Consultation on 'Staying at School'

Report prepared for:

The Ministry of Education

Prepared by:

tns

MONARCH CONSULTING

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Background

TNS and Monarch Consulting[1] were commissioned to undertake a consultation exercise for the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) exploring the views of students, caregivers, schools and other school sector stakeholders about the drivers of early-leaving decisions, and the factors that might encourage greater school-student retention.

1.2 Summary of Findings

Students at Risk of Leaving School Early

Most students who are at risk of leaving school before the age of 16 are identifiable, with around three-quarters of principals (76%) believing that students who leave school before the age of 16 have similar attributes or experiences, and nearly all principals (91%) believing there are typical warning signs for identifying students at risk.

The similar attributes and experiences mentioned by principals are disengagement (43%), low achievement (35%), dysfunctional family (34%), lack of family support (30%) and a lack of social skills (24%). The warning signs for identifying students at risk are truancy (67%), disengaged attitudes (48%), disruptive (35%), lack of family support (25%) and negative out of school behaviour (19%).

Early school leavers corroborate the principal's views to a large extent in terms of being disengaged (as evidenced by most early leavers being truant at least weekly (72%), and most going to school/classes late [70%]) and having issues at home (29%) such as parents separating (involving a custody battle), a death in the family, transience (i.e. constantly moving area/school), alcohol and drug related issues, students having to care for/support family members (by staying at home and/or working), abusive parents (verbally and physically) and financial issues resulting in poor living conditions.

The underlying causes for low academic achievement may include students falling behind in school work, finding school difficult, and having literacy and numeracy issues. Over half (56%) of the early school leavers said they had fallen behind in their school work (because of truancy, sickness, moving around – both houses and schools) and found it hard to catch up. Half the early leavers (50%) found school hard, and around half (46%) said they had either literacy (25%) or numeracy issues (25%), with 13 percent of early leavers saying they had both.

A point of difference between principals and early school leavers is that 45 percent of early school leavers say their teacher wanted them to leave school compared to only 16 percent of principals saying some teachers wanted students to leave.

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[1] Monarch Consulting contributed the services of an experienced education policy advisor to assist with project set-up, reviewing research instruments, and reviewing and contributing to the development of the research report.

Barriers to Retaining At Risk Students

The factors seen by principals as barriers to student retention can be categorised as those relating to:

- Students as individuals (e.g. attitudes [disengaged, not wanting to be at school][2], disruptive behaviour).

- The student's family or external support network.

- The school's offering to the student (e.g. the curriculum, relevance of subjects).

- Resources (e.g. specialised staff[3], funding for co-curricular activities and high student to staff ratio).

- Teachers (e.g. struggling to cope with meeting the diverse needs of students, a lack of effective teaching - specifically, 'soft skills' such as connecting with the students, engaging them, managing the classroom and teaching to different levels within the classroom).

Supporting Student Retention

A number of things were identified as necessary to encourage students to stay at school. These include curriculum adaptation (external courses and work experience), making school relevant to at risk students, extra academic support (catch-up tuition), interagency connections, building linkages to family and community, attendance management, teacher training (as noted above) and provision of health and social services to deal with risk indicators early.

The most effective things that principals say their school does to keep students at school until age 16 include curriculum adaptation (49%), provide work experience (24%) and encourage family involvement (22%).

It should be noted that early leaving exemptions are regarded as necessary for schools to have for use in extreme cases (e.g. violence to other students or teachers), and also for use with early leavers who have a genuine opportunity to undertake a pathway (employment or study) that will provide them with realistic future employment opportunities[4].

Suggestions to improve the process of obtaining an early leaving exemption include making the process harder for the student (important in supporting students who might otherwise drop out) and closer monitoring of students once they have left[5].

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[2] Students may be disengaged for a number of reasons including learning difficulties (literacy and numeracy issues).

[3] Includes guidance, pastoral, careers staff and remedial teachers.

[4] One in ten principals (11%) surveyed agree that if a student wants to leave school early (at age 15), and their parents/caregivers agree, then an exemption should be granted automatically.

[5] Monitoring to ensure the early leavers are still in employment or studying – 16 percent of early school leavers surveyed for this consultation exercise were neither working nor studying.

Supporting Schools to Encourage Student Retention

Over two-thirds of principals (69%) agree there is scope to develop new incentives to encourage schools to retain students to the age of 16. However, not all principals agree that all students should be retained until the age of 16 (20% of principals do not believe that the benefits of keeping disruptive students at school who want to leave means that every effort should be made to ensure that they stay at school until the age of 16, and 37% of principals think that keeping students at school who want to leave causes more problems than benefits).

The majority of principals (80%) believe the Ministry can help schools to encourage greater student retention[6] through additional resources (e.g. funding for teachers (72%), for co-curricular activities (63%), for attendance management (57%) and 'other' funding (24%) such as mental health services and programmes to help 'at risk' students). Principals were also interested in assistance to make inter-agency connections (61%), with the most frequently mentioned agencies being CYFs (40%), the Police (19%) and Work and Income (19%)[7]. Around a fifth of principals (23%) also wanted advice (e.g. on successful programmes and support avenues).

1.3   Consultation Exercise[8]

As part of the consultation, the following occurred:

- An online survey of 123 principals.

- A telephone survey of 330 students who had been granted an early leaving exemption.

- A series of in-depth interviews[9] with principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, key personnel in the education sectors, early school leavers, and parents/caregivers of early school leavers.

1.3.1 Early School Leaver Profile

Of the early school leavers surveyed, over six out of ten (62%) were male and over a third were female (38%). Over half of early school leavers identified as New Zealand European/Pakeha (55%), over a third identified as Māori (38%), five percent identified as Pacific and two percent as 'other'. Half of early school leavers live in the upper North Island (52%), a quarter live in the lower North Island (22%) and a quarter live in the South Island (26%).

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[6] The following support measures were shown in the questionnaire and the principals were asked to indicate whether they thought they were something the Ministry of Education could do to support their school.

[7] Caution, small base size (n=57).

[8] A detailed methodology section is appended to this report.

[9] A total of n=41 in-depth interviews were undertaken; this is sizeable for a qualitative study. Please note one of the main limitations of qualitative research is that (unlike quantitative research) it is not generaliseable to the wider population.

1.3.2 Principal Profile

The principals who completed the online survey were from a range of schools around the country. Just over two-fifths (41%) of principals come from schools in the upper North Island (above Hawkes Bay), 27 percent from the lower North Island (Hawkes Bay and below) and 32 percent from the South Island. The decile ratings of the schools the principals were from are evenly split between low (28%), medium (35%) and high (35%) deciles[10]. Around six out of ten principals (59%) come from schools with between 201 to 900 students[11], and around a fifth come from schools smaller than 200 students (19%) or more than 900 students (23%).

1.4   Research Objectives

The research addressed a series of objectives. These objectives, along with a brief synopsis of the main findings for each objective, are outlined below.

1.5   Barriers to Student Retention

Objective One: Identification of the factors that are seen by schools as barriers to retaining students at school to the age of 16.

The factors seen by principals as barriers to student retention can be categorised as:

- Those relating to the **student as an individual**, specifically the

    - attitude of students (disengaged, disruptive, etc) (76% of principals 'agree' or 'agree strongly' that this is a factor)
    - suitability of some students to mainstream education (54%)
    - personal suitability of students to school (38%).

- Those relating to the **student's family or external support network**

    - 59 percent of principals agree ('agree' or 'agree strongly') that a barrier to retaining students is a lack of parent/caregiver support
    - 58 percent of principals agree that a barrier to retaining students is a lack of external professional support for students at risk of leaving school.

- Those relating to the **school's offering to the student**

    - one of the main barriers some principals say they face in trying to keep students at school is the curriculum (46%), e.g. curriculum not being suited to all students or being unable to provide the wide range of courses needed so there is something that is relevant to everyone.[12]

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[10] Two percent of schools had a '99' decile rating.
[11] Principals were only asked to include students Year 9 and above.
[12] This question asked principals to spontaneously mention what was the main barrier their school faces in trying to keep students at school.

- Those relating to **resources**

  - 61 percent of principals agree ('agree' or 'agree strongly') that a barrier to retaining students is a lack of specialised staff[13] who are able to support students at risk of leaving school
  - 42 percent of principals agree that lack of funding for co-curricular activities is a barrier to student retention
  - 33 percent of principals agree that a barrier to retaining students is a high student to staff ratio.

- Those relating to **teachers**

  - 27 percent of principals agree that a fair number of teachers at their school struggle to cope with meeting the diverse needs of students
  - from the qualitative research, there was an indication that a barrier to student retention was a lack of effective teaching (specifically, 'soft skills' such as connecting with the students, engaging them, managing the classroom and teaching to different levels within the classroom).

1.6 Supporting Student Retention

Objective Two: Identification of the factors that support student retention that are seen by schools as working well.

Inclusive and innovative practices appear to make a difference. The most effective things that principals say their school does to keep students at school until age 16 include curriculum adaptation (49%), work experience (24%) and encouraging family involvement (22%). Other practices that were noted by principals as supporting student retention were staff involvement (19%), developing career programmes (13%) and extra-curricular activities (12%)[14].

The following are examples of practices to support student retention that were reported as working well in schools:

- **Prior identification of existing issues** – whereby schools actively seek academic and background information on each student entering year nine. This is done in order to identify any existing issues (e.g. literacy, behavioural) so that school can put measures in place to address these.

- **Dealing with literacy and numeracy issues** – provide additional literacy and numeracy support within the learning environment for less competent students. This is done in order to bring students up to a level of competency that enables them to effectively participate in the learning process, thus preventing disengagement.

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[13] Includes guidance, pastoral, careers staff and remedial teachers.
[14] All these factors were spontaneously mentioned by principals.

- **Getting to know the student** – the school (principal, deputy principal, dean) meets with all students entering the school. This enables the school to provide the most engaging curriculum for each student based on their needs and interests. This is also an effective first step in building a relationship between the school, the student and the student's family.

- **Recognise that there are other pathways beyond the academic** – schools offer more trade/career oriented learning options to those students for whom an academic pathway is less relevant. Students who find school relevant to their future goal are less inclined to leave early.

- **Goal setting** – schools help students with goal setting for their life through exposure to potential futures – realities of tertiary student life, trades, or professions. The school provides encouragement to reach those goals. This is done to make the outcome of school more tangible and therefore relevant to the student.

- **Encourage good relationships between teachers and students** – listening to and talking with students, providing encouragement and positive reinforcement, and building realistic expectations develops good relationships between students and teachers. This demonstrates the school's interest in the student, making them feel like a valued member of the school community.

- **Ongoing professional development of teachers** – whereby the school culture actively encourages teachers' continued professional development, demonstrated by providing access to support networks that facilitate this. This equips teachers with the skills to create a more engaging learning environment and one within which students want to remain.

- **Continuity of 'adult' contact** – provide students access to an adult (e.g. teacher, guidance counsellor, community leader) for the duration of students' school-based education, not just for the crisis points. This person will reinforce 'positive' behaviours that may otherwise be lacking in the student's life, while encouraging the student to remain within the educational system.

- **Health support** – whereby schools facilitate access to health services for students (and their families). This is done to remove health issues as a barrier to learning.

- **Targeted support** – whereby schools identify specific areas where support within the wider community would engender greater engagement with schools and education. By creating a tangible value to education within the community, parents/caregivers are less likely to support student withdrawal from education.

- **Multi-systemic support** – when necessary schools involve other agencies (e.g. the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFs), Family Planning doctors, Police, district truancy services) so that families do not feel isolated and unsupported when there are problems.

- **Community Liaison** – where schools are supported by, or employ, community liaison officers who visit with families to help identify and understand issues and involve the wider community in school activities. This is done to make the school environment more welcoming and inclusive.

1.7 Encouraging Greater Retention

Objective Three: Identification of the factors that would encourage schools to encourage greater student retention.

Over two-thirds of principals (69%) agree there is scope to develop new incentives to encourage schools to retain students to the age of 16.

The majority of principals (80%) believe the Ministry can help schools to encourage greater student retention by[15]:

- Providing funding for teachers (72%).

- Providing funding for co-curricular activities (63%).

- Helping to make inter-agency connections (61%). The most frequently mentioned agencies were:

    - CYFs (40%)
    - Police (19%)
    - Work and Income (19%)[16].

- Providing funding for attendance management (57%).

- Providing other funding (24%), e.g. for mental health services and programmes to help 'at risk' students.

- Giving schools advice (23%), e.g. on successful programmes and support avenues.

A range of other suggestions was also given, including: specialist teachers, social workers, funding for outside education, and raising the perceptions (i.e. value) of education.

1.8 Why Students are Leaving School Early

Objective Four: Identification of the factors that are associated with decisions to leave school before turning 16 by students.

Early school leavers appear to have a lot in common, including being regular truants, struggling academically, difficult home lives, perceptions of 'exclusive' school environments, and being attracted to leave by money or friends outside of school, which can all be components of their disengagement.

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[15] The following support measures were shown in the questionnaire and the principals were asked to indicate whether they thought they were something the Ministry of Education could do to support their school.
[16] Caution, small base size (n=57).

Three quarters of principals (76%) believe students who leave school early have similar attributes or experiences. The most frequently mentioned attributes or experiences by principals were disengagement, low achievement and having a dysfunctional family.[17] This is corroborated by the experiences of early school leavers:

- Disengagement (mentioned spontaneously by 43% of principals). Early leavers substantiate this; of those surveyed, most had been truant (79%), most were truant at least weekly (72%), and most went to school/classes late (70%).

- Low achievement (mentioned spontaneously by 35% of principals)[18]. Half the early leavers (50%) surveyed said they found school hard, and over half (56%) said they had fallen behind in their school work and found it hard to catch up. Around half (46%) said they had either literacy (25%) or numeracy issues (25%), with 13 percent of early leavers saying they had both.

- Dysfunctional family (mentioned spontaneously by 34% of principals). A similar number of early leavers said they had issues at home (29%).

Related to the attributes and experiences of early school leavers, principals also say the following are factors in students leaving before aged 16[19]:

- Issues at home disrupting students' routine (79%).

- Parents/caregivers placing little value on education (69%).

- Students falling too far behind (as a result of truancy or other reason) (67%).

- Drug and alcohol issues (58%).

- Academic issues (51%).

When asked an open-ended question about their reasons for leaving, the top five reasons given by early school leavers can be categorised into 'push' (elements inside the school that encourage students to leave) and 'pull' (elements outside the school that entice students to leave) factors. On balance, the 'push' factors[20] (55%) rather than the 'pull' factors[21] (35%) were most often given as reasons for leaving school by early school leavers[22].

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[17] These responses were unprompted.

[18] From the qualitative research, it was identified that low achievement leads to disengagement unless strategies are enacted to enable the student to *"reach their own level of potential"*.

[19] The qualitative research also supports this.

[20] Push factors were: a poor or bad classroom environment (17%), not liking school (13%), finding school uninteresting or boring (12%), and being stood down/expelled (12%).

[21] Pull factors were: to work or have money (18%) and to do training or an apprenticeship (16%).

[22] This question allowed multiple responses; therefore percentages will not add to 100.

When provided with a list of possible factors[23] relating to their reasons for leaving, the top five reasons given by early school leavers as to why they decided to leave school are (prompted reasons):

- They wanted to leave (92% said this was a factor).

- Knew what they wanted to do when they left (63%).

- Were accepted into a course or apprenticeship (53%).

- Felt school wanted them to leave (45%)[24].

- Had a full-time job (30%).

1.9 Encouraging Students to stay at School

Objective Five: Identification of the factors that may have encouraged these students to stay at school.

As summarised below, apart from more funding for teachers[25], there is also a reported need for curriculum adaptation (external courses and work experience), making school relevant to at risk students, extra academic support (catch-up tuition), interagency connections, building linkages to family and community, attendance management, teacher training and provision of health and social services to dealing with risk indicators early.

Curriculum adaptation

- 76 percent of principals agree that having an alternative school curriculum that is more flexible (e.g. offers options like work and part-time study) is important in supporting students who might otherwise drop out.

- 73 percent of early school leavers say they would have stayed at school if they could do school part-time and also work towards something else like an apprenticeship or course.

- 60 percent of early school leavers say they would have stayed at school if they could work part-time and study part-time.[26]

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[23] Early leavers were read a series of statements and asked if each was true or false for them (refer to student questionnaire appended). Note, the qualitative research found similar results.

[24] Note – this is in contrast with principals who state that 16 percent of teachers want the students to leave.

[25] As reported by principals. More funding for teachers includes having more teachers (in order to have a lower student to staff ratio in the classroom), having specialist teachers (increased numbers and full-time) such as remedial teachers, guidance and careers teachers, also having more teacher aides.

[26] Of those early school leavers who are doing full-time or part-time study elsewhere (53%), nearly all (97%) like it.

Make school more relevant to at risk students

- Qualitative findings indicated that students who could see no tangible connection between the school curriculum and their career goals or skills required for daily life (where they had no goals) could not see the point of staying at school.

- Over two thirds of early school leavers (69%) say they would have stayed at school if the school was more flexible to their needs.

- 72 percent of early school leavers say they would have stayed if they only had to do subjects they liked.

- 71 percent of principals agree that getting students involved in sports or other extra-curricular activities is important in supporting students who might otherwise drop out. Some early school leavers say they would have stayed at school if they had more friendships/social activities at school (17%).

- Some early school leavers say they would have stayed at school if the subjects were more interesting/entertaining/fun (11%), and if they had more subject choices (8%)[27].

Extra academic support (catch-up tuition)

- 59 percent of principals think offering extra academic help for students (internal or external) is important in supporting students who might otherwise drop out.

Inter-agency connections

- 70 percent of principals think greater inter-agency support is important in supporting students who might otherwise drop out.

- Provision of health is seen as a benefit by families, thus serving as an effective incentive to send their children to school. Principals reported increased student retention in schools where there is easy and confidential access to health services (mother and child units, substance abuse clinics, family planning, STI clinics).

- School liaison with and access to social services, provides opportunity for issues outside the school environment which are hindering retention to be addressed by skilled professionals.

- This enables schools to concentrate on creating a positive learning environment for students, by freeing up time that is otherwise spent addressing the issues of the minority.

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[27] These responses were unprompted.

Building linkages to family and community

- Principals try to overcome student retention issues by having family involvement (36%)[28].

- Two thirds of principals (66%) agree that teaching the value of education not just to students, but to the wider community and parents is important in supporting students who might otherwise drop out.

Attendance management

- 57 percent of principals said they would like funding for attendance management.

Teacher training

- The qualitative findings indicated that principals, teachers and students identified that not all teachers have the 'soft' skills required to connect meaningfully with their students, particularly **relationship** building:

  - relationship building – find out what is important to the student, and what else is going on with students' lives
  - understanding current teenagers – methods and means of communication have changed (text, e-mail), participation in community (face to face, via the internet) and expectations have changed since teachers were their students' age, teachers need to know how and where to access the resources/advice to make the learning environment relevant
  - supportive behaviours – actively seek solutions to problems/issues with the students rather than place the issues in the 'too hard basket'
  - communication skills – listening to and talking with students.

- Over half these early leavers also say that they would have stayed at school if they had more support from teachers to stay (57%).

- Some early school leavers say they would have stayed at school if the teachers were more likeable/fun (9%).[29]

Provision of health and social services

- Educators agree that students who are mentally and physically healthy are better equipped to learn but not all students' home environments ensure physical and mental health.

- Provision of health is seen as a benefit by families, thus serving as an effective incentive to send their children to school. Principals reported increased student retention in schools where there is easy and confidential access to health services (mother and child units, substance abuse clinics, family planning, STI clinics).

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[28] This is an unprompted response.
[29] Unprompted response from an open-ended question.

School liaison with and access to social services, provides opportunity for issues outside the school environment which are hindering retention to be addressed by skilled professionals.

- This enables schools to concentrate on creating a positive learning environment for students, by freeing up time that is otherwise spent addressing the issues of the minority.

Dealing with risk indicators early

- Nearly all the principals (91%) agree there are typical warning signs of students at risk of leaving school. These signs are: truancy (67%), disengaged attitudes (48%) and disruptive behaviours (35%).[30]

- The qualitative research indicated that, in order to mediate the risks, it is important to act on the warning signs early (or pre-empt them). In addition to the practices that are effective in retaining students who might otherwise be at risk of leaving early (as listed in objective two), other suggested options to dealing with the risk factors are:

  - develop monitoring, assessment and response guidance tools for secondary schools to use relative to risk indicators (such as truancy, behaviour problems or poor achievement)
  - attendance management – some effective practices reported were acting quickly on truancy, e.g. within two hours of students not attending school, parents are contacted. However, attendance management is perceived to take up too much of the school's time
  - parental involvement – meet with parents to address issues with students in a non-threatening and culturally sensitive way, directly with teachers or via community liaison officers, so as to understand 'where the family is coming from'. Provide adult literacy and life skills classes to demonstrate to parents the tangible benefits of education
  - inter-agency support.

1.10 Key Findings and Information to Assist Options Development

1.9.1 Literacy and Numeracy 'Catch-up' Tuition

One of the factors associated with leaving school early was students falling behind in their school work and/or finding their school work too difficult[31]. Therefore, additional tuition support may be required to assist students to catch-up or to cope better with their school work.

Prior to providing catch-up tuition it would first be necessary to identify the students who are having learning issues. As mentioned earlier, a successful practice (as identified by principals) for doing this is the Year 9 interview of students (to identify any prior issues from primary and intermediate). Some schools also mentioned teachers need to be equipped to
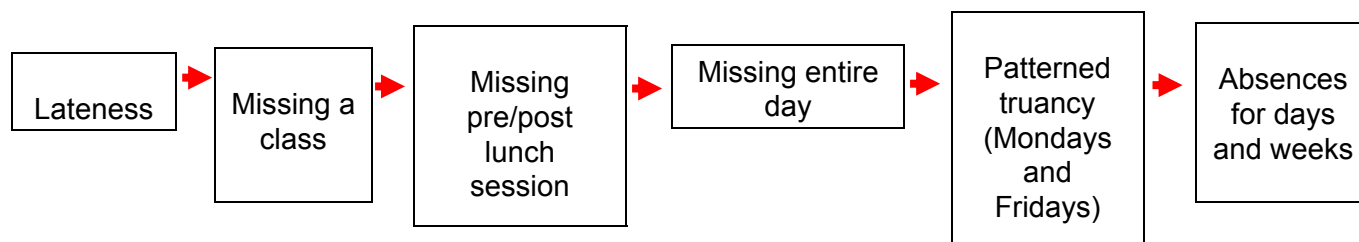
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[30] This was a multiple response question, percentages will not add to 100.
[31] As outlined under research objective four: around half of the early leavers (46%) had either literacy (25%) or numeracy issues (25%), with 16 percent of early leavers having problems with both.

recognise children with learning issues, e.g. literacy issue or English language skills, dyslexia or slow learner (i.e. whether something is a symptom or a cause).

1.9.2 Student Engagement/Disengagement

As shown by the research there are common risk indicators for disengagement. Truancy is the most easily identified expression of disengagement, escalating as follows:

| Lateness | → | Missing a class | → | Missing pre/post lunch session | → | Missing entire day | → | Patterned truancy (Mondays and Fridays) | → | Absences for days and weeks |

Actions undertaken to arrest this flow are likely to increase retention.

Disruptive behaviours are the other most easily recognised expressions of disengagement.

Schools (principals and teachers) indicated that, in order to ensure students remain engaged, the following processes and approaches have proved to be helpful:

- Adapting the curriculum (e.g. successful practices have included a personalised approach to curriculum structure so it is more relevant to students' future goals, two days in school with three days in a work environment (e.g. apprenticeship), and sourcing courses outside the school that are relevant to student interests, and distance learning)[32].

- Developing effective relationships with students.

- Getting students involved in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

The following matters raised in the context of student engagement, are addressed in detail elsewhere in this report:

- Literacy and numeracy catch-up tuition for students that are struggling or have fallen behind.

- Promoting and explaining the relevance of subjects (e.g. through industry connections and linking subjects to employment or study outcomes).

- Increased flexibility and innovation to accommodate students' interests and needs (e.g. 'hands-on' work experience, other forms of curriculum adaptation and co- or extra-curricular activities to engender interest and maintain engagement).

- Upskilling teachers on how to develop effective relationships and to engage students.

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[32] Examples of successful practices mentioned included Gateway and STAR.

- Providing opportunities for students to develop other effective relationships – for example, involving other independent adults who may be positive role models or simply available from time to time for students to talk to at school.

1.9.3 Professional Development for Teachers

As noted above, effective relationships with teachers and effective teaching is important for keeping students engaged. Suggestions from the qualitative research about ensuring effective teaching ranged from **pre-service** suggestions to **in-service** suggestions.

Pre-service suggestions included:

- Reviewing the acceptance process of training teachers (e.g. assess potential candidates'suitability and aptitude for teaching as a vocation).

- Reviewing, in the medium to long-term, the curriculum taught at colleges of education and other teacher training facilities – especially for secondary teachers. Specific areas mentioned as requiring attention were strategies for student engagement, relationship building, classroom management, teaching to different levels within a class, and personal resilience).

Post-service suggestions included:

- Ongoing professional development for teachers (it was noted that one off courses are not as valuable as seeing best practice teaching modelled in the classroom).

- Principals presenting and discussing teacher professional development plans with the Board of Trustees.

- Modelling of best practice for establishing good relationships in the classroom between teachers and students.

- Te Kōtahitanga was mentioned by principals as a positive practice (focusing on effective relationships between teachers and students, and recognising that deficit theorising by teachers can be a major impediment to students' educational achievement).

1.9.4 Student Pathways/Careers Advice

Some students are bewildered by the choices they need to make and have no clear idea what to do or where to go to begin to understand what to do next. With these students it is important that there is some intervention to show them what is out there, or else they may just 'give up'.

Effective practices have included taking students to universities to show them what it is like (i.e. 'you can fit in here'), placing students in various workplace environments to understand what working means, and talking with students to understand their interests and use this to discover career options that students may otherwise have never considered.

The research indicates that increasing understanding of the value of education and the relevance of subjects to students' goals and interests may encourage students to stay at school longer[33]. Also it may help to encourage families to better support their children to stay at school.

1.9.5 External Support Required

The research indicates that, in order to support students staying at school, external support is required. This includes support from students' families, interagency connections and community support.

Specific suggestions that were made included:

- A 'multi-systemic' approach to support: facilitating the making of timely and effective connections with other agencies (i.e. both government and non-government – possibly as an extension of the well-regarded Ministry student support service).

- Medical and other health and wellbeing support for students – i.e. either available on-site at the school or visiting/referral services that are 'youth-friendly'.
- Building good home-school relationships. Encourage parental involvement in school (parents and schools working together to keep students in school).

Continuing to promote importance of education in conjunction with these was also seen as important (e.g. through Team Up and Te Mana).

1.9.6 Early Leaving Exemptions

Most principals (70%) think the link between truancy and applying for an early leaving exemption is strong. Truancy is usually a symptom of disengagement with school. In some of these cases early leaving exemptions can be seen as a "get out of jail free" card for schools/students who are unable/unwilling to deal with the root cause of the truancy.

Interestingly, just over a quarter of principals (28%) think the link between the number of stand downs/suspensions and early leaving exemptions is strong or very strong. This is because stand downs/suspensions maintain the dialogue between the student/family and school, which continues the relationship between student/family and school based education, whereas early leaving exemptions is the end of the relationship.

The qualitative research indicated that schools perceive there will always be a need for early leaving exemptions (i.e. in extreme instances where a student has a prolonged history of serious behavioural and learning problems and also for the instances where the student has a genuine opportunity that is likely to produce good outcomes for them).[34] Typically, early leaving exemptions were spoken of as a 'last resort'. There was some concern that once an early leaving exemption was granted that no one then monitored whether or not the early leaver remained in work or at the alternative learning institute.[35]

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[33] Around half of the students (48%) felt the subjects they did were stupid and meaningless.

[34] 11 percent of principals who think they should be granted automatically if parents ask for them.

[35] Indeed, 16 percent of the early leavers surveyed were currently neither working nor studying.

Around a fifth of principals (23%) think it is important or very important that the process of applying for an early leaving exemption is made harder in order to support students to stay at school who might otherwise apply for an exemption. Given this and the finding that greater interagency support may be required to reduce the numbers of students who leave school early, there are several possible elements or permutations of the approach that could be considered to address these concerns, including:

- Before approving an early leaving exemption, undertaking a thorough review of what has (or has not) been tried to address the issues contributing to the student's desire to leave school.

- Taking steps to ensure that all reasonable options are exhausted before approving an early leaving exemption.

- Increasing knowledge of, access to, and coordination of a full range of government and non-government support services.

- Completing detailed needs assessments and matching services to those needs.[36]

- Taking some of the load off schools – for example, by increasing the capacity of the Ministry's student support teams (which appear to be generally well-regarded).

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[36] This is along the same lines as the Ministry recently concluded (in the course of Student Engagement Initiative work) was appropriate for some excluded students to expedite their re-enrolment at another school.

2.0
Research Findings

2.0 Barriers to Student Retention

Objective One: Factors that are seen by schools as barriers to retaining students at school to the age of 16.

2.1 Risk Factors

Students who are at risk of leaving school before the age of 16 are identifiable, with around three-quarters of principals (76%) believing that students who leave school before the age of 16 have similar attributes or experiences, and nearly all principals (91%) believing there are typical warning signs for identifying students at risk.

2.1.1 Frequently Observed Attributes/Experiences

Principals who believe early school leavers have similar attributes or experiences were asked to list the types of attributes and experiences that these students have[37]. The most frequently mentioned attributes and experiences are shown below:

- Disengagement (43%).

- Low achievement (35%).

- Dysfunctional family (34%).

- Lack of family support (30%).

- Lack of social skills (24%).

Disengagement

Over two-fifths (43%) of principals report that most students who leave before age 16 are disengaged:

> *"They are disengaged with school and lacking clear focus about future pathways."*

Low Achievement

Around a third of principals (35%) believe early school leavers are similar in terms of low academic achievement:

> *"They have a history of poor or limited achievement/success."*

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[37] Most principals listed more than one type of attribute or experience, therefore the percentages do not add to 100 percent (base: n=94).

Around a fifth of principals (21%) reported that literacy and numeracy issues can also be typical attributes of early school leavers. This is also supported by early school leavers who indicated that struggling academically may be a factor in deciding to leave school. Around half of the school leavers report that prior to leaving school, they[38]:

- Had fallen behind in their school work and found it too hard to catch up (56%).

- Found school work difficult (50%).

- Had fallen behind in their school work due to being unwell (49%).

- Had problems with reading (25%) and had problems with writing (21%).

Over two-thirds (69%) of principals agree that falling too far behind academically (e.g. as a result of truancy or other reasons) is a factor for students leaving school before the age of 16.

Lack of Family Support/Dysfunctional Family

Issues at home are also seen to be a typical experience of early school leavers, with around a third of principals saying that early school leavers typically will have a dysfunctional family (34%), and/or a lack of family support (30%):

> *"Poor family support for the value of education, family role models involved in unskilled labour and do not see any value in formal education."*

Note that a similar number of early school leavers (29%) report they had issues at home. Issues at home included parents separating (sometimes involving a custody battle), a death in the family, transience (i.e. constantly moving area/school), alcohol and drug related issues, students having to care for/support family members (by staying at home and/or working), abusive parents (verbally and physically) and financial issues resulting in poor living conditions.

Lack of Social Skills

Having low or no social skills is an identifying attribute of early school leavers, mentioned by around a quarter of principals (24%):

> *"Their social skills for interaction with peers are poorly developed."*

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[38] This question asked students whether each of these factors were true or false for them.

2.1.2 Warning Signs

Principals who think there are typical warning signs in identifying students who are at risk of leaving school before the age of 16 were asked to list the warning signs[39].   The most frequently mentioned attributes and experiences are shown below:

- Truancy (67%).

- Disengaged attitudes (48%).

- Disruptive (35%).

- Lack of family support (25%).

- Negative out of school behaviour (19%).

These are explored below.

Truancy

Truancy is the most frequently mentioned warning sign in identifying students at risk of leaving school before the age of 16 (mentioned spontaneously by 67% of principals).

"Truancy - especially wagging class within the school day."

In relation to this, nearly eight out of ten (79%) school leavers say they were truant at least once before leaving school, with 72 percent reporting that they were truant at least weekly.

Principals were asked to rate how strong they believe the link between truancy and students applying for early leaving exemptions is. Around three-quarters (72%) of principals believe the link between truancy and applying for an early leaving exemption is strong (rating it either 'strong' or 'very strong' on a 5-point scale).   In contrast, under a third (30%) of principals believe the link between stand downs and applying for an early leaving exemption is strong.

The qualitative research supports this, in that it was found principals and teachers believe that stand downs/suspensions maintain the dialogue between the student/family and school, which continues the relationship between student/family and school based education, whereas an early leaving exemption is the end of the relationship.

Behaviour: Disengaged Attitudes, Disruptiveness and Negative Out of School Behaviour

Behaviour is also commonly mentioned by principals as a warning sign of students at risk of leaving school early; with around half (48%) saying the students become disengaged, over a third (35%) saying the students become disruptive, and around a fifth (19%) saying a warning sign is negative out of school behaviours, for example, being involved in drugs and alcohol or gangs.

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[39] Most principals listed more than one warning sign, therefore the percentages do not add to 100 percent (base: n=110).

"Failure to engage fully in academic learning, a development of single period absences, inattention and off task behaviour in class."

"Out of school behaviours, e.g. sexually active, alcohol and drug suggestions, gang or unemployed friends and on an Independent Living Allowance."

Some principals believe that swift and harsh management is the most effective way to arrest these types of behaviours.

> *"We have specific people who deal with behaviours to deans, the deputy principal puts a lot of, a huge amount of effort into modifying student behaviour in dealing with situations when they arise, so the boys of the school know that if something goes wrong, then it gets dealt with swiftly and harshly, and because it's a boys school, because there's a pretty immediate response, it gets dealt with really well and they know that's going to happen. From the boys' perspective, they don't really focus on things down the track, so if it's an immediate thing they see the benefit of it, which is why I front the kids everyday for lateness, if they're late in that morning I see them two hours later."*

Lack of Family Support

A quarter of principals (25%) say that a typical warning sign for being at risk of leaving school early is a lack of family support.

> *"They have parents who do not motivate them, parents who do not understand the value of education, and parents who do not understand which qualifications are real and which are time fillers."*

The qualitative research also found that in some of these cases the families are just not aware of how or where to demonstrate their support due to their unfamiliarity with the education system. For some families, coming into school and dealing with educators is a *'scary'* and daunting prospect.

2.2 Barriers to Student Retention

Principals were asked whether they thought the barriers for students staying at school are more about the students themselves (including their peers and home life), the school's offering, or a mixture of both. Six out of ten principals (60%) think that it is a mixture of both, while over a third (37%) believe it is more about the students. Only one percent of principals think it is solely about the school (two percent answered "don't know" for this question).

2.3 Main Barriers Faced By Schools

Principals were asked to list the main barriers their school faces in trying to keep students at school until the age of 16[40]. The barriers that were most frequently mentioned by principals are:

- The current school curriculum (mentioned by 46% of principals).

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[40] Most principals listed more than one barrier, therefore the percentages do not add to 100 percent (base: n=123).

- Staffing issues (28%).

- Lack of family support (23%).

- The student not valuing education (17%).

- Funding (15%)[41].

School Curriculum

The school curriculum appears to be the biggest barrier for principals, with nearly half of them (46%) mentioning the curriculum as one of the main barriers for their school in trying to retain students until the age of 16. Common types of issues mentioned include the curriculum not being suited to all students and not being able to provide a wide range of courses to suit every student:

> *"A curriculum aimed at academia rather than practical life skills does little to assist the school in keeping challenging pupils longer."*

> *"Lack of support/resources to develop suitable programmes for students at risk of leaving school early (these need to be in school and individually focused), and availability of alternative education seen is as an option but this doesn't suit the 13/14 year olds."*

Staffing Issues

Over a quarter of principals (28%) say that staffing issues are one of the main barriers at their school to retaining students. Types of staffing issues include a lack of staff (or of good staff) and a lack of specialist staff, as well as the attitudes of some teachers"

> *"Attitude of some teachers who hold deficit model and attribute failure simply to student characteristics."*

> *"We have a lack of staff time to devote one to one with these students."*

Lack of Family Support

Just under a quarter of principals (23%) say that one of the main barriers for their school in retaining students is a lack of family support, with the students having problems at home, the parents not valuing education or having low expectations of their children:

> *"All the barriers can be summed up in one statement: whanau and parents not seeing education as a priority."*

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[41] Principals were allowed to mention as many barriers as they were aware of.

> *"Sometimes the problems have got so bad at home, that the parents are desperate to allow the student to go away on a course/to work, so their home life can be retrieved, and put pressure on us to sign the form."*

This barrier was also indicated by the school leavers themselves, with around a third of students (29%) saying that issues at home made it hard to stay at school.[42].

The Student Not Valuing Education

Around a fifth of principals (17%) say that the student not valuing education is one of the main barriers for their school in retaining the students until they are 16 years old:

> *"Attitude – it's better to give up school and do a 'course' or low level job rather than look to the long term, difficulty seeing long term benefits from continued education, and lack of engagement with the school system."*

> *"We live in a rural area and lots of lads can earn big money on farms or in the bush, so they are struggling through three plus years of school knowing they are unlikely to pass, so it seems pointless to them."*

Funding

Fifteen percent of principals say that a lack of funding is one of the main barriers for their school in retaining students until the age of 16; for example, a lack of money to provide alternative courses or programmes that may be better suited to the students:

> *"Not enough funding to provide courses from tertiary providers for these students (Year 10 and 11 students) and not enough staffing to give the students different curriculum options."*

> *"Lack of money to provide a diversity of alternative courses which need low student to teacher ratios."*

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[42] This question asked students whether this factor was true or false for them.

2.4   Factors that are Barriers to Retaining Students

Principals were asked how much they agree or disagree that various factors are barriers for their school in retaining students until they are 16 years old. These are explored overleaf.

Barriers to Retaining Students

Factor	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree somewhat	Agree	Agree strongly	n
The attitude of the student (e.g. disengaged from learning or disruptive)	2%	3%	2%	3%	15%	28%	47%	n=123
A lack of specialised staff who are able to support students at risk of leaving school	5%	7%	1%	4%	22%	23%	39%	n=122
A lack of parental/caregiver support	3%	5%	9%	7%	17%	26%	33%	n=123
A lack of external professional support for students at risk of leaving school	3%	4%	4%	12%	18%	25%	34%	n=122
The suitability of mainstream education for some students	4%	7%	7%	8%	20%	24%	29%	n=123
A lack of funding for co-curricular activities	7%	7%	6%	17%	20%	20%	23%	n=123
A lack of funding for attendance management	7%	15%	5%	12%	20%	19%	22%	n=123
The personal suitability of students to school	7%	12%	6%	12%	26%	25%	13%	n=121
A lack of support from the Ministry of Education	6%	7%	10%	24%	17%	24%	13%	n=121
A high student to staff ratio	11%	16%	9%	20%	11%	19%	14%	n=123
A lack of community support	5%	15%	14%	20%	17%	16%	12%	n=123

Similar to when the principals were asked to list the main barriers for their school by way of an open-ender, when prompted, the factors that most principals agree are a barrier for their school in retaining students until the age of 16 are:

• The attitude of the student (e.g. disengaged from learning or disruptive) (76%).

• A lack of specialised staff able to support students at risk of leaving school (61%).[43]

• A lack of parental/caregiver support (59%).

• A lack of external professional support for students who are at risk of leaving school (58%).

Factors that fewer principals agree are a barrier for their school in retaining students until the age of 16 are:

• A lack of community support (28%).

• A high student to staff ratio (33%).

• A lack of support from the Ministry of Education (37%).

• The personal suitability of students to school (38%).

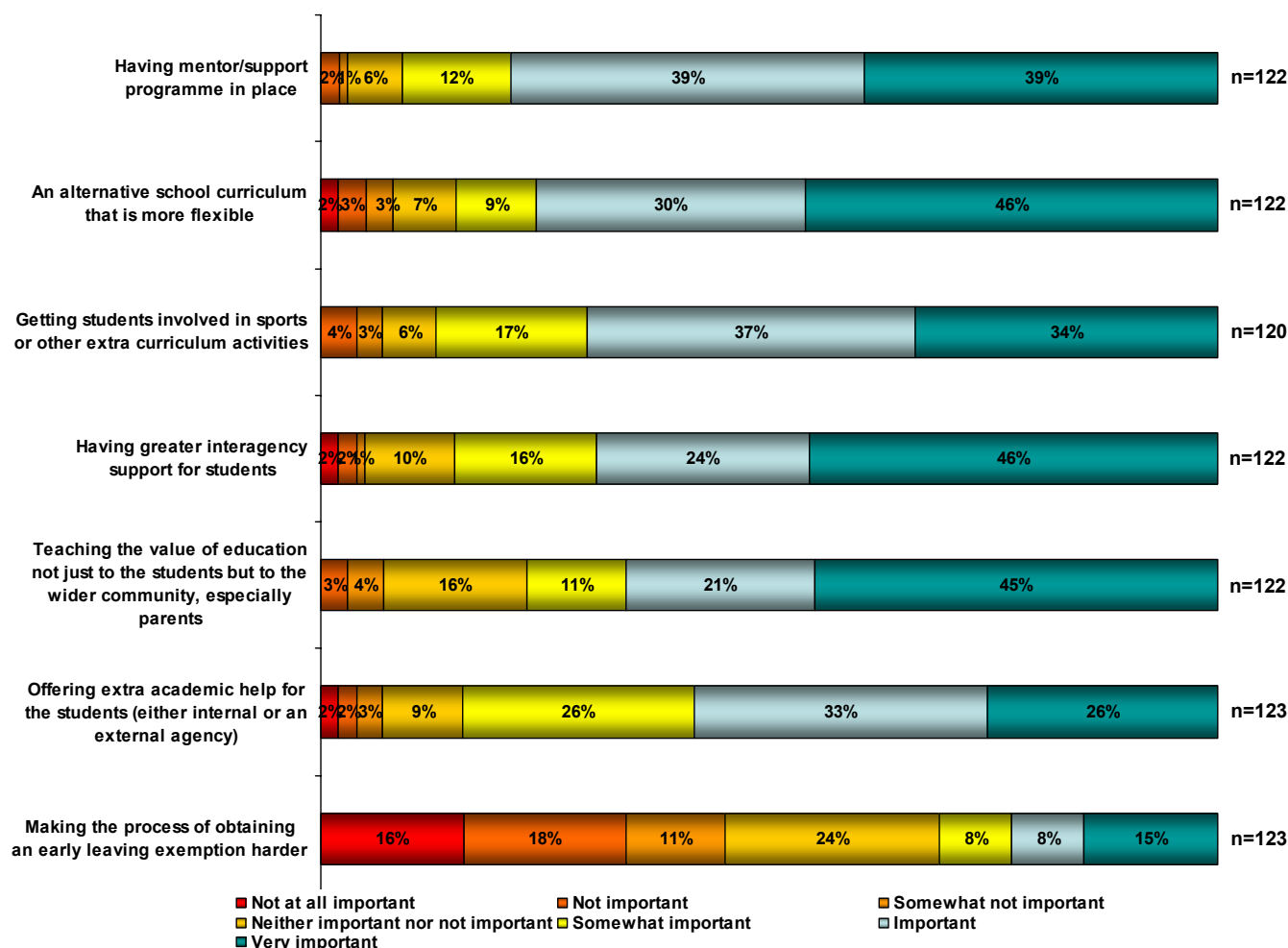[43] Difference to graph is due to rounding

3.0 Supporting Student Retention

> *Objective Two: Factors that support student retention that are seen by schools as working well.*

3.1 Factors Actively Supporting Student Retention

Principals were asked to rate how important various factors are in actively supporting students who might otherwise apply for an early leaving exemption or drop out. These factors included having a mentoring or support programme in place, an alternative school curriculum that is more flexible, and getting students involved in sports or other extra-curricular activities.

Importance of Factors Supporting Student Retention

Factor							n
Having mentor/support programme in place	2% 1% 6%	12%		39%		39%	n=122
An alternative school curriculum that is more flexible	2% 3% 3% 7%	9%	30%		46%		n=122
Getting students involved in sports or other extra curriculum activities	4% 3% 6%	17%	37%		34%		n=120
Having greater interagency support for students	2% 2% 1%	10%	16%	24%	46%		n=122
Teaching the value of education not just to the students but to the wider community, especially parents	3% 4%	16%	11%	21%	45%		n=122
Offering extra academic help for the students (either internal or an external agency)	2% 2% 3%	9%	26%	33%	26%		n=123
Making the process of obtaining an early leaving exemption harder	16%	18%	11%	24%	8% 8%	15%	n=123

Legend:
- Not at all important
- Not important
- Somewhat not important
- Neither important nor not important
- Somewhat important
- Important
- Very important

Bases exclude those who answered "don't know"

3.1.1 Important Factors

The factors that principals believe are most important in supporting student retention (those for which over 70 percent of principals rated as either 'important' or 'very important'), were:

- Having a mentor or support programme in place (79%).

- Providing an alternative school curriculum that is more flexible (e.g. it may offer options like work and study part-time) (76%).

- Getting students involved in sports or other extra-curricular activities (71%).

- Having greater inter-agency support for students (70%).

When principals were subsequently asked what types of agencies they would like help from the Ministry to connect with, the most frequently mentioned agencies were CYFs (40%), Work and Income (19%), and the Police (19%)[44].

3.1.2 Least Important Factor

The factor that was rated as having the lowest importance in terms of actively supporting students to stay at school was 'making the process of obtaining an early leaving exemption harder for the student', with around a quarter (23%) of principals rating this as either 'important' or 'very important'.

3.2 Overcoming Barriers to Retention

Principals were asked to list what their school does to overcome the barriers they face in retaining students at school until they are 16 years old[45]. The most frequently mentioned things the schools do to overcome the barriers are:

- Adapt the curriculum (40%).

- Family involvement (36%).

- Guidance (18%).

- Career programmes (17%).

- Work experience for the students (16%).

- Staff involvement (16%).

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[44] Caution, small base size (n=57). Only those that said they would like the Ministry to help them make inter-agency connections were asked to list the agencies that they think would be most useful for their school to be connected to.

[45] Most principals listed more than one thing that their school does to overcome the barriers, therefore the percentages do not add to 100 percent (base: n=123).

Adapting the Curriculum

Adapting the curriculum was the most frequently mentioned thing that schools do to overcome the barriers they face in keeping students at school until they are 16, with two-fifths (40%) of principals reporting that their schools do this. Ways of adapting the curriculum include creating innovative courses for students, running more practical courses, or having programmes such as ASDAN, OtagoNet or Pathway at their school:

> *"We provide alternative courses at Years 11 and 12 to try to encourage success."*

> *"Develop programmes of work to be more relevant to the kids, offer programmes at the senior school to match the kids' needs, including Gateway and STAR courses."*

Family Involvement

Over a third of principals (36%) mentioned that their school encourages more family involvement in their attempt to keep students at school, for example having more communication with parents, or educating them about the value of education:

> *"Improving the engagement of parents and whanau in the triangular relationship for achievement (namely student, school and whanau)."*

> *"We get parents in for meetings or go to their home and talk with them."*

Guidance, Career Programmes and Work Experience

Around a sixth of principals mentioned increased use of guidance facilities (18%), career programmes (17%), and work experience (16%) as ways that their schools overcome the barriers to student retention:

> *"We have career planning for all levels, and a Careers Counsellor working mainly with disengaged students."*

> *"We have a comprehensive careers programme (years 7 – 10) followed by STAR/Gateways programmes in the senior years with relevant and student specific personalised courses, and put a lot of emphasis on building a culture of career pathways/tertiary learning."*

Staff Involvement

Around a sixth of principals (16%) mentioned increased staff involvement as a way of helping their school to overcome the barriers in keeping students at school until the age of 16:

> *"Staff professional development is focussed on the importance of relationships both in the classroom and beyond."*

> *"We are in Te Kōtahitanga which addresses the relationship aspects of effective teaching."*

3.3   Most Effective Retention Practices

Most principals (79%) report that their school does something specifically to keep students at school until the age of 16, and were asked to list the most effective thing their school does.[46]

Around half (49%) of the principals adapt the curriculum in some way:

> *"Teacher timetabled to individualise and supervise alternative courses, including: literacy and numeracy, NCEA, STAR, Gateway and OtagoNet programmes.   It's a big cost to our mainstream timetable but it pays off."*

> *"We offer a range of courses within the school with less academic focus and more work experiences. We also have learning centres for small group work and Alternative Education."*

Around a quarter of principals (24%) say that they provide work experience for their students:

> *"Providing alternative learning programmes, encouraging flexibility in work experience programmes, and developing a range of non-conventional subjects, for example, automotive engineering."*

> *"We have a work experience class at Year 12 (also for some Year 11's if deemed necessary) and also run the Gateway programme."*

Around a quarter (22%) of principals say that their school tries to get the student's family involved:

> *"Spending time, lots of it in some cases, talking with students and their parents, giving them second, third, and fourth chances. However, in many instances, interventions from the school are not supported from the home."*

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[46] Note, nearly all principals mentioned more than one effective thing that their school does, therefore percentages do not add to 100 percent.

> *"Involve the family and community in the every day activities of the college. Make them feel part of a culture that wants them here and that together we can make a difference."*

Around a fifth (19%) of principals report that getting the staff involved in the student is effective:

> *"We ensure that the staff show an interest in the students."*

> *"We develop good teacher-student relationships."*

The qualitative research identified the following as effective practices, with examples provided in the words of the educators themselves:

* ***Prior identification of existing issues*** – schools actively seek academic and background information on each student entering Year 9. This is done in order to identify any existing issues (e.g. literacy, behavioural) so that school can put structures in place to address these.

> *"When students arrive at Year 9 we have a huge amount of data from our contributing schools, we share data we accept their data so we know where they are at and we target particular students that have got poor literacy, numeracy, behaviour, social issues. We run ten teaching classes at Years 9 and 10 for them.*

> *We also interview their teacher in one of the three contributing schools we have and find out background about their family and about the student, what are their likes, dislikes, social issues are and that all contributes to how we place them in a particular class and the structures we put around them."*

* ***Dealing with literacy and numeracy issues*** – provide additional literacy and numeracy support within the learning environment for less competent students. This is done in order to bring students up to a level of competency that enables them to effectively participate in the learning process, thus preventing disengagement.

> *"We have three Year 9 classes for English, science and social studies where we have 12 of our most needy kids in each of those classes so we are dealing with 30 plus kids and we top up those classes with a range of other kids. So there will be some high achieving kids there, there will be some average kids and I put two teachers in there for those three subjects and it's quite complex but effectively you are creating a teaching environment and so we are able to differentiate the programmes.*

> *So the classes are operating more effectively in groups and so while we don't say 'you are the dummies you go into that class over there and we don't want to know about you', 'we are going to teach you within this class environment and sometimes we are going to work as a full class. But then we might do our written work in different groups depending on your particular skills'. And so the kids aren't so socially isolated and they can see some effective learning taking place by other kids and the modeling and so it is a much, much more effective way of thinking."*

- ***Getting to know the student*** – the school (principal, deputy principal, dean) meets with all students entering the school. This enables the school to provide the most engaging curriculum for each student based on their needs and interests. This is also an effective first step in building a relationship between the school, the student and the student's family.

> *"I personally (principal) conduct entrance interviews for all Year 9s, understanding their strengths, weaknesses and interests, not just from an education viewpoint but also in their lives. I get to know a bit about them as people and where their head is at… Can develop a pathway and curriculum that suits them better, or at least is of interest to them… Treat them as people, show them a bit of respect, we are interested and listening to you...it begins a relationship with the school."*

- ***Recognise that there are other pathways beyond the academic*** – schools offer more trade/career oriented learning options to those students for whom an academic pathway is less relevant. Students who find school relevant to their future goal are less inclined to leave early.

> **"***If they are going to take over the farm, there's no point building them up for a life based on academic qualifications. Show them farming related skills, maths for running a farm, science to understand fertiliser or whatever, understanding taxes and funding – not how to achieve enough points to go to college to study an unrelated subject just for the sake of it."*

> *"So we run our two top classes in Year 10 to university visits, our next two classes to polytech visits and that is again just an effort to show them what is out there. Our hunch is that our kids actually don't know what is out there so we have also got a programme that runs our Year 10 kids into town for three days and they do a programme based in town for three days just to show them central Christchurch and things like the library and the museum and the art gallery and historic trailer in town. Just that sense that our kids are very much from [area] and to venture out is actually a big effort for them. One year they trucked the whole school to the beach on the first day of school, that was a real eye opener for some of the kids."*

- ***Goal setting*** – schools help students with life goal setting through exposure to potential futures – realities of student life, trades, professions, and to provide encouragement to reach those goals. This is done to make the outcome of school more tangible and therefore relevant to the student.

> *"All students who are at risk and all Year 10's produced a plan like this so they think about who they are and start looking at their career goals and thinking about what they're learning, their personal goals and what they need to do to reach them, what could get in the way, what they could do about it, what strengths they've got, and it's a way of recording their subject choices, but this is a living document that goes through the school with them…*

More commonly with kids that age, either a career adviser who is also a counsellor, or me, will work with them and help them establish really clear career goals and work out how they can staircase through to that goal and what the first step is, and we will take them to a course, usually it's a course, to visit the course, to get familiarised, help them get involved, and meet with parents and talk about the process. If it's an apprenticeship they need, then we will help them with work experience first, sometimes we will help them with getting a job and getting into an apprenticeship, but often they have to have a trial period or go out to a job for a while."

- ***Encourage good relationships between teachers and students*** – listening to and talking with students, providing encouragement and positive reinforcement and building realistic expectations develops good relationships between students and teachers. This demonstrates the school's interest in the student, making them feel like a valued member of the school community, and increasing their likelihood of remaining at school.

  "I think it really is quite significant for some kids who are in that 'will I or won't I stick around', that relationship can be quite critical. If they have got one teacher who they trust, and we know that there is an English teacher or technology teacher who has developed a particular relationship with this kid then we use that and try and talk things through and rationalise that."

  "Our principal is really, really good listening to kids, you know if a kid is really in trouble and has been stood down by the board, something else happens, she listens to the kids, she tries to get her head around why are they doing this. They are just not out on their ear. And I think that is really important."

- ***On-going professional development of teachers*** – whereby the school culture actively encourages teachers' continued learning, demonstrated by providing access to support networks that facilitate this. This equips teachers with the skills to create a more engaging learning environment and one within which students want to remain.

  "Historically when this school started off, achievement levels were appalling. In 2002 we had 11% of our Year 11's get NCEA Level 1 which is below a decile 1 school. This last year it has risen to 52% – 57% is the national average. So our level 1 results have risen quite dramatically and that comes down to we have placed an emphasis on teacher professional learning has been our major focus and I think it's really paying off.

  We have an ongoing strategic professional learning development programme and it operates every week, we have an hour out of it every week, everyone is involved in their own action research, there is a coaching programme operating here, there is in-class observation, feedback sessions, at least six to eight times a year for every staff member. And everyone is involved in their own professional learning group and we put a huge emphasis and that is what is paying off. Now I don't think other schools have anything like that."

- ***Continuity of 'adult' contact*** – provide access to an adult (teacher, guidance counsellor, community leader) for the duration of students' careers, not just for the crisis points. This person will reinforce 'positive' behaviours that may otherwise be lacking in the student's life, encouraging the student to remain within the educational system.

  > *"Finding somebody who they can talk to and hopefully emulate, particularly amongst boys when there is no adult male figure in their lives. It doesn't have to a teacher, it could be somebody within their community who they look up to, a sportsperson, a professional, whoever… just somebody who'll help them find the way"*

- ***Health support*** – whereby schools facilitate access to health services for students (and their families). This is done to remove health issues as a barrier to students' learning.

  > *"I think health services are reasonably strong here, we actually have a medical centre on site funded by the DHB and that operates three days a week, 15 hours with a nurse, 5 hours with a doctor so kids get free medical service here as well as their own GP services etc and that is all credit to our DHB. I think they have been incredibly proactive and I give them full credit for it. Often health issues aren't being addressed because parents are off to work or 'oh well just see how it goes' and they don't get around to it and these things get worse. Whereas the kids can do something about that here, they don't have to get their parents to go along with them."*

- ***Targeted support*** – whereby schools identify specific areas where support within the wider community would engender greater engagement with schools and education. By creating a tangible value to education within the community, parents/caregivers are less likely to support student withdrawal from education.

  > *"We've got a Pacific Island liaison staff member. She works closely with the PI boys, we've got a Māori liaison staff member who works closely with the Māori boys…It's just getting it out there that it's ok to attend school, if you attend school you will learn, if you will learn you will achieve, if you achieve you will get a better job. It's getting that message out there, because a lot of the parents do want them to come to school and get an education, but have no idea what the education is and often won't have the support background to back it up. As I've said right early on, many of the problems we have with this sort of leaving early, home life is dysfunctional as well, so you're getting 16 year old boys looking after themselves."*

- ***Multi-systemic support*** – when necessary, schools involve other agencies (CYFs, Family Planning doctors, Police, truancy services) so that families do not feel isolated and unsupported when there are problems.

  > *"Well we try and engage outside agencies to support the family, be it CYFs, be it something like [name] Trust, Drug and Alcohol, Truancy Service, we use the Police, we use all of these services, [name] Centre, Family Planning, doctors, we have a lot of liaison with doctors, we use all of these to try and support the family so that it's a multi systemic system where you have got a number of people all working to support so that families aren't isolated."*

- ***Community Liaison*** – whereby schools support Community liaison officers who visit with families to help identify and understand issues and involve the wider community in school activities. This is done to make the school environment more welcoming and inclusive.

  > *"The community liaison scheme that we have is very successful so that helps build up the home school partnerships … Two community liaison officers who go to homes and visit homes and say 'what is the problem' and 'can you sort it?' They find things out and they mentor the students and they do restorative justice. They are from this community, they speak in a way that the parents speak, and they identify things that are going wrong, so they just knit up together that home/school partnership."*

4.0 Encouraging Greater Retention

Objective Three: Factors that would encourage schools to encourage greater student retention.

In order to understand how to encourage schools to encourage greater student retention, it is essential to understand the context in which schools operate, in terms of the principals' attitudes around early school leavers.

4.1   Context Setting

Small numbers of principals agree (answering that they 'agree' or 'agree strongly') that the numbers of students who leave their school before the age of 16 is high (9%). Relative to other similar schools, even fewer principals agree that the number of students who leave their school before the age of 16 is high (7%).[47]

4.2   The Value in Keeping Students at School

Principals were asked how much they agree or disagree that even though some kids are disruptive and want to leave school early, the benefits of keeping them at school means that every effort should be made to ensure that they stay at school until the age of 16.

While half of the principals (50%) agree ('agree' or 'agree strongly') with this statement, one of out every five principals (20%) disagrees, indicating these principals are not seeing the benefits in keeping the students at school.[48]

A pie chart with the principals' views is shown overleaf.

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[47] Those who participated in the qualitative research also felt the numbers leaving before 16 are relatively low.
[48] However, around six out of ten principals (59%) believe that retaining all students until age 16 benefits the individual student and society as a whole (with 12% disagreeing), and seven out of ten principals (70%) believe there is scope to develop new incentives to encourage schools to retain students to the age of 16.

Even Though Some Students are Disruptive, the Benefits of Keeping Them at School Means Every Effort Should be Made to Ensure They Stay
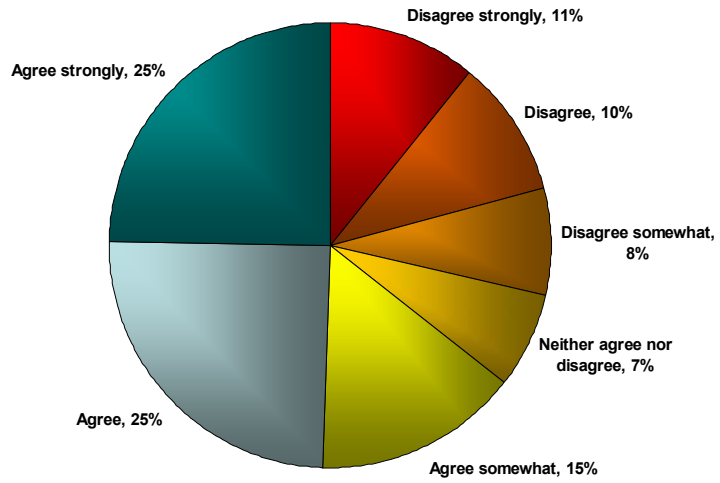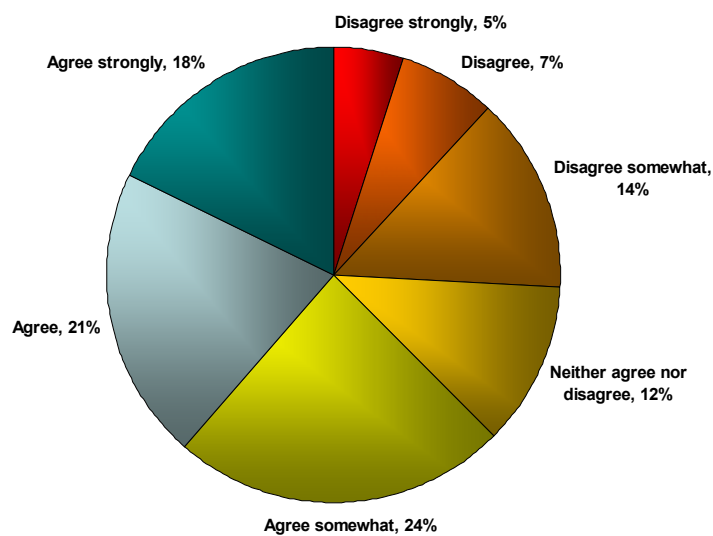

Base: n=123

Base excludes those who answered "don't know"

A similar result was found when principals were asked whether they agree or disagree that keeping students at school who want to leave causes more problems than benefits. Over a third of principals (37%) agree with this statement, with only eleven percent disagreeing. Just under half (49%) reported being neutral with regards to the statement (either by saying they disagree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, or agree somewhat).

These findings indicate that the benefits of keeping the students at school need to have increased emphasis.

Keeping Students at School Who Want to Leave Causes More Problems than Benefits

Agree strongly, 18%

Disagree strongly, 5%

Disagree, 7%

Disagree somewhat, 14%

Neither agree nor disagree, 12%

Agree, 21%

Agree somewhat, 24%

Base: n=120

Base excludes those who answered "don't know"

It was suggested by educators in the qualitative research that removal of disruptive students allows *"those who want to learn to do so"* and that this policy gives the teachers more teaching time to concentrate on these students (who they believe are in the majority). It also means that students who are regarded as disruptive because they want to leave are not affecting the school's grade averages.

4.3 Letting Students Leave School

Principals were asked how much they agree or disagree that if a student wants to leave school early (at age 15), and their parents/caregivers agree, then an exemption should be granted automatically.

Around one in ten principals (11%) agree (either by answering 'agree' or 'agree strongly') with this statement, and around six out of ten (62%) disagree.

If a Student Wants to Leave School Early and Their Parents/Caregivers Agree, then an Exemption Should Be Granted Automatically
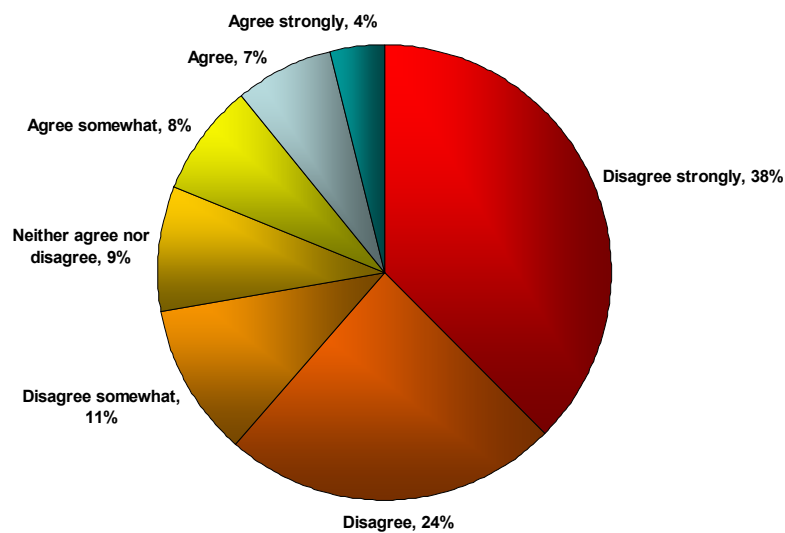
Base: n=123

Base excludes those who answered "don't know"

In the qualitative research, in some cases, principals and teachers viewed *"resorting to early leaving exemptions"* as a failure on behalf of the school to answer that student's needs, including communicating benefits of education to the wider family.

4.4 Support Required

Most principals (80%) believe their school requires support to help students make the best decision for their situation and their future. The most frequently mentioned types of support were[49]:

- Specialist staff (29%).

  "We need specialist staff and resources to cater for the educational needs of students who have decided that school is not the place for them, so that we can work with these students to either re-integrate them back into school, or alternatively to manage the process where they leave school as a positive experience for all concerned."

  "It would be great to have a school social worker who could work with students in the context of their families."

In the qualitative research, some principals commented that RTLBs are neither widespread nor numerous enough.

- Careers staff (25%).

  "More careers advice time. One careers advisor for 1,000 kids is too few."

  "Paid professional careers guidance support. Difficult to fund in small schools and the typical worn out teacher with community ties is not engaging enough for students today."

- Guidance staff (22%).

  "We have one guidance counsellor in a decile 1 school. We need another one so we can have one male and one female. In most cases the students who are going to disengage are reasonably obvious when they first arrive at high school. These sorts of kids need much better support long before they reach high school. A residential social worker would also make a big difference."

  "More guidance counselling time."

- Family involvement (18%).

  "Family meetings discussing other options."

  "One-to-one mentoring and support for student and family is the most beneficial."

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[49] Note that nearly all principals mentioned more than one type of support that their school requires, therefore percentages do not add to 100 percent (base: n=98).

- Support from outside agencies (17%).

> *"We need to be able to access adequate and timely mental health support - the weeks of waiting are ridiculous. Also need experts to support us with students with severe behaviour problems, and those on the autism spectrum, especially Asperger's Syndrome. Teacher aides often don't have the skills to provide the necessary expertise in terms of support. Special education (GSE) does have behaviour support workers but they are very thin on the ground. There are some fantastically skilled nurses and teachers at the hospital school who can advise and support us."*

> *"Outside agencies to call on those who have expertise in careers."*

4.5   Support from the Ministry of Education

Most principals (80%) believe there is something specific that the Ministry could do to support their school in retaining students until they are 16 years of age. Those who said there was something specific were given a list of types of support and were able to select as many of them as might be appropriate for their school. The types of support that were most frequently sought were:

- Funding for teachers (72%).

- Funding for co-curricular activities (63%).

- Inter-agency connections (61%).

- Funding for attendance management (57%).

- Advice (23%).

Interestingly in the qualitative research, not all principals mentioned additional funding. For some it was more about using the existing funding more effectively, for example, stopping programmes that obviously were not working, less funding for bureaucratic procedures, and less funding for programmes affecting only the minorities.

Rather than speaking of funding for additional staff or teachers, principals tended to speak about the need to be able to provide more time to teach/prepare lessons by removing some classroom functions from teachers.

Funding for Teachers

The most frequently sought type of support was for the Ministry to provide more funding for teachers, with around three-quarters of principals indicating this. The lack of funding for teachers is also supported by only a quarter of principals (22%) stating that their school has an adequate number of staff to meet students' needs[50]. Funding for teachers included having more teachers (to enable teachers to have more non contact time to connect with parents etc, and having a smaller student/teacher ratio in the classroom), having specialist teachers (e.g. remedial), and having teacher aides to support teachers.

Funding for Co-Curricular Activities

Funding for co-curricular activities was also a frequently mentioned type of support, with over six-tenths of principals (63%) indicating this. The importance of involving students in co-curricular activities is also evidenced by the high number of principals (71%) who agree that co-curricular involvement is a factor in actively supporting students who might otherwise apply for an early leaving exemption.

Inter-agency Connections

Around six out of ten (61%) principals indicated that having help from the Ministry to establish inter-agency connections would help their school in retaining students until the age of 16. Again, this is supported by 70 percent of principals agreeing that greater inter-agency support is an important factor in actively supporting students who might otherwise apply for an early leaving exemption[51].

Funding for Attendance Management

Around six out of ten principals (57%) indicated that having funding for attendance management would support their school in retaining students until they are 16 years of age. To put this in context, note that nearly one fifth of the principals (19%) said that truancy is a particular problem at their school, with eight percent saying that truancy is a particular problem at their school relative to other similar schools (8%). Over two-thirds of principals state that their school takes a strong stance against truancy (69%).

Advice

Around a quarter of principals (23%) said that having advice from the Ministry would support their school in retaining students. Types of advice they mentioned were advice on successful programmes either in New Zealand or from overseas, and support avenues that they could access:

> *"Programmes of work that have been trialled at other schools and found to be successful."*

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[50] It is also useful to note that over a quarter of principals (27%) agreed that a fair number of teachers at their school struggle to cope with meeting the diverse needs of their students.

[51] As mentioned earlier in the report, the types of agencies that principals said they would like to connect with are CYF/CYPS, Work and Income, and the Police.

5.0 Why Students are Leaving School Early

Objective Four: Factors that are associated with the decision to leave school before 16 by students.

5.1   Reasons for Leaving School Early

In order to establish their motives for leaving, early school leavers were asked why they decided to leave school[52]. The most frequently mentioned reasons provided by early leavers can be categorised into 'pull' and 'push' factors.

'Pull' factors are those elements outside of school that entice or 'pull' students to leave school. The 'pull' factors mentioned most by early leavers include, leaving so that they could work or have money (18%) and leaving to do training or an apprenticeship (16%). This area was explored further in the qualitative phase of the project. In regards to leaving to work or have money, early leavers express the desire for new 'toys' – mp3 players, cars, etc. Early leavers also want to keep up with their friends who also have jobs.

'Push' factors are those elements inside school that encourage or 'push' students to leave school. The 'push' factors mentioned most by early leavers include, a poor or bad classroom environment (17%), not liking school (13%), finding school uninteresting or boring (12%), and being stood down/expelled/kicked out (12%). This area was also explored further in the qualitative phase of the project. Other 'push' factors included boring subjects, inability to keep up, not feeling valued by school, too many rules and regulations, not fitting in and feeling unsafe at school.

On balance, the 'push' factors[53] (55%) rather than the 'pull' factors[54] (35%) were most often given as reasons for leaving school by early school leavers.

5.2   Motivations to Leave School Early

A series of statements about school and leaving school were read out to early school leavers in order to examine what motivates them to leave school before the age of 16[55]. Nearly all early leavers (92%) wanted to leave school. The main motivations for leaving school early are:

- Wanting to leave school (92%).

- Being accepted into diploma, course or apprenticeship (53%).

- Feeling that their school wanted them to leave (45%).

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[52] This was an open ended question and early school leavers often provided more than one reason for leaving, therefore percentages will not add to 100.

[53] A poor or bad classroom environment (17%), not liking school (13%), finding school uninteresting or boring (12%), and being stood down/expelled/kicked out (12%).

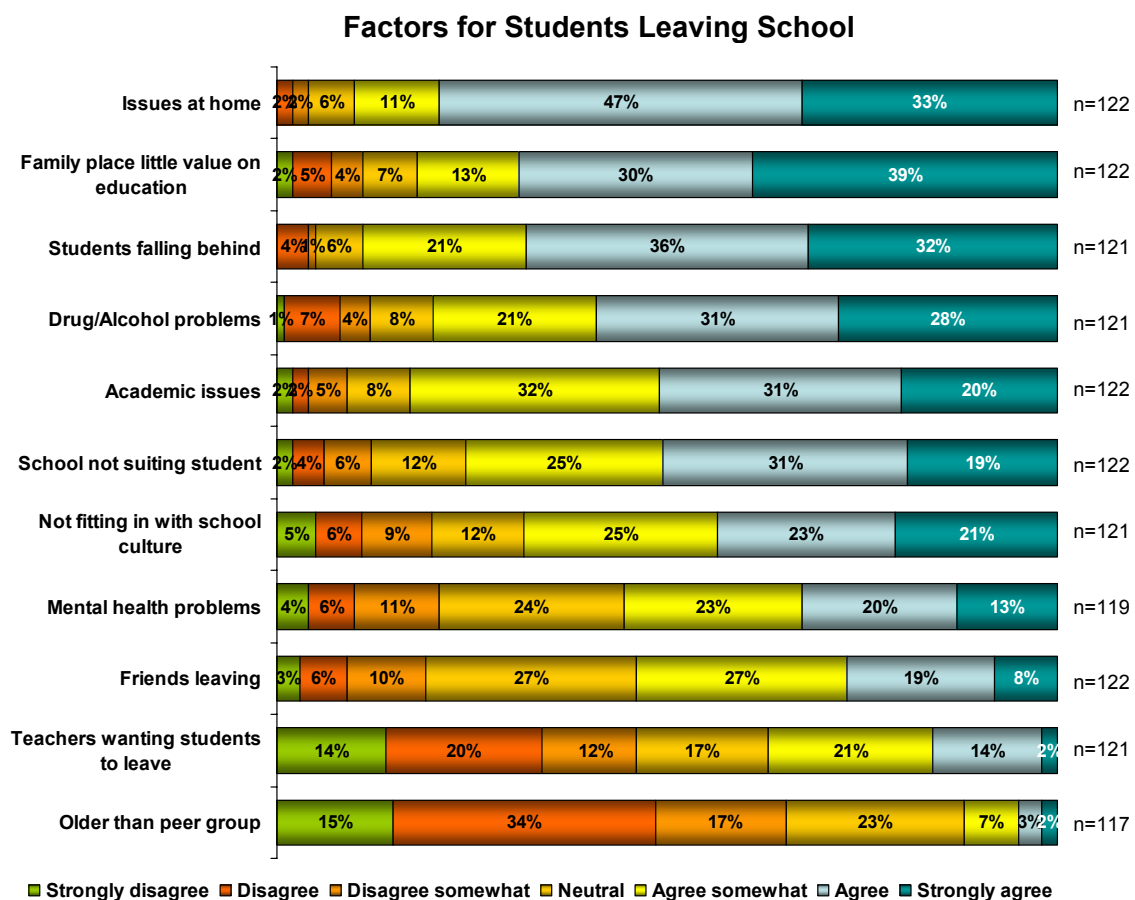[54] To work or have money (18%) and to do training or an apprenticeship (16%).

[55] Early leavers were asked if each statement was true or false for them. Percentages reported are for each statement. For example, 92 percent of early leavers said that it was true that they wanted to leave school, eight percent said that this was false for them, and 1 percent did not know.

- Leaving school because they got a full-time job (30%).

- Having issues at home which made it hard to stay at school (29%).

- Costing too much to go to school (20%).

- Family wanting them to leave school (17%).

- Friends wanting them to leave school (7%).

5.3 Principals' Perspective

Principals were also presented with a list of statements and were asked how strongly they agree or disagree that each statement is a factor for students leaving their school. The main factors for students leaving their school (those to which over 65% of principals 'agree' or 'strongly agree' are factors for students leaving school) are:

- Issues at home disrupting students' routine (e.g. financial, moving around, etc) (80%).

- Parents/caregivers placing little value on education (69%).

- Students falling too far behind (e.g. as a result of truancy or other reasons) (68%).

Factors for Students Leaving School

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Neutral	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree	
Issues at home	2%	2%		6%	11%	47%	33%	n=122
Family place little value on education	2%	5%	4%	7%	13%	30%	39%	n=122
Students falling behind	4%	1%		6%	21%	36%	32%	n=121
Drug/Alcohol problems	1%	7%	4%	8%	21%	31%	28%	n=121
Academic issues	2%	2%	5%	8%	32%	31%	20%	n=122
School not suiting student	2%	4%	6%	12%	25%	31%	19%	n=122
Not fitting in with school culture	5%	6%	9%	12%	25%	23%	21%	n=121
Mental health problems	4%	6%	11%	24%	23%	20%	13%	n=119
Friends leaving	3%	6%	10%	27%	27%	19%	8%	n=122
Teachers wanting students to leave	14%	20%	12%	17%	21%	14%	2%	n=121
Older than peer group	15%	34%	17%	23%	7%	3%	2%	n=117

☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Disagree somewhat ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree somewhat ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

Base: n=330

5.3.3 Academic Issues and Students Falling Behind

Half of principals (52%) agree (either strongly agree [20%], or agree [31%]) that academic issues (e.g. problems with reading or writing) are a factor for students leaving their school early.

The perception of principals is supported by the experiences of early leavers, with half (50%) of early leavers finding school difficult. As noted previously, a quarter of early leavers had problems with reading (25%) and a fifth had problems with writing (21%) (N.B. 13% had problems with both).

The qualitative research found that students and some educators believe that teachers only teach to the middle of the class and leave behind students who have trouble keeping up due to literacy issues. Schools with practices that identify and assist these students saw truancy, disruptions and ultimately early leaving decrease.

Another contributing factor to difficulties experienced by some students is that a quarter of principals (27%) agree (either strongly agree [13%], or agree [14%]) that a fair number of their teachers struggle to cope with meeting the diverse needs of their students.

As noted previously, seven out of ten principals (69%) agree (either strongly agree [32%], or agree [37%]) that students falling too far behind (e.g. as a result of truancy or other reasons) is a factor for students leaving their school early. This is supported by the experiences of students with around half falling behind in their school work and finding it too hard to catch up (56%) and falling behind in their school work due to being unwell (49%).

5.3.4 Drug, Alcohol and Mental Health Problems

Six out of ten principals (61%) agree (either strongly agree [28%], or agree [31%]) that drug and alcohol problems are a factor for students leaving their school early. The qualitative research found that confidential and easy access to support agencies that can identify and address these types of issues has increased student retention rates where it is available.

A third of principals (33%) agree (either strongly agree [13%], or agree [20%]) that mental health problems are a factor for students leaving their school early. This is supported by the experiences of students with almost half of early leavers (52%) finding school really stressful.

5.3.5 Student-School Mix[60]

Just under half of principals (44%) agree that students not fitting in with the school culture (e.g. lacking friends or involvement in school activities) is a factor for students leaving school early. This perception is supported by early leavers, with seven out of ten early leavers (69%) hating having to follow rules at school, almost half (48%) feeling that school subjects were stupid and meaningless and a fifth of early leavers (19%) feeling like an outsider at school.

Furthermore, a total of 17 percent of early leavers did not felt safe at school and 13 percent had a serious problem with being bullied by other students.

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[60] The qualitative research found similar things to those mentioned in this sub section.

The concept of the student-school mix not working for early school leavers is further corroborated by principals' views, with half (50%) agreeing that the school does not suit the student (e.g. student being better off working or in the alternative education system) is a factor for students leaving school early. This perception is supported by the reasons students give for leaving, with half of early leavers (53%) leaving school because they were accepted into a diploma, course or apprenticeship and three out of ten early leavers (30%) leaving because they got a full-time job.

5.3.6 Friends Leaving

Nearly two thirds (64%) of early leavers had friends who left school before them. However, only seven percent of early leavers felt that their friends wanted them to leave school. Just over a quarter of principals (27%) agree (either strongly agree [8%], or agree [19%]) that friends leaving is a factor in students leaving school early.

The qualitative research found that while their friends may not have been actively encouraging them to leave school, early school leavers did feel under a certain amount of pressure to keep up with their friends' 'grown-up' life-styles (e.g. purchasing power of those working and the 'freedoms' they now appeared to have).

5.3.7 School/Teachers Wanting Students to Leave

A total of 45 percent of early leavers felt that their school wanted them to leave school. This is moderately supported by the perception of principals, with 16 percent agreeing (either strongly agree [2%], or agree [14%]) that teachers wanting students to leave is a factor for students leaving school early[61].

This perception is further supported by the experiences of early leavers with a quarter of early school leavers (24%) feeling bullied by a teacher. Educators from the qualitative research suggest further teacher training, especially in the 'soft' people management skills, such as communications, relationship building, listening, empathy and classroom management, would better equip teachers to deal with students.

The qualitative research also found that sometimes early leaving exemptions are used to get rid of 'problem' students, a fact of which the students are fully aware. In these cases it is the school who initiates the early leaving exemption process.

In other cases it is a genuine case of the school identifying a better pathway for the student using their skills in an area of genuine interest with realistic future employment opportunities.

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[61] A third of principals (34%) disagree (either strongly disagree – 14%, or disagree – 20%) that teachers wanting students to leave is factor for students leaving school early.

5.4 What Early Leavers Like About not Being at School

In order to fully understand why early school leavers leave, early leavers were asked what are the good things about not being at school anymore. The good things about not being at school most often stated can also be categorised into 'pull' and 'push' factors. 'Pull' factors include working and money (31%) and the course or programme early leavers are taking (7%). 'Push' factors include, the absence of rules and being able to do what they want (29%), not being in a classroom[62] (13%) and being able to learn what they want to learn (12%).

5.5 Where Early Leavers End Up

Almost two thirds of early school leavers (63%) knew what they wanted to do when they left school.

5.5.1 Studying (Full or Part-time)

More than two fifths (43%) of early leavers are currently studying, with a third (31%) studying full-time and 12 percent studying part-time. Of those who are studying (n=142) almost all (97%) are enjoying it. Of those who are studying (n=188) almost half (48%) either agree or strongly agree that they would like to undertake further education in the future.

Of those early leavers who left because they were accepted into a diploma, course or apprenticeship (53%, n=174), half are no longer studying (51%), a third (36%) are studying full-time and 14 percent are studying part-time. Of those who are no longer studying, three quarters (76%) are now working (either full-time [52%], or part-time [24%]) and a quarter (24%) are not working (i.e. neither working nor studying, n=21).

5.5.2 Working

A total of 58 percent of early leavers are currently working, with 38 percent in full-time work and 20 percent in part-time work. Of those who are working (n=192), almost a quarter (23%) are in the building industry, 22 percent are in retail or hospitality, 10 percent are in the motor industry and 10 percent are in the forestry or farming sectors[63]. Over a third of early leavers (36%) have an average weekly pay of less than $300, a quarter (24%) have an average weekly pay between $300 and $399, and three in ten (29%) have an average weekly pay above $399[64].

Of those who left because they had a full time job (30%, n=100), four fifths (79%) are working full-time, one in ten (11%) are working part-time and a further one in ten (10%) are not working at all. Of those who are not working (n=10), half are studying full-time (n=5) and half are not studying (n=5).

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[62] Learning style and environment was also cited in the qualitative research by students and teachers.
[63] A total of 5 percent are in the manufacturing industry, 29 percent are involved in other industries.
[64] A total of 10 percent of early leavers either did not know their average weekly pay or refused to answer.

5.5.3 Feelings since Leaving

Early school leavers were asked about how they feel since leaving school. Three fifths of early leavers (61%) agree that they have made a good decision, and almost eight out of ten (78%) agree that they feel happier as a person.

Early Leavers Feelings since Leaving School

Base: n=330
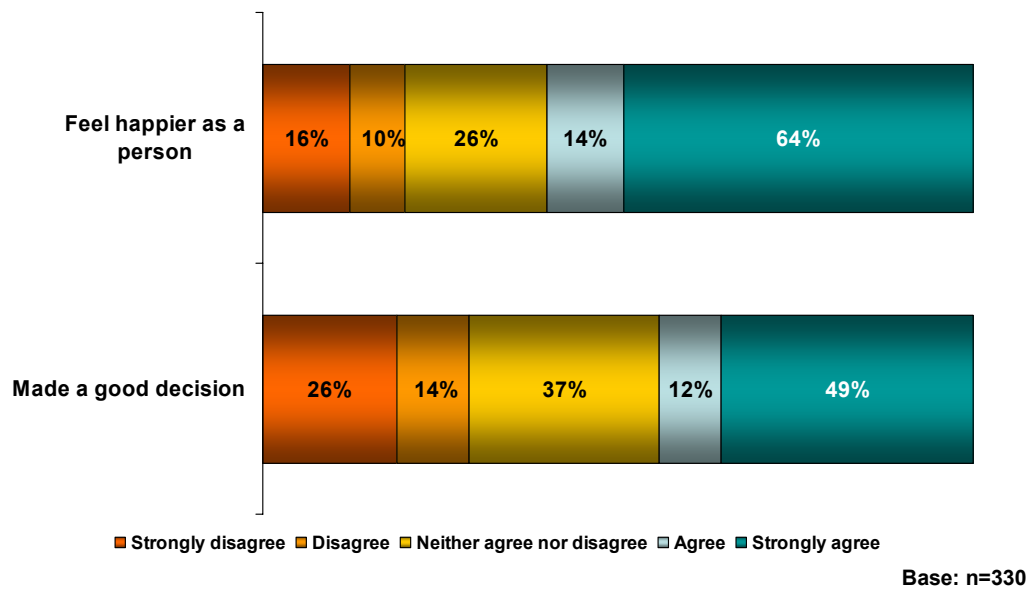
6.0 Encouraging Students to Stay at School

Objective Five: Factors that may have encouraged these students to stay at school.

6.1 Reasons to Stay

In order to establish what may have encouraged early school leavers to stay at school, early leavers were asked what, if anything, would have made them want to stay at school[65]. The most frequently mentioned reasons provided by early leavers are:

- Nothing (22%).

- Friendship/s and social activities (17%).

- If interesting subjects/more entertaining/ fun, not so boring (11%).

- More subject choices (8%).

When compared to those things identified by principals as the most important for supporting student retention (those for which over 70 percent of principals rated as either 'important' or 'very important')[66], students and principals appear to agree that an alternative school curriculum which is more flexible (76%)[67] and greater involvement in school activities (71%)[68] are important for encouraging early leavers to stay at school.

Factors identified by principals that were not identified by students include mentoring or support (79%) and greater inter-agency support (70%).

6.2 Motivation to Stay

A series of statements about reasons to stay at school were read out to early school leavers in order to examine what may encourage early school leavers to stay at school until the age of 16[69]. The top three reasons to stay at school are:

- Being able to do part-time school and also work towards something else like an apprenticeship, a diploma or other study outside of school (73%).

- Only having to do subjects they liked (72%).

- If school was more flexible to their needs (69%).

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[65] This is an open-ended question with early school leavers often provided more than one reason for staying, therefore percentages will not add to 100.
[66] See section 3.0 for a description of these factors.
[67] Described by early leavers as subjects which are more fun and interesting, more subject choices.
[68] Described by early leavers as friendships and social activities.
[69] Early leavers were asked if each statement was true or false for them. Percentages reported are for each statement.

6.2.1 Options for Study and Work/Apprenticeship

For three quarters of early leavers (73%), being able to do part-time school and also work towards something else like an apprenticeship, a diploma or other study outside of school would have encouraged them to stay at school. For six out of ten (60%) early leavers, being able to go to school part-time and work part-time would have encouraged them to stay at school. As noted previously, nearly all of those early leavers who are currently studying (53%) like it (97%).

Providing options for study and work/apprenticeship is also supported by the views of principals, with three quarters of principals (76%) rating providing an alternative school curriculum that is more flexible (e.g. it may offer options like work and study part-time) as important or very important for retaining students.

6.2.2 Offering Alternative Pathways through School

For seven out of ten students, only having to do subjects they liked (72%), and/or if school was more flexible to their needs (69%) would have encouraged them to stay at school. Being able to easily change classes if they did not like the subject or teacher would also have encouraged around six out of ten (64%) early leavers to stay at school.

As noted above in 'Options for study and work/apprenticeship', offering alternative pathways is also supported by three quarters of principals (76%) who believe that an alternative school curriculum that is more flexible is important for retaining students.

6.2.3 Support from School

Those early leavers who feel their school wanted them to leave school (45%, n=147) were asked if they would have stayed at school if they had more support from teachers to stay. Almost six out of ten of these early leavers (57%) say they would have stayed.

This is supported by the views of principals, with almost eight out of ten principals (79%) rating a mentor or support programme as important for the retention of students. Two thirds of principals also think offering extra academic help for students is important for encouraging students to stay at school.

6.2.4 Support from Family

Those early leavers who feel their family wanted them to leave school (17%, n=57) were asked if they would have stayed at school if they had more support from family to stay. Three out of ten of these early leavers (30%) say they would have stayed.

Two thirds of principals (66%) think that teaching the value of education to parents and wider community is important for retaining students at school. Indeed, a third of principals (36%) try to overcome student retention issues by having family involvement. Specifically by, involving the wider family in learning, adult literacy and life skills, understanding where the family is coming from and seeking parents and caregivers accountability for their children.

6.2.5 Support from Friends

Those early leavers who feel their friends wanted them to leave school (7%, n=23) were asked if they would have stayed at school if they had more support from friends to stay. Four out of ten of these early leavers (39%)[70] say they would have stayed.

6.2.6 Inter-agency Support

As noted previously, seven out of ten principals (70%) think inter-agency support is important in supporting student retention. Agencies principals would like to have better links with, as identified in the quantitative research, include Child Youth and Family, Work and Income and the Police. Agencies identified by principals in the qualitative research include those agencies mentioned in the quantitative research and also health providers, substance abuse counsellors, IRD/Ministry of Social Development (in relation to the 'Working for Families' package) and Housing New Zealand Corporation.

6.3 What Early Leavers did and did not like about School

It is useful to note what early leavers did like about school and what they did not like about school when considering those aspects of school which may encourage early school leavers to stay at school longer.

Early leavers were asked an open-ended question; what the good things about being at school were. The main things mentioned by early leavers were:

- Friends – socialising, hanging out talking, etc (71%).

- Learning (31%).

- Sports (12%).

- Lunchtime (8%).

- Meeting new people (5%).

- Extra-curricular activities (e.g. kapa haka, school play/production, stage challenge etc) (3%).

- Physical education (3%).

Early school leavers were also asked about specific elements of school[71]. Parts of school that early leavers did like include 'most of their subjects' (55%) and the 'school routine' (43%).

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[70] Caution, small sample size.
[71] Early leavers were asked if each statement was true or false for them. Percentages reported are for each statement.

Aspects of school early leavers did not like include:

- Having to follow rules (69%)[72].

- The principal (48%).

- The subjects (48% felt they were stupid and meaningless)[73].

- The teachers (35% did not like any teachers at school).

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[72] Note that there is some overlap between this finding and what those who said they liked 'school routine'.
[73] Note that there is some overlap between this finding and what those who said they liked 'most of their subjects'.

7.0
Appendix

7.0 Quantitative Research Methodology

7.1 Research with Principals

TNS undertook a quantitative online survey with n=123 secondary principals. The margin of error associated with this sample is +/-8 percent.

Sample

The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) supplied TNS with a list of all New Zealand Secondary School Principals[74].

Method

An email was sent out to each principal inviting them to participate in the survey. The emailed invitation included a background to the research and a direct link to the online questionnaire. The link also included a unique password which ensured each principal could only complete the survey once. It also allowed response tracking, so that reminders could be sent only to those stakeholders who had not yet completed the survey[75].

In order to encourage a greater uptake of principals having 'their say', the Ministry advertised the survey in the 'Principals View' section of the 'New Zealand Education Gazette'.

On completion of each survey, responses were automatically sent back to TNS for processing, giving principals' assurance of confidentiality. Up to two reminder emails were sent to those who were slow to complete the survey.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by TNS and Monarch Consulting in conjunction with feedback from the Ministry. TNS set up a secure website for each survey. The web questionnaires were professionally designed, making use of the Ministry's corporate branding, and were administered between the 21st of August and the 1st of September 2006.

The questionnaire comprised 25 questions (of those, 10 were open-ended questions) and took around 15 minutes to complete.

The online questionnaire was designed to explore the following themes:

- Factors that are seen by schools as barriers to retaining students at school to the age of 16.

- Factors that support student retention that are seen by schools as working well.

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[74] A total of 35 principals (and their schools) were removed from the database for recruitment for the Qualitative Phase of the project.
[75] A limited number of principals were faxed a paper based version of the questionaire at their request.

- Factors that would encourage schools to encourage greater student retention.

A copy of the questionnaire is appended to this report. The response rate was 26 percent[76].

Statement Rating

Throughout the report, principals were asked to rate (on a seven point likert type scale, where one is strongly disagree or not at all important[77], and 7 is strongly agree or very important[78]) a statement or statements. As the majority of responses tended to fall into the top or bottom two categories, the responses to each statement were grouped into the following three categories:

- Disagree/unimportant (rating of 6 or 7).

- Neither agree nor disagree, or neutral (rating of 3 or 4 or 5).

- Agree/important (rating of 1 or 2).

Significant Differences

Any statistically significant differences in terms of key demographic differences are provided in the results section of this report. Where no comment is provided, there were no significant differences evident.

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[76]Response rate was calculated using the following formula: completed interviews/ database sample x 100.
[77] Depending on the scale used, one was either strongly disagree or not at all important.
[78] Depending on the scale used, one was either strongly agree or very important.

7.2 Principal Sample Profile

	%[79]
Number of years as principal at current school	
Less than 5 years	38
5 to 10 years	33
More than 10 years	28
Number of students	
Less than 200 students	19
Between 201 and 900 students	59
More than 900 students	23
Area	
Upper North	41
Lower North	27
South	32
Decile	
Low (1-3)	28
Medium (4-6)	35
High (7-10)	35
Other (99)	2
Base:	**n=123**

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[79] Due to rounding, percentages will not always add to 100.

7.3 Early Leaver Research

TNS undertook a quantitative telephone survey with n=330 early school leavers using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI). The interviews took approximately 18 minutes to complete. The margin of error associated with this sample is +/-5 percent.

Sample

Interviewees were randomly selected from the Early Leaving Exemptions database which was supplied to TNS by the Ministry.

Method

Fully trained and briefed TNS CATI interviewers conducted the interviews between August 16th and August 21st 2006. Early leavers who participated in the survey had the option of going into a draw for a Warehouse voucher.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by TNS and Monarch Consulting in conjunction with feedback from the Ministry. The questionnaire comprised 22 questions (of which four were open-ended).

The questionnaire was designed to explore the following themes:

- Factors that are associated with decisions to leave school before turning 16 by students.

- Factors that may have encouraged these students to stay at school.

A copy of the questionnaire is appended to this report.

7.4 Response Rates

To calculate the response rate the following formula was used:

D / (D + C + E)

A =   ineligible pre-contact (unobtainable, business number, fax number, disconnected number, engaged, no answer)
B =   ineligible post-contact (not eligible for survey)
C =   eligible non-responding (refusals)
D =   eligible responding (interview completed)
E =   unknown (hard appointment – interviewer told to call back *with definite time given* with interviewer unable to get hold of or back to person, and soft appointments – interviewer told to call back *without definite time given* with interviewer unable to get hold of or back to person, and language issues)

330 / (330 + 250 + 249) = 39.80%

7.5 Refusal Rates

To calculate the refusal rate the following formula was used

C / (D + C + E)

250 / (330 + 250 + 249) = 30.15%

Significant Differences

Any statistically significant differences in terms of key demographic differences are provided in the results section of this report. Where no comment is provided, there were no significant differences evident.

Other Statistical Analysis

Correlations, factor analysis and cluster analysis were undertaken where appropriate. However, the results obtained were either not significant or failed to add value to the report, as a result these are not shown.

Correlations

A correlation matrix of the responses to questions 2, 3 and 9 of the student survey showed poor correlations between most variables. Those correlation which did occur were low (0.2 - 0.3).

Factor analysis

Due to the poor inter-correlation of the responses in question 2, 3 and 9 a factor analysis could not be conducted.

Cluster analysis

A cluster analysis was conducted for questions 2, 3 and 9 of the student survey in order to establish typical student types. However, the clusters that did form were either too general to add value (e.g. positive and negative phrased question clusters), too close to zero (ideally values will be close to one – showing the variable is true of most within the cluster) or they were nonsensical (conflicting to other variables).

7.6   Early Leaver Sample Profile

	%[80]
Gender	
Male	62
Female	38
Ethnicity	
Pakeha/New Zealand European	55
Māori	38
Pacific	5
Other (e.g. Indian, Somalian)	2
Area	
Upper North	52
Lower North	22
South	26
Currently working	
Full-time	38
Part-time	20
Unemployed	42
Currently Studying	
Full-time	31
Part-time	12
Not studying	57
Time since left school	
0-3 months	11
3-6 months	11
7-12 months	29
12+ months	47
Base:	**n=330**

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[80] Due to rounding, percentages will not always add to 100.

7.7   Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is concerned with identifying and understanding the range of issues that exist on a given topic, and understanding these (as opposed to quantitative research which is concerned with measurement). It is used to discover the underlying factors that lead to the formation of attitudes, motivate behaviours and influence people's perceptions of the world around them. It allows the real issues to emerge, i.e. those which are genuinely important to people, and not just issues clients and researchers feel might be important.

Qualitative research was undertaken to provide the necessary understanding to meet the Ministry's information needs by giving an in-depth knowledge of the views and experiences of the following groups:

- Early school leavers.

- Parents/caregivers of early school leavers.

- Principals.

- Teachers.

- Guidance counselors.

- Educations sector representatives.

To meet the Ministry's information needs, **in-depth interviews** were used. An in-depth interview methodology provides the greatest level of security and confidentiality for the participant, and encourages the sharing of information to a far greater degree than a group methodology.

An **in-depth interview** is a one-to-one dialogue between a participant and a researcher. This is the method of choice when discussing personal (e.g. beneficiary status), sensitive (e.g. self-confidence) or complex (e.g. decision-making) topics and when we need to understand people as individuals (e.g. their experiences, attitudes, motivations, barriers, needs, preferences and perceptions). These interviews may be conducted face-to-face or via telephone.

7.8 Research Sample

Participants	n=
Early School Leavers	6
Parents/Caregivers of Early Leavers	6
Principals	10
Teachers	4
Guidance Counsellors	4
Education Sector Groups, including representatives from: • Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand (SPANZ) • Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) • Post Primary Teachers Association Principals Council • New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) • New Zealand Catholic Education Office (NZCEO) • Independent Schools of New Zealand • Te Akatea Maori Principals' Association • New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) • Association of Intermediate and Middle Schools (AIMS) • New Zealand Area Schools Association (NZASA).	11

7.9 Research Procedure

Recruitment

All participants were recruited by TNS staff by telephone. All potential participants were screened using a standardised questionnaire to ensure they met the specified criteria.

Early School Leavers and Parents/Caregivers of Early School Leavers

The Ministry provided TNS with a list of students who have obtained early leaving exemptions[81]. A random sample of early leavers was taken from the early leaving exemptions database for recruitment[82]. Parents/caregivers of early leavers were also contacted using the same database.

Teachers, Principals and Guidance Counsellors

The Ministry also provided TNS with a list of schools and their principals[83]. A random sample of schools[84] was obtained from this database for recruitment of principals, teachers and guidance counsellors.

Education Sector Groups

A list of relevant education sector groups was compiled by TNS, Monarch Consulting and the Ministry. Representatives from these organisations were recruited to be part of the project.

Discussion Guide

TNS developed four discussion guides for use in the in-depth interviews. Each guide was tailored to a specific group. These were reviewed and signed off by the Ministry prior to use. Copies of the discussion guides are appended to the report.

Interviews

Interviews were a mixture of face-to-face and telephone[85] interviews. Face-to-face interviews took place in Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton and Christchurch. Interviews took approximately an hour.

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[81] This database is the same as the one used for the quantitative early school leavers CATI survey.
[82] These early leavers were not contacted for quantitative early school leavers CATI survey.
[83] This database is the same as the one used for the quantitative principals online survey.
[84] These schools and their principals were not contacted for the quantitative principals online survey.
[85] There were a total of n=5 telephone interviews and these were all with education sector representatives.

Venue of Groups

Those interviews that we conducted face-to-face were done at the location of the participant's choice[86].

Taping and Duration of Groups

All in-depth discussions were audio-taped (with participant consent), and the tapes transcribed to aid analysis.

Koha/Participant Gift

The participants received a koha or gift from TNS, as outlined below, to thank them for their time and input:

- Early school leavers - Warehouse voucher.

- Parents/caregivers of early school leavers - Warehouse voucher.

- Principals, teachers and guidance counsellors - book voucher.

- Education sector representatives - no inducement[87].

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach was taken to analysing qualitative data. Grounded theory is an inductive technique that provides precise and rigorous analysis of qualitative data. The output of the completed analysis is a *theory* that is *grounded* in the data. This not only accounts for the research situation being explored but also clearly identifies a *'go forward'* position.

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[86] Those participants who did not want to be interviewed at work or at home, were interviewed at TNS's Auckland and Wellington offices.

[87] As this exercise may be considered part of their role it was decided that this group would not receive any koha/inducements.

Questionnaires

Ministry of Education
Staying at School
Principal Questionnaire (Online)
1302087

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this questionnaire, administered by TNS on behalf of the Ministry of Education. It should take around 10 minutes to complete.

BACKGROUND

To begin with, we would like to ask a few background questions about you and your school.

Q1 How long have you been a principal?

Less than 5 years	01
5 years to 10 years	02
More than 10 years	03

Q2 How big is your school? Please only include the number of students in years 7 and above.

Less than 200 students	01
Between 201 and 900 students	02
More than 900 students	03

Q3 Thinking about your school, please rate the following statements using a scale of one to seven, where one is disagree strongly and seven is agree strongly, how much do you agree or disagree that:

	Strongly disagree						Strongly agree	Don't Know
Your school has an adequate number of staff to meet student's needs	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Truancy is a particular problem at your school	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Truancy is a particular problem at your school relative to other similar schools	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Your school takes a strong stance against truancy	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

	Strongly disagree						Strongly agree	Don't Know
The numbers of students who leave your school before the age of 16 is high	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
The numbers of students who leave your school before the age of 16 is high relative to other similar schools	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Your school is well-supported by parents/caregivers	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Your school has a strong anti-bullying philosophy	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
You believe that retaining all students until 16 benefits the individual student and society as a whole	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
You believe there is scope to develop new incentives to encourage schools to retain students to the age of 16	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
A fair number of teachers at you school struggle to cope with meeting the diverse needs of your students	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

Q4   In your experience, do students who leave school before age 16 have similar attributes or experiences?

Yes	01	**CONTINUE**
No	02	**GO TO Q6**

Q5   Please list the types of attributes or experiences you have observed in students who leave school before the age of 16.

Please specify

Q6 In your experience, do frequently truant students have similar attributes or experiences?

| Yes | 01 | **CONTINUE** |
| No | 02 | **GO TO Q8** |

Q7 Please list the types of attributes or experiences you have observed in frequently truant students

Please specify

BARRIERS TO RETAINING STUDENTS

This section is about the barriers for schools in retaining students until they are 16 years old.

Q8 What are some of the main barriers your school faces in trying to keep students at school until they are 16 years old?

| **Please specify** | 97 |
| Don't know | 99 |

Q9 What, if anything, does your school do to overcome these barriers?

| **Please specify** | 97 |
| Don't know | 99 |

Q10 Using a scale from one to seven, where one is strongly disagree and seven is strongly agree, how much do you agree or disagree that the following factors are barriers for your school in retaining students until they are 16 years old…?

	Strongly disagree			**Neutral**			**Strongly agree**	**Don't Know**
Lack of funding for co-curricular activities	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Lack of funding for attendance management	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Lack of specialised staff who are able to support students at risk of leaving school	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
A lack of community support	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
The attitude of the student (e.g.	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

disengaged from learning or disruptive)								
Lack of support from the Ministry of Education	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
A high student to staff ratio	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree	Don't Know
Lack of external professional support for students at risk of leaving school	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
A lack of parental/caregiver support	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
The personal suitability of students to school	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
The suitability of mainstream education for some students	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Zero tolerance and high numbers of stand-downs/suspensions for behaviour issues	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

FACTORS SUPPORTING STUDENT RETENTION

This section explores ideas that would support students in staying at school until age 16.

Q11 Are there any typical warning signs to identify students who are at risk of leaving school before they are 16 years old?

Yes	01	**GO TO Q?**
No	02	**CONTINUE**

Q12 What are the typical warning signs?

Please specify	97
Don't know	99

Q13 Using a scale from one to seven, where one is not at all important and seven is very important, how useful do you think the following factors are in actively supporting students at your school who might otherwise apply for an early leaving exemption or drop out?

	Not at all			Neutral			Very	Don't

	important						important	Know
An alternative school curriculum that is more flexible (e.g. for example may offer options like work and study part-time)	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

	Not at all important			Neutral			Very important	Don't Know
Teaching the value of education not just to the students but to the wider community, especially parents	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Offering extra academic help for the students (either internal through peer tutors or teachers or an external agency)	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Making the process of applying for/obtaining an early leaving exemption harder for the student	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Having a mentor/support programme in place	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Getting students involved in sports or other extra curriculum activities	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Having greater interagency support for students	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

Q14 Using a scale from one to seven, where one is strongly disagree and seven is strongly agree, how much do you agree or disagree that the following are factors for students leaving your school before they are 16 years old…?

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree	Don't Know
Not fitting in with the school culture (e.g. lack of friends or involvement in school activities)	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Mental health problems	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Parents/caregivers placing little value on education	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Drug and alcohol problems	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Academic issues (e.g. problems with reading or writing)	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Students falling too far behind (e.g. as a result of truancy or other	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

reasons)								
Issues at home disrupting students routine (e.g. financial, moving around etc)	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Student's friends leaving	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
School not suiting student (e.g. student being better off working or in alternative education system)	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Teachers wanting the students to leave	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99
Students being older than their academic peer group	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

ENCOURAGING SCHOOLS TO RETAIN STUDENTS

This section is about ideas that may encourage schools to actively try to retain students until age 16.

Q15 Does your school do anything specifically to keep students at school until the age of 16?

Yes	01	**CONTINUE**
No	02	**GO TO Q17**

Q16 What is the most effective thing your school does to keep students at your school until the age of 16?

Please specify	97
Don't know	99

Q17 Using a scale of one to seven, where one is strongly disagree and seven is strongly agree, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

ROTATE STATEMENTS

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree	Don't Know
Even though some students are disruptive and want to leave school early, the benefits of keeping them at school mean that every effort should be made to ensure that they stay at school until the age of 16	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

Keeping students at school who want to leave causes more problems than benefits	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree	Don't Know
If students want to leave school early (at age 15), and their parents/caregivers agree, then an exemption should be granted automatically	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	99

Q18 What type of support, if any, does your school require to help students make the best decision for their situation and future?

Please specify	97
No, we are fine as we are	98
Don't know	99

Q19 Is there anything specific that the Ministry of Education could do to support your school in retaining students under 16 years of age?

Yes	01	**CONTINUE**
No	02	**GO TO Q21**

Q20 What would this be?
MULTIPLE RESPONSE

Funding for teachers	01
Funding for co-curricular activities	02
Funding for attendance management	03
Funding for something else, please specify	04
Advice	05
Helping to make interagency connections	06
Other, **please specify**	97

IF ANSWERED CODE 05 (ADVICE) AT Q20 ASK Q21
Q21 What sort of advice would you find most useful?

Please specify	97

IF ANSWERED CODE 06 (INTERAGENCY CONNECTIONS) AT Q20 ASK Q22

Q22 Which agencies would it be most useful for your school to have connections with?

Please specify	97

OVERALL THOUGHTS

Q23 Thinking overall about why students leave school before the age of 16, do you think the barriers for students staying at school are more about the students themselves (including their peers and home life), the school's offering, or a mixture of both?

More about the students	01
More about the school	02
Mixture of both	03
Neither	98
Don't know	99

Q24 Using a scale of one to five where one is not at all strong and five is very strong, at your school how strong do you think the link is between frequent truancy and applying for an early leaving exemption?

Not at all strong	01
Not strong	02
Neither	03
Strong	04
Very strong	05
Don't know	99

Q25 Using a scale of one to five where one is not at all strong and five is very strong, at your school how strong do you think the link is between the number of stand-downs/ suspensions and early leaving exemption applications?

Not at all strong	01
Not strong	02
Neither	03
Strong	04
Very strong	05

Don't know	99

That is the end of the survey – thank you for your time. Your input in this consultation process is much appreciated and will be useful for the Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education Student Questionnaire
1302087

May I please speak to…..? **(CONTACT NAME).**

IF UNAVAILABLE - ARRANGE TO CALL BACK. IF AVAILABLE - GO TO INTRODUCTION.

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is .... from TNS, an independent market research company. We have contacted you because your name was on the Ministry of Education early school leavers' database.

We are carrying out a survey on behalf of the Ministry of Education. We are speaking to school leavers to understand what people thought of school, what their reasons for leaving were and what people are doing now.

To thank the people for taking part TNS is offering all participants the chance to win a $300 Warehouse voucher.

The survey will take 10 minutes. It would be great if you would complete this survey, is now a good time for you?

IF YES CONTINUE
IF NO ASK:

What would be a convenient time for us to call you back?

READ ONLY IF CALL-BACK IS MADE: May I please speak to…..? **(CONTACT NAME).**

Good morning/afternoon. This is ………………. from TNS. Thank you for agreeing to participate in our survey, we really appreciate it.

READ TO EVERYONE:

All the answers you give us will be confidential. The answers you give will be combined with the answers of others before being reported back to the Ministry of Education.

Firstly I would like to know about when you left school.

Q1 How long ago did you leave school?
DO NOT READ

In the last month	01
One month ago	02
Two months ago	03
Three months ago	04
Four months ago	05
Five months ago	06
Six months ago	07
Six to nine months ago	08
Ten to twelve months ago	09
Over tweleve months ago	10
Other **(DO NOT READ OUT) (PLEASE SPECIFY)**	97
Can't remember **(DO NOT READ OUT)**	99

Q2. Now I'd like to ask some questions about some things from when you were at school, did you…

	Yes	No	Can't remember
Play sports	1	2	9
Take part in extra activities like the smokefree rockquest, stage challenge, kapa haka etc	1	2	9
Ever skip school (wag/bunk off) without permission	1	2	9
Have a part time job	1	2	9
Have a favourite subject	1	2	9
Smoke on school grounds	1	2	9
Have a favourite teacher	1	2	9
Go to school or classes late	1	2	9
Have friends at school	1	2	9

Q3. Still thinking about when you were at school did you…

	Yes	No	Don't know
Enjoy parts of your school day	1	2	9
Have a teacher or another adult you felt you could talk to if you needed to	1	2	9
Get positive feedback from teachers at your school	1	2	9
Feel that you learned things in your last year at school	1	2	9
Got support or mentoring from the school	1	2	9
Feel safe at school	1	2	9

Q4. Overall did you like school?

Yes	01	**GO TO Q6**
No	02	**CONTINUE TO Q5**

Q5. What year were you in when you stopped liking it?
DO NOT READ

In primary school (years 1 – 6)	01
At intermediate or year 7 or 8	02
At year 9	03
At year 10	04
Year 11	05
Never liked it	06
Other **(PLEASE SPECIFY)**	97

Q6. Can you tell me why you decided to leave school?

PLEASE SPECIFY	97
Don't know	99

Q7. What <u>are</u> the good things about **not** being at school anymore?

PLEASE SPECIFY	97
Don't know	99

Q8. What <u>were</u> the good things about being at school?

NOTHING	01
PLEASE SPECIFY	97
Don't know	99

Q9. I'm now going to read out a list of statements I want you to tell me if they are true or false for you…

		True	False	Don't know
ROTATE	Your family wanted you to leave school	1	2	9
	Your friends wanted you to leave school	1	2	9
	You wanted to leave school	1	2	9
	You felt that your school wanted you to leave	1	2	9
DO NOT ROTATE	Didn't like any teachers at school	1	2	9
	Didn't like the principal at school	1	2	9
	Enjoyed most of your subjects	1	2	9
	Hated having to follow rules at school	1	2	9
	Had a serious problem with being bullied by other students	1	2	9
	Felt bullied by a teacher	1	2	9
	You bullied other students	1	2	9
	Did your homework regularly	1	2	9
	Had problems with reading	1	2	9
	Had problems with writing	1	2	9
	Enjoyed the school routine	1	2	9
	Found school really stressful	1	2	9
	Were unwell and fell behind in your school work	1	2	9
	Felt that school subjects were stupid and meaningless	1	2	9

	Had friends who left school before you	1	2	9
	Had good self esteem at school	1	2	9
	Found school work difficult	1	2	9
	Fell behind in your school work and it got too hard to catch up	1	2	9
	It costs too much to go to school	1	2	9
	Moved house a lot	1	2	9
	Changed schools a lot	1	2	9
	It was hard to get to school (transport)	1	2	9
	Felt like an outsider	1	2	9
	Left school because you got a full time job	1	2	9
	Left school because you were accepted into diploma, course or apprenticeship	1	2	9
	Knew what you wanted to do when you left school	1	2	9
	Had issues at home which made it hard to stay at school	1	2	9
	Plan to do study one day in the future	1	2	9

ONLY ASK Q10-Q12 IF YES AT Q2 "EVER SKIP SCHOOL WITHOUT PERMISSION"
Earlier you said that you had skipped (wagged, bunked) school at some stage in the past…

Q10. What year were you in when you first skipped (wag, bunk) school?
DO NOT READ OUT

In primary school (years 1-6)	01
At intermediate or year 7 or 8	02
At year 9	03
At year 10	04
This year (year 11)	05
Can't remember	06
Other **(please specify)**	97

Q12. On average how often would you skip (wag/bunk) school?

Everyday	01
Every couple of days	02
Once a week	03
Once every two weeks	04
Once a month	05
Less than once a month	06
Other **(PLEASE SPECIFY)**	97

IF 'TRUE' TO CHANGING SCHOOL AT Q9

Q13. Did you change school because you…
READ OUT

Shifted house	01
Your parents/caregivers wanted you to change schools	02
Were expelled/excluded	03
Didn't like your school and went to another one	04
Another reason **(PLEASE SPECIFY)**	97

Q14. What, if anything, would have made you want to stay at school?

PLEASE SPECIFY	97
Don't know	99

Q15. Would you have stayed at school if…
[IF ANSWER MAYBE – ASK MAYBE YES OR MAYBE NO]

	Yes	No	Don't know
You could go to school part-time and work part-time?	01	02	99
You only had to do subjects you liked	01	02	99
You could do part-time school and also work towards something else like an apprenticeship, a diploma or other study outside of school	01	02	99
There were no costs associated with going to school (all your costs for transport, books	01	02	99

and school uniform were paid for)			
You could easily change classes if you didn't like the subject or teacher	01	02	99
If you had more support from friends to stay **ONLY ASK IF "TRUE" AT Q9 "YOUR FRIENDS WANTED ME TO LEAVE SCHOOL"**	01	02	99
If you had more support from family to stay **ONLY ASK IF "TRUE" AT Q9 " YOUR FAMILY WANTED ME TO LEAVE SCHOOL"**	01	02	99
If you had more support from school teachers to stay **ONLY ASK IF "TRUE" AT Q9 "YOU FELT THAT YOUR SCHOOL WANTED YOU LEAVE"**	01	02	99
If school was more flexible to your needs	01	02	99

I am now going to ask you about you are doing at the moment…

Q16. Do you have a full or part time job?

Yes – full time	01	**CONTINUE TO Q17**
Yes – part time	02	
No	03	**GO TO Q19**

ONLY ASK IF Yes AT Q16

Q17. Which of the following industries do you work in?

Retail	01
Hospitality	02
Motor	03
Building/Labourer	05
Forestry	06
Farming	10
Manufacturing	11
Other	97

Q18. What is your average weekly take home pay? (**IF NECESSARY**, that is, what you get each week after tax).
DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLE RESPONSE ONLY

Less than $100	01
$100 - $199	02
$200 - $299	03
$300 - $399	04
$400 - $499	05
$500 - $599	06
$600 - $699	07
$700 or more	08
Refused **(DON'T READ)**	97
Don't know **(DON'T READ)**	99

Q19. Are you doing any full or part time study at the moment?

Yes – full time	01	**CONTINUE TO Q20**
Yes – part time	02	
No	03	**GO TO Q21**

ONLY ASK Q20 AND Q21 IF YES AT Q19
Q20. Where are you studying?

Evening Programmes with Local Provider	01
The Correspondence School	02
The Open Polytechnic	03
A trade programme (e.g. apprenticeship)	05
Other, **(PLEASE SPECIFY)**	08

Q21. Do you like it?

Yes	01
No	03

Q22. Thinking about since you left school, I want you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with each statement I read out. I would like you to use a scale from one to

five, where one is strongly agree, three is neither agree nor disagree and five is strongly disagree. Do you agree or disagree that…

	Strongly agree		Neither		Strongly disagree	Don't Know
You feel that you have made a good decision	1	2	3	4	5	9
You feel happier as a person	1	2	3	4	5	9
You would like to undertake further education in the future **(DO NOT ASK IF YES AT Q19 STUDYING PART TIME OR FULL TIME)**	1	2	3	4	5	9

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Would you like to enter the prize draw for the $300 Warehouse voucher?

IF YES.
I just need a few details for the draw.
Your name:
Your contact number (cell phone is fine):
Again, we really appreciate the time you have taken answer these questions and good luck for the draw. Goodbye.

IF NO.
That fine. Again, we really appreciate the time you have taken answer these questions. Goodbye.

Discussion Guides

This guide allows for considerable freedom within the topic. Questions are indicative only of the subject matter to be covered. They are not word for word descriptions of the interviewer questions.

Research Objectives
- To understand perceived barriers to student retention
- To understand factors that support student retention that are seen by schools as working well
- To understand factors that would encourage greater student retention within schools.

Introduction - 5 mins

Explain nature of the interview
- Confidentiality
- Purpose of discussion
- Interested in all opinions – no right or wrong answers
- Use of audio/video
- Time limit and need to cover topics
- Please turn off mobile phone before we start

Background – 5-10 mins   *To develop rapport*

Tell me a little about your school.
Probe
- Decile
- School achievements
- School problems
- Affect of early leavers
- Number of staff
- Number of students (roll size)

How long have you been a principal/teacher/guidance counsellor?
- What do you enjoy most about your job?
- What do you enjoy least?

What is the biggest problem facing students in New Zealand?
- Who is responsible for this?
- How can it be solved?

Why students leave 20 mins

Let's talk about why students leave before they are 16.
In your opinion, what are the main reasons that students leave before they are 16?

- Use of alcohol/drugs
- Teen pregnancy
- Parents don't value education
- Not suited to school
- Antisocial behaviour
- Low self esteem
- Mental or physical illness
- Family moving around
- Trouble at home
- Trouble with the police/authorities
- Lack of interest in subjects
- School is too rigid/inflexible
- Too far to travel/transport difficulties
- Shortage of quality teachers/poor teachers/not liking teachers (may be caused by shortage of quality teachers)
- Difficulty of school responding to diverse needs of students
- Financial difficulties
- Getting a job/going onto alternative training
- Friends leaving school

Before the students actually leave are there any indicators that they might be at risk of leaving before they turn 16? What are they?

- Truancy, lateness, lack of engagement in subjects
- Poor academic achievement
- Antisocial behaviours at school/at home
- Low self esteem
- Illness
- Alcohol/drug abuse

How can you recognise these indicators?

- What could the school do to prevent problems from arising or better support students having difficulties?
- Should the school get involved (if not, why not)?
- Who else should be involved? Why?

Does your school have an action plan for these types of students?
Please describe it to me, from the point they are identified at risk.
Tell me about some successes in turning students round.

- What worked? What factors contributed to making a positive and sustained change?

How about less successful interventions?

- What factors contributed to lack of positive/sustained change?

What are the main factors that support student retention? (relating to the students and the school)

What are the main barriers to student retention? (relating to the students and the school)
- What needs to change to break these barriers?

Are you aware of any available programmes or funding for student retention?
- What are they? How accessible are they?
- In what ways do they work?
- In what ways do they not work?
- What would you change to improve them?

Tell me about ELX (Early Leaving Exemption)?
- What are the advantages of ELX?
- Any disadvantages?
- Does it need to be changed?
  - How? What should replace it?
- Is it suitable for everyone?
  - Who? Who not?

When a student decides to leave school early is there anyone at school they can talk to about their decision?
- Who? How often are they used? Do students know about them but don't use them?
- Should anyone else talk to the student? Who? Why?

In your opinion, who (or what) has the most influence on the student's decision to leave?
- Any other factors?

On average, what do you think happens to most students that leave school early?
- In the short term?
- In the longer-term?
- In terms of completing further education and/or training?
- Going on to secure quality employment?
- Standard of living?

Student retention 20 mins

Do you believe there is scope to develop new incentives to encourage schools to retain students to the age of 16?
- What sorts of incentives
- Who would be responsible for developing them? Implementing them?
- How would schools buy into this process?
- What would be the impact of this process?

What sort of practices might be meaningful and useful in retaining students?
Probe:
- School fitting in round work
- Tailored curriculum to subjects that are of interest & relevant to future plans
- School apprenticeships
- Greater emphasis on tangible benefits of leaving school later
- Rewards for staying on
- Greater participation in way schools are run
- Transition type programmes
- Anything else?

Who should provide this?

Are there some students who just should be excluded?
- If you could not suspend/exclude students, what type of support would you need to keep them?
- Funding amounts?
- Extra staff? Type of staff?

In your opinion, what needs to be done to better meet student needs within the education and other social service systems?
 Probe:
Health needs – mental & physical
Transport
Living circumstances e.g. accommodation, safe place to study
Financial

What other agencies particularly need to be involved?

How would meeting these needs have a positive affect on student retention?

What else could help you to keep students in school?
- What support do you need?
- From whom?

Thinking now just about the Ministry of Education, what support could they offer schools to help student retention?

What needs to happen to support you to support the students?

If mention additional funding

- What would you spend the funding on? In your opinion what would be the top priority?
- 2nd priority?
- 3rd priority?

How would you know that these initiatives had been successful?

- Academic achievement
- Longer-term life outcomes
- Improved behaviour

If you could change one thing tomorrow to increase student retention, what would it be?

- Would you need additional funding? How much? From whom?
- Would you need additional staff?
- Would you need different types of support staff? Please specify

What, if anything, would be the impact at your school if there were no students under 16 leaving?

- Positive impacts/negative impacts
- Impact on students
- Impact on teachers
- Impact on schools academic standing
- Impact on resources (e.g. for co-curricular activities)
- Other?
- How could the negative impacts be minimised?

Wrap 10 mins

We're almost there. Just to finish I'd like you to think about the culture of a successful school.

- What does a successful school look like? What do the students say about it? What do the teachers say about it? What do the parents say about it?
- What do successful schools do differently to make every student feel motivated to stay?
- What needs to change so this can happen in all schools?
    - Teachers, parents, MOE, students, ...

How does this compare to the culture of an unsuccessful school?

Please rate the relative importance of schools as compared to parents/family,

Warm down

peers and others in students decision to leave school. Which is the most important, and which is the least important?

Now I'd just like to re-cap what we've been talking about.

In your opinion, what are the one or two main reasons why students leave school early?
What if any, are the 'warning signs'?

What would the most effective intervention be to prevent students leaving early?
What is the most important thing that needs to happen for schools to encourage greater student retention?

If you had one piece of advice for the Ministry of Education, what would it be?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about this that I've not asked you?

Thank and close

This guide allows for considerable freedom within the topic. Questions are indicative only of the subject matter to be covered. They are not word for word descriptions of the interviewer questions.

Research Objectives
- To understand role & influence of caregiver in a student's decision about whether to stay at school

Introduction - 5 mins

Explain nature of the interview
- Confidentiality
- Purpose of discussion
- Interested in all opinions – no right or wrong answers
- Use of audio/video
- Time limit and need to cover topics
- Please turn off mobile phone before we start

Background - 10 mins

To develop rapport
To understand environment

Tell me a little about yourself
Probe
- Ages of child/children in their care
- Relationship to child/children in their care
- Household structure
    - Who's at home, ages, role in household, occupation
- Occupation
- Ethnicity most identify with

How old were you when you left school?
- Who decided when you should leave school?
- Did you have the choice to stay in school?
    - What if anything prevented you from staying in school?

What did you do when you left school?
- Apprentice
- Full time/part time work
- Family
- Further education and/or training
- Unemployed

How many of your child/children are at school?
- What are their ages?

How many of your child/children are not at school?
- What are their ages?
- What are they doing now they're not in school?

Education 20 mins

To understand caregiver value of education

Thanks for that. Let's talk about education now.

How important to you is education for your child/children?
- In what ways?

What, if anything do your child/children learn in school that they can't learn elsewhere?
- Is this important to their future?

How about outside of school? What do your child/children learn outside of school?
- Is this important to their future?
- Who do they learn from?

Do you talk to your child/children about school?
- How often?
- What sort of things do you talk about?
  - Subjects
  - Performance
  - Teachers
  - Dislikes
  - Relevance of school to future
  - Likes
  - Problems they may be having
  - Friends

Do you take part in school activities with your child/children?
- Which ones take part in & why?
- Which ones don't take part in & why?

Does your child/children doing well at school matter to you?
- Why/Why not?
- How about your child/children, do you think it matters to them?

How do you know how they are doing at school?
- From whom?

What stops your child from doing well?
- What would encourage your child to do well?
How relevant is staying at school to your child/children's future?

- What is school providing them with?
- What is missing from school that will prepare them for their future?
  - Can school provide this? What needs to change for schools to be able to provide this?

What kind of things make your child/children like school?
Probe:
- Qualifications leading to better future
- Subjects are interesting – which ones?
- Sports/other activities – which ones?
- Inspiring teachers
- Rewards/trophies
- Role in school (class captain etc.)
- Cultural opportunities and support
- Relevant to their future plans
- Socialising with others
- Standing in society

And what kind of things make your child/children not like school?
Probe:
- Boring
- Not relevant
- Teachers don't care/not interested
- Keeping up with class
- Under achieving/performing badly
- Not liking the teachers
- Can't read/write at level expected
- Don't get on with class mates or difficulty making friends
- Being bullied or 'picked on' (by other students or teachers)
- Workload
- Fitting school in with job/family responsibilities
- Travel time
- Don't fit in (including lack of respect for culture)
- Too hard – easier to quit
- Have ambitions to do something else (job/other training)

Are there people you or your child/children can talk to about any issues or difficulties they may have with school?
- If yes, who?
- If no, what type of people would you like to be available for them to talk to?
  - Family
  - Careers adviser
  - Teacher
  - Peer
  - Counsellor
  - Minister (of religion)

      o   Ethnic representative

Can you think of any advantages to staying in school?
- If yes, what are they?
- What will that enable your child/children to do?
- If no, what are the advantages of leaving school?
- Any disadvantages of leaving?

If you could change anything about school for your child/children what would you change?
- Why?
- What benefit does that give your child? Your family (including you)?

Have you heard of ELX (Early Leaving Exemption)?
- Where did you hear about it? From whom?
- What does it mean?

Decision Making 15 mins

Have your child/children left school? What age were they when they left?
- How did you react to this?

Thinking back, had your child shown any signs that they wanted to leave?
- What were they?
- How did that affect their school performance?
- What did you do?

Who made the decision to leave?
Probe:
- Child
- Caregiver
- School

What else was going on in your child/children's life when they decided to quit school?
- Family change
- Relocation
- Trouble at school
    - o   What sort of trouble? How long had it been going on for?
- Trouble at home
- Dependencies – drugs/alcohol/gambling – in child/friends/family
- Poor performance
- Friends left school

Had they already been skipping school?
- If yes, when did they start skipping school? How often?

To understand who & what influences the decision to leave

- What, if anything, did you do about it? Did the school do anything about it?
- What were they doing instead of school?
- How did you feel about this?

Did anyone suggest to you that your child should leave school?
- If yes, who? (friends/family/school)
- What reasons did they give?

What is the main reason(s) your child decided to leave school?
Probe:
- Bad experience with school
- Poor academic achievement/performance in certain areas/across the board?
- Low reading level
- Teachers (explore)
- Family issues (explore)
- Lack of interest
- More exciting in real world
- Learning/achievement issues
- Financial issues (explore)
- Dependencies
- School wanted them out
- Peer pressure

Had anyone taken any action to change these for the better?
- What action was that?
- What was the result?

Did anyone else influence your child to leave school?
- Who?
- In what ways?

Did you talk to your child about their decision to leave school?
- Did you agree with them?
- If Yes, why?
- If no, why not?

Did you give you child any advice
- What sort of advice given?
- Did they follow the advice?

Did you talk to anyone else about their decision to leave school?
- Who?
- Why did you talk to them?
- Was there anyone else you could talk to?

Did your child talk to anyone else about their decision?

- Who?

What role, if any did the school play in influencing your child's decision?

- Should the school have done anything else to help your child stay in school?
- What changes would they need to make?

Do you think your child will want to do further study in the future?
Do you think leaving school early will have any affect have on their future?

- Now
- In 5 years?
- In 10 years?

Expectations 5 mins

To understand expectations

Are you or you child getting any advice on what to do next?

- From whom?
- What advice are you getting?
- Will you follow it?

What is your child doing now instead of school?
Probe:

- Work full-time
- Work part-time
- Modern apprentice
- Training for NQF
- Nothing
- Family

How come they've decided to do this rather than school?

- Advantages/Disadvantages

Is this what you hoped they would do?

- What would you rather they were doing?

Wrap 5 mins

Warm down

Ok, just a few more questions.

Ultimately, who is responsible for whether or not your child stays in school?

- Child
- Parents
- School
- Government

What would need to change to encourage your child to stay in school?

- Who needs to make this change?

In your opinion, who (or what) was the most important reason they decided to leave school?

If you had one piece of advice for the MOE to help them encourage people like you or your child/children to stay in school, what would that be?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about school that I've not asked you?

Thank and close

This guide allows for considerable freedom within the topic. Questions are indicative only of the subject matter to be covered. They are not word for word descriptions of the interviewer questions.

Research Objectives
- To understand perceived barriers to student retention
- To understand factors that support student retention that are seen by schools as working well
- To understand factors that would encourage greater student retention within schools.

Introduction - 5 mins

Explain nature of the interview
- Confidentiality
- Purpose of discussion
- Interested in all opinions – no right or wrong answers
- Use of audio/video
- Time limit and need to cover topics
- Please turn off mobile phone before we start

Background – 5-10 mins   *To develop rapport*

Tell me a little about your organisation
Probe
- Main role/objectives
- Members

How long have you been involved with the organisation?
- What do you enjoy most about your role?
- What do you enjoy least?
- How did they come to be involved with organisation?

What is the biggest problem facing students in New Zealand?
- Who is responsible for this?
- How can it be solved?

Why students leave 20 mins

Let's talk about why students leave before they are 16.
In your opinion, what are the main reasons that students leave before they are 16?
- Use of alcohol/drugs
- Teen pregnancy
- Parents don't value education
- Not suited to school
- Antisocial behaviour
- Low self esteem
- Mental or physical illness
- Family moving around
- Trouble at home
- Trouble with the police/authorities
- Lack of interest in subjects
- School is too rigid/inflexible
- Too far to travel/transport difficulties
- Shortage of quality teachers/poor teachers/not liking teachers (may be caused by shortage of quality teachers)
- Difficulty of school responding to diverse needs of students
- Financial difficulties
- Getting a job/going onto alternative training
- Friends leaving school

Before the students actually leave are there any indicators that they might be at risk of leaving before they turn 16? What are they?
- Truancy, lateness, lack of engagement in subjects
- Poor academic achievement
- Antisocial behaviours at school/at home
- Low self esteem
- Illness
- Alcohol/drug abuse

How can you recognise these indicators?
- What can schools do to prevent problems from arising or better support students having difficulties?
- Should schools get involved (if not, why not)?
- Who else should be involved? Why?

What are the main factors that support student retention? (relating to the students and the school)
What are the main barriers to student retention? (relating to the students and the school)
- What needs to change to break these barriers?

To understand why students leave
To understand successful retention strategies

Are you aware of any available programmes or funding for student retention?
- What are they? How accessible are they?
- In what ways do they work?
- In what ways do they not work?
- What would you change to improve them?

Tell me about ELX (Early Leaving Exemption)?
- What are the advantages of ELX?
- Any disadvantages?
- Does it need to be changed?
  - How? What should replace it?
- Is it suitable for everyone?
  - Who? Who not?

In your opinion, who (or what) has the most influence on the student's decision to leave?
- Any other factors?

On average, what do you think happens to most students that leave school early?
- In the short term?
- In the longer-term?
- In terms of completing further education and/or training?
- Going on to secure quality employment?
- Standard of living?

Student retention 20 mins

Do you believe there is scope to develop new incentives to encourage schools to retain students to the age of 16?
- What sorts of incentives
- Who would be responsible for developing them? Implementing them?
- How would schools buy into this process?
- What would be the impact of this process?

What sort of practices might be meaningful and useful in retaining students?
Probe:
- School fitting in round work
- Tailored curriculum to subjects that are of interest & relevant to future plans
- School apprenticeships
- Greater emphasis on tangible benefits of leaving school later
- Rewards for staying on
- Greater participation in way schools are run
- Transition type programmes
- Anything else?

To understand factors which support student retention

Who should provide this?

Are there some students who just should be excluded?
- If schools could not suspend/exclude students, what type of support would they need to keep them?
- Funding amounts?
- Extra staff? Type of staff?

In your opinion, what needs to be done to better meet student needs within the education and other social service systems?
 Probe:
Health needs – mental & physical
Transport
Living circumstances e.g. accommodation, safe place to study
Financial

What other agencies particularly need to be involved?

How would meeting these needs have a positive affect on student retention?

What else could help keep students in school?
- What support do schools need?
- From whom?

Thinking now just about the Ministry of Education, what support could they offer schools to help student retention?
What needs to happen to support schools to retain support the students?

If mention additional funding
   What would you spend the funding on? In your opinion what would be the top priority?
   2nd priority?
   3rd priority?

 How would you know that these initiatives had been successful?
cademic achievement
onger-term life outcomes
nproved behaviour

If you could change one thing tomorrow to increase student retention, what would it be?
- Would additional funding be required? How much? From whom?
- Additional staff? (support staff? Please specify)

What, if anything, would be the impact at schools if there were no students under 16 leaving?
- Positive impacts/negative impacts

- Impact on students
- Impact on teachers
- Impact on schools academic standing
- Impact on resources (e.g. for co-curricular activities)
- Other? How could the negative impacts be minimised?

Wrap 10 mins

We're almost there. Just to finish I'd like you to think about the culture of a successful school.

- What does a successful school look like? What do the students say about it? What do the teachers say about it? What do the parents say about it?
- What do successful schools do differently to make every student feel motivated to stay?
- What needs to change so this can happen in all schools?
  - Teachers, parents, MOE, students, ...

How does this compare to the culture of an unsuccessful school?

Please rate the relative importance of schools as compared to parents/family, peers and others in students decision to leave school. Which is the most important, and which is the least important?

Now I'd just like to re-cap what we've been talking about.

In your opinion, what are the one or two main reasons why students leave school early?
What if any, are the 'warning signs'?

What would the most effective intervention be to prevent students leaving early?
What is the most important thing that needs to happen for schools to encourage greater student retention?

If you had one piece of advice for the Ministry of Education, what would it be?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about this that I've not asked you?

Thank and close

Warm down

This guide allows for considerable freedom within the topic. Questions are indicative only of the subject matter to be covered. They are not word for word descriptions of the interviewer questions.

Research Objectives
- To understand what factors influenced students to leave school before they reach 16 years old
- To understand what factors may have retained them at school

---

Introduction - 5 mins

Explain nature of the interview
- Confidentiality
- Purpose of discussion
- Interested in all opinions – no right or wrong answers
- Use of audio/video
- Time limit and need to cover topics
- Please turn off mobile phone before we start

Background - 10 mins

To develop rapport
To understand environment

I'd just like to get to know you a little before we start talking about school.
Tell me about yourself
Probe
- Current age of student
- Age when left school
- Ethnicity most identify with
- Gender
- Part time or full time job? Studying elsewhere at the moment?
- Household structure
    o Who's at home, ages, role, occupation, time spent with them
    o Most regular caregiver – occupation, level of education
    o How involved in student's education

- Things you enjoy doing
- Things you don't enjoy doing
- What career path/job are you planning or hoping to do?
    o How do you get to be that? What do you need to do?
    o Anything preventing you from achieving this?
    o Is education relevant to help get you there?

Let's talk about your friends. What are they like?

- Older, younger, same age
- At school, working, training, open polytechnic, university, not working
- What do you spend most of your time doing with your friends?
  - What, if anything, stops you from doing this?

Determine language youth uses for truancy

Before you left school, were you playing truant/skipping school/wagging/bunking off? How often?

- What were you doing instead, when you should have been at school?
- When did you start missing school?
- Did the school do anything about it?
- Did your parents/caregiver do anything about it?

Would get to school mostly on time or were you often late to classes?

Why did you start missing school/being late?

- Ill health (mental & physical)
- Fallen so far behind, couldn't catch up
- Drugs/alcohol/gambling dependency (self)
- Family responsibilities
- Subjects – boring/hard
- Teachers
- Bullying
- Friends – pressures
- Pregnancy
- Other reasons

School 20 mins

Thanks for that. Let's talk about school now.

Was school important to you?

- Why/Why not?
- How about your family – do you think it matters to them?

How well do you think you were doing at school?

- Was it important to you to do well?
- Why/why not?

How did you know how you were doing at school?

- What kind of feedback on your work did you get?
- From whom? (self judged/parent/teacher)

Was this the sort of feedback you wanted?

- What sort of feedback did you want or need? From whom?

To understand attitudes to school
To identify barriers to staying at school & triggers to retention

- What needed to change for you to get the feedback you want?

What subjects did you take?
- Which were compulsory & which did you chose to take?
- Why did you choose those subjects?
  - Interest
  - Relevant to future career path
  - Advised to take them (explore)
  - Friends taking them
  - Suit my schedule
  - Had to choose something
  - Easy to do
- Did your friends influence you choice? How?
- Did your parents/caregiver influence your choice? How?
- Did you get any advice from your school? From whom & when?

Did you like school? Find it easy/hard? If hard – did you have any issues with reading or writing or understanding the subjects?

What would have been more relevant to you?
- Part-time school around work schedule
- Vocational training – apprenticeship while at school
- More options about how & what learnt
- Different teaching styles

What did you like about school?
Probe:
- Subjects/classes interested in
- School life (including friends)
- Teachers
- Feedback on progress
- Sport/ non-educational activities
- Methods of teaching/learning
- Affect on future (place in society/job/family)
- Escape from family issues (what are they)

How about your friends, did they like the same things?
- What are the differences?

Ok, now, what did you not like about school?
Probe:
- No interest in subjects available
- Not relevant to chosen future
- Keeping up with class – too far behind to catch up
- Work load
- School life (fitting in)
- Travel to/from
- Uniforms

- Lack of freedom/choices
- No reason to be there
- Teachers
- No motivation (teachers/friends/family)

How about your friends, do they dislike the same things?
- What are the differences?

Were there people you could talk to about any issues or difficulties you may have with school?
- If yes, who?
- Did you speak with them? Why/why not?
- If no, what type of people would like to be able to talk to?
  - Careers adviser
  - Teacher
  - Peer
  - Counsellor
  - Minister (of religion)
  - Ethnic representative
- What sort of information would you find helpful?

Can you think of any advantages of people staying at school?
- If yes, what are they? What will that enable them to do?
- If no, what are the advantages to leaving school? What does leaving enable people to do?

If you could change anything about school what would you change?
- Why? What benefit does that have for you?
- Are there any changes the school could make to help you feel motivated to stay?
  - What would they be?
  - How would you recognise them?

Decision Making 15 mins

I'd like to talk to you now about leaving school.

When did you first think about leaving school?
Probe:
- Age
- Time of year
- Life events

When you were thinking about leaving school, did you keep going to school everyday or did something change?
- If yes, what changed?
- What were you doing instead of school?
  - With whom?

Did anyone suggest to you that you should leave school?
- If yes
  - Who? (friends/family/school)
  - What reasons did they give?

What are the reasons why you decided to leave school?
Probe:
- Bad experience with school
- Poor academic achievement/performance
- Too many rules
- Low reading level
- Teachers
- Family issues
- Lack of interest
- More exciting in real world
- Learning/achievement issues
- Financial issues
- Dependencies
- School wanted them out
- Pregnancy
- Peer pressure
- Had a job/other study lined up

Did your family influence your decision?
- In what ways?

How did they react?
- Did they agree/disagree with you?
- Why? What did they give as advantages/disadvantages?

How about your friends, did they influence your decision?
- In what ways?

Did you talk to anyone about your decision to leave school?
- If Yes
  - Whom?
  - What sort of advice given?
  - Did you try to follow the advice?

How did your school react?
- Did anyone at school suggest you should stay?
- Who?
- What reasons did they give for staying?
- Are these important to you?
- Why not?

When you decided to leave school did you get any advice on what to do next?
- From whom?
- What advice did you get?
- Are you following it?

What affect, if any, do you think leaving school will have on your future?
- Role in society
- Earning capacity
- Expectations in life

Is there something that the school could have done to make it more meaningful to you?
- Part time school and work
- Only did subjects that interested me
- More freedom – less rules
- Different learning/teaching style
  - Describe this to me

Future Aims 5 - 10mins

Let's talk about the future.

What are you doing now you're not in school?
Probe:
- Work full-time
- Work part-time
- Modern apprentice
- Training for NQF
- Nothing
- Family

How come you've decided to do this rather than school?
- Advantages/Disadvantages

What career path/job are you planning or hoping to do now?
- How do you get to be that? What do you need to do?
- Anything preventing you from achieving this?
Is this the same as before you left school?
- What changed?
Do you think you might do more study one day on the future?

How do you feel now that you're no longer in school?
- Is this what you expected it to be like?
- What do you like best about not being in school?
  - And least?

To understand future plans & expectations

Wrap 5 mins

I just have a couple more questions.

What (or who) was the most important reason you decided to leave school?
What would have encouraged you to stay in school?
- What needs to change for this to happen?

If you had one piece of advice for the MOE to help them encourage people like yourself to stay in school, what would that be?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about school that I've not asked you?

Warm down

Thank and close

Terms and Conditions

1.0   The Contract

1.1   The Client appoints the Company and the Company accepts such appointment to provide the Services and Deliverables upon these terms and conditions. Only changes agreed by both parties in writing are valid.

2.0   Payment of Fees

2.1   For customised continuous research services, unless agreed otherwise in writing, payment of the basic annual fees will be made in advance in equal monthly instalments commencing on the date agreed between the parties in writing in any year.

2.2   For customised ad-hoc research services, unless otherwise agreed in writing, payment of the fees shall be one-half on the Acceptance date and the balance on delivery of the Deliverables. If a Service is to be carried out in stages, with interim Deliverables, final invoices for each stage will be raised on delivery of relevant interim Deliverables.

2.3   All invoices shall be due on the invoice date and shall be subject to payment within 7 days. Any payment after this 7 day period shall entitle Company to charge interest at the rate permitted by law.

2.4   The Company shall be entitled to recover reasonable expenses incurred pursuant to the provision of the Services as agreed between the Company and the Client.

3.0   Termination

3.1   Either party may terminate this Contract immediately for a material breach by the other which is not remedied within 30 days of written notice.

4.0   Change, Delay or Cancellation

4.1   Client hereby agrees to pay Company for any changes requested by it to the Service at standard Company rates.

4.2   If a Service is shortened, delayed, cancelled or terminated early by the Client, the final invoice will include, the balance of the fees for providing the Service plus a cancellation fee and any reasonable costs and expenses incurred by the Company due to the Client's acts or omissions. For example, the Client shall be liable for the costs and expenses incurred by the Company for pre-booked fieldwork, which is delayed, not used or not fully used by reason of the Client's acts or omissions.

4.3   If materials are required from Client for Company to deliver the Service these will be delivered promptly to Company. If not delivered promptly this may cause delays and additional costs and expenses, which Client agrees to pay for (if reasonable).

5.0   Subcontracting

5.1   The Company may use other TNS Group Companies or third party subcontractors as necessary in delivering the Service.

6.0   Company's Obligations

6.1   The Company warrants that it shall use reasonable skill and care in providing the Service and Deliverables. The response rates to surveys/questionnaires cannot always be predicted and are not guaranteed by the Company. Figures contained in

Deliverables will be estimates derived from sample surveys and subject to the limits of statistical errors/rounding up or down.

6.2 The Company disclaims all other warranties, either express or implied, including warranties for merchantability, and fitness for a particular purpose.

6.3 The Company agrees to use reasonable endeavours to comply with the ESOMAR and Market Research Society Codes of Conduct.

7.0 Intellectual Property Rights and Public Statements

7.1 The Intellectual Property Rights in the Deliverables vest in the Client subject to payment of all fees due to the Company in respect of such Deliverables. The Company and TNS Group Companies shall have the right to use such Deliverables for their internal use, and in connection with any relevant legal dispute without charge.

7.2 The Client shall not disclose the Deliverable publicly in any manner that exaggerates, distorts or misrepresents or that is likely to harm the Company's or TNS Group Companies' reputation or business.

7.3 Any public statement, marketing material, press releases or the like that contain the whole or any part of the Deliverables shall only be (a) disclosed upon prior written consent of the Company (which consent shall not be unreasonably withheld), and (b) accompanied by an acknowledgement, such as "Data/figures/information supplied by TNS".

7.4 The parties shall be entitled to list the other as its' service provider or client in marketing/promotional material, except for this right the Client shall have no right to use the Company's name, trade mark TNS, logo, or slogans without the prior written consent of the Company.

8.0 Confidentiality

8.1 The receiving party agrees that it shall (a) use the Confidential Information only to full its obligations pursuant to this Contract; (b) treat all Confidential Information of the disclosing party as secret and confidential and shall not copy or disclose any such Confidential Information to any third party; (c) not, without the express written consent of the disclosing party, disclose the Confidential Information or any part of it to any person except to the receiving party's directors, employees, parent company, subsidiaries or agreed subcontractors, who need access to such Confidential Information for use in connection with the Services and who are bound by appropriate confidentiality and non-use obligations; and (d) comply promptly with any written request from the disclosing party to destroy or return any of the disclosing party's Confidential Information (and all copies, summaries and extracts of such Confidential Information) then in the receiving party's power or possession.

9.0 Data Protection

9.1 Both parties undertake to comply with data protection legislation and to keep personal data supplied by the other secure and only use such data in accordance with such data protection legislation. Subject to prior consent from an individual the Company reserves the right to re-contact an individual for participations in further surveys.

10.0 Limits and Exclusions of Liability

10.1 Unless otherwise agreed by a letter or fax which is executed by both parties, the Company's liability for any for any claims, demands, damages, costs (including legal

costs) and expenses resulting from any tortious act or omission, and/or breach of the terms and conditions set out in the Contract is strictly limited to the amount of any fees receivable by the Company in respect of the specific Deliverable which is the subject of the potential claim.

10.2   Neither party shall be liable for the other's loss of profits, loss of turnover, loss of data, loss of business opportunities, or consequential loss. Liability is not excluded for (a) fraudulent misrepresentations, or (b) death or personal injury caused by the negligence of either party. The Company shall not be liable for any loss howsoever arising from or in connection with the Client's interpretation of the Deliverables.

11.0   Product Testing

11.1   Where the Service involves testing or using the Client's products (including prototypes) and/or third party products supplied by Client, the Client shall indemnify the Company and TNS Group Companies from and against any losses, 3rd party claims, demands, damages, costs, charges, expenses or liabilities (or actions, investigations or other proceedings in respect thereof) which the Company and TNS Group Companies may suffer or incur relating to testing or using such products.

12.0   Miscellaneous

12.1   The obligations set out in clauses 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 shall survive termination.

12.2   Any notice given hereunder shall be by post or facsimile. In the case of the notice to the Company, notices shall also be copied to Murray Campbell, Managing Director – New Zealand, PO Box 26 254, Epsom, Auckland; fax +649 525 0876. Email notification is not sufficient.

12.3   The Company shall not be liable for failure to perform its obligations hereunder due to, fires, storms, riots, strikes, disease, shortages of materials, lock-outs, wars, key employees not being available to perform the Services through death, illness or departure from the Company, floods, civil disturbances, terrorism, Governmental control, restriction or prohibition whether local or national.

12.4   The invalidity or unenforceability of any part of this Contract shall not affect the other provisions of this Contract.

12.5   No term of this Contract shall be enforceable by a third party.

12.6   New Zealand law governs this Contract and in the event of a dispute the parties agree to submit to the non-exclusive jurisdiction of the New Zealand courts.

Definitions

"Acceptance" means written, oral or other acceptance by a Client of a Proposal by the Company for the Service.

"Client" means the party to whom the Company provides the Service.

"Confidential Information" means in respect of the Service all information, data or material of whatsoever nature in any form, which either party, discloses to the other pursuant to this Contract including the Proposal. It shall not include any information or materials which: (a) is in or enters into the public domain (other than as a result of disclosure by the receiving party or any third party to whom the receiving party disclosed such information); (b) were already in the lawful possession of the receiving party prior to the disclosure by the disclosing party; (c) are subsequently obtained by the

receiving party from a third party who is free to disclose them to the receiving party; or (d) are required to be disclosed by law or regulatory authority.

"Contract" means these terms and conditions together with the Proposal. In the event of conflict these terms and conditions prevail over those in the Proposal.

"Customised Ad-hoc Research Service" means research studies designed specifically for the Client that are carried out on a case-by-case basis by the Company.

"Customised Continuous Research Service" means research studies designed specifically for the client by the Company that are carried out on a regular repeat basis.

"Deliverables" means survey results, reports, data, summaries, comments, discussion, and/or analysis provided by the Company to Client pursuant to the Contract.

"Intellectual Property Rights" means copyright, database rights, trademarks, designs, patents and/or know how.

"Proposal" means the written proposal and/or quotation provided by the Company to the Client (which is valid for three (3) months).

"Service" means the Customized Continuous Service as specified in the Proposal..

"TNS Group Companies" means Taylor Nelson Sofres plc and its subsidiaries and affiliates.

In these terms and conditions a reference to the singular includes plural and vice versa (unless the context otherwise requires).