to prevent/minimise truancy
- Undertake patrols in your community
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above. I do not believe there is a role for the DTS

Q17 Of these select three core aspects which best summarise the DTS provider's role?

- Respond to referrals with a home visit
- Provide information to schools about the home visit
- Provide information to schools about truancy rates in the school cluster
- Provide transport to students to facilitate their attendance
- Build working relationships with schools
- Build working relationships with the local community, businesses and support services
- Keep children safe
- Keep children out of crime
- Support students' re-integration back into school
- Support schools to ensure students stay in school
- Help family/ whānau reconnect with schools
- Help family/ whānau access social services as needed
- Help schools identify truancy/non-attendance
- Raise public awareness of the problem of truancy
- Monitoring the effectiveness of any interventions DTS puts in place
- Develop early interventions to prevent/minimise truancy

- Undertake patrols in your community
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above. I do not believe there is a role for the DTS

Using the District Truancy Service

Q18 On average how often does your school have contact (phone, email/mail, face to face, or fax) with the District Truancy Service Officer regarding specific students or truancy in general?

Daily
 Weekly
 Fortnightly
 Monthly
 Once a term
 Less often than once a term
 Don't know

Q19 Overall how satisfied are you with the DTS?

Very satisfied, slightly satisfied, neither nor, slightly dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied, Don't know

Q20 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your District Truancy Service (DTS)?

The DTS always responds quickly when we refer cases
 The scale and type of response from the DTS is appropriate
 The DTS has the appropriate level of power and authority to be effective
 The DTS has the appropriate mandate to be effective
 The DTS meets the needs of my school
 The truancy/attendance officers have the skills to do a good job
 Truancy/attendance officers are supported and trained appropriately
 We have been provided with clear guidelines on how to refer students to the DTS
 We have been provided with clear guidelines on when to refer students to the DTS
 We have a good working relationship with our DTS

Q21 Thinking specifically about the information the DTS provides about a student's absence how strongly do you agree or disagree that the information provided to you is

Accurate
 Reliable

Relevant

Timely

Q22 Which of the following, if any, does the District Truancy Service provide to your school?

A summary of information on truancy at your school e.g reasons for truancy, total number of referrals in a term/year, total number of truant individuals in a term/year

A summary of information on truancy amongst the schools in your cluster (e.g. reason for truancy, numbers of truants etc)

Analysis of your school's attendance data to help early identification of students that may be showing signs of poor attendance

Information on truancy for parents and students

Setting of attendance targets for the school

Setting of agreed attendance targets for the school cluster

Forums for schools in the cluster to discuss truancy

Forums for the community, schools and other organisations to come together and discuss truancy

Appendix 4: List of providers

#	District Truancy Service Provider	Telephone	Email
1	Ashburton Safer Community Council	03 308 1395	asafercc@xtra.co.nz
2	Balclutha Primary School	03 418 1009	admin@balclutha.school.nz
3	Bay of Islands College	09 404 1055	apn@boic.school.nz
4	Bluestone School	03 684 3706	admin@bluestone.school.nz
5	Buller District Truancy Service	03 789 7299	office@buller.ac.nz
6	Cambridge Middle School	07 827 5135	office@cms.school.nz
7	Central Hawkes Bay College	06 858 9203	office@chbc.school.nz
8	Central Otago REAP	03 448 6115	admin@coreap.org.nz
9	Central Southland College	03 236 7646	andyw@csc.school.nz
10	Christchurch District Truancy Service	03 982 1865	nobunking@extra.co.nz
11	Dannevirke High School	06 374 8302	admin@dannevirkehigh.school.nz
12	Darfield High School	03 318 8411	admin@darfield.school.nz
13	Dargaville High School	09 439 7229	dbargh@darghigh.schoolzone.net.nz
14	Gore High School	03 208 9130	ghs@gore-high.school.nz
15	Greymouth High School	03 768 0472	office@greyhigh.school.nz
16	Hamilton's Fraser High School	07 847 9044	office@fraser-high.school.nz
17	Hawera Intermediate School	06 278 5030	intermediate@extra.co.nz
18	Helensville School	09 420 8005	sven@helensville.school.nz
19	Heretaunga Intermediate	06 878 8358	office@heretaunga.co.nz
20	Horowhenua College	06 368 6159	horowhenuacollege@horowhenua.school.nz
21	Huntly College	07 828 7152	admin@huntlycollege.school.nz
22	Invercargill Secondary Schools Network (Verdon College)	03 216 9039	principal@verdoncollege.school.nz
23	Kapiti Safer Community Trust	04 902 7920	safercommunity@paradise.net.nz
24	Kerikeri High School	09 407 8916	eforgie@kerkerhigh.ac.nz
25	Lytton High School	06 868 5193	info@lytton-high.school.nz
26	Lytton Street School	06 323 6687	office@lyttonstreet.school.nz
27	Mahurangi College	09 425 8039	admin@mahurangi.school.nz
28	Marlborough District Council	03 520 7400	mdc@marlborough.govt.nz
29	Morrinsville College	07 889 7745	glenisholten@morrill.school.nz
30	Motueka High School	03 528 9050	admin@motuekahigh.school.nz
31	Mt Albert Grammar	09 846 2044	headmaster@mags.school.nz

32	Mount Maunganui College	07 575 3096	principal@mmc.school.nz
33	Naenae College	04 567 7175	admin@naenae-college.school.nz
34	Napier Intermediate	06 835 6013	admin@nis.school.nz
35	Nayland College	03 547 9769	principal@nayland.school.nz
36	Ngapuhi Iwi Social Services	09 405 3400	gms@niss.org.nz
37	North Harbour Blue Light Enterprises	09 477 5317	kristen.evans@police.govt.nz
38	Opotiki College	07 315 7022	principal@opotikicol.school.nz
39	Otago Youth Wellness Trust	03 474 9547	administrator@oywt.org.nz
40	Otamatea High School	09 431 8230	ohsprin@ihug.co.nz
41	Otara Boards Forum Inc	09 271 4623	ceo@otaraboardsforum.org.nz
42	Otorohanga College	07 873 8029	carrg@otocoll.schoolzone.net.nz
43	Paeroa College	07 862 7579	pcstaff@paeroacollege.school.nz
44	Pakuranga Intermediate	09 576 1860	office@pakarangaint.school.nz
45	Palmerston North Boys High School	06 354 5176	admin@pnbhs.school.nz
46	Porirua College	04 237 5465	poriruacollege@pen.net.nz
47	Randwick School	04 568 5621	office@randwick.school.nz
48	Rangitikei College	06 327 7024	admin@rangitikei-college.ac.nz
49	Rata Te Awhina Family Trust	03 755 6572	barbara.greer@rtat.co.nz
50	Redhill School	09 298 4377	glennn@redhill.school.nz
51	Rodney College	09 423 6030	principal@rodneycollege.school.nz
52	Rotorua Boys High School	07 3486169	rotoruabhs@xtra.co.nz
53	Ruapehu College	06 385 8398	office@ruapehucollege.school.nz
54	South Westland Area School	03 753 3160	mainoffice@southwestlandarea.school.nz
55	Southern Wairarapa Safer Community Council	06 379 5407	swscc@xtra.co.nz
56	Spotswood College	06 751 2416	admin@spotswoodcollege.school.nz
57	Stratford High School	06 765 6039	mail@stratfordhigh.school.nz
58	Tauhara College	07 378 9304	info@tauvara.school.nz
59	Tauranga Girls College	07 578 8114	info@tgc.school.nz
60	Tawa College	04 232 8184	secretary@tawacol.school.nz
61	Te Kuiti High School	07 878 6292	principal@tekuitihigh.schoolzone.net.nz
62	Te Ora Hou Northland Inc	09 438 3818	ldavis@teorahou.org.nz
63	Te Runanga O Ngati Porou	06 867 9960	htuhaka@tronp.org.nz
64	Te Runanga O Te Rarawa	09 408 1971	kevin@terarawa.co.nz
65	Thames High School	07 868 8688	office@thames-high.school.nz
66	Tokoroa Truancy Service	07 886 7687	office@tokoroa.school.nz
67	Tuakau College	09 236 8521	principal@tuakau.school.net.nz
68	Upper Hutt College	04 527 8749	office@upperhutt.school.nz
69	Waimakariri Community	03 310 6375	wcdt.manager@extra.co.nz

	Development Trust		
70	Waimate High School	03 689 8920	gen@waimate-high.school.nz
71	Wainuiomata High School	04 938 3224	office@wainuiomatahigh.school.nz
72	Wairoa College	06 838 8303	info@wairoacollege.school.nz
73	Waitakere City Improving School Attendance Programme	09 838 9737	margaret@isap.org.nz
74	Waitaki Boys High School	03 437 0529	paulb@waitakibhs.school.nz
75	Wanganui City College	06 349 0180	office@wcc.school.nz
76	Wellington High School	04 385 8911	admin@whs.school.nz
77	Whakatane High School	07 308 8251	admin@whakatanehigh.school.nz
78	Whangaroa College	09 405 0199	principal@whangaroacollege.school.nz