

**Faculty of Education**

**Patterns of Absence of  
Compulsory Age Students:  
A Retrospective Study**

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the award of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## **CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

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## ABSTRACT

This study focusses on the examination of the recorded absences of compulsory age students. The main purpose was to identify emergent patterns of school non-attendance, critical periods of absences and key factors within and beyond the school that might contribute to school non-attendance and the impact such non-attendance has on student achievement and perceptions of schooling.

A review of literature on school non-attendance was undertaken and presented to highlight the number of factors that are often linked with non-attendance. As a result of the literature review a comprehensive list of factors for further investigation was distilled and a conceptual framework was developed. It was this conceptual framework, together with the research questions, that guided the research design and the subsequent collection and analysis of data.

The research was undertaken in Perth, Western Australia utilising one State Government secondary school and five of its contributory (or feeder) primary schools. The research constituted a retrospective study spanning seven years (1989 to 1995 inclusive) incorporating the complete attendance records of 61 students.

The first phase of the study involved the establishment of an empirical database developed from records compiled by the five feeder schools and the secondary school under study. Data derived from the schools were analysed to establish the patterns of non-attendance and trends.

The second phase involved a series of case studies in which student perceptions on school non-attendance were investigated alongside the student's characteristics and attendance patterns in order to provide greater insight into key factors contributing to school non-attendance.

The case studies not only provided greater insight into key factors contributing to school non-attendance but also the impact non-attendance had on the educational outcomes of the deemed 'at risk' students.

Finally, the thesis provides a number of conclusions and action statements to all key stakeholders including the schools at the centre of this research, policy makers within the State Government Education Department, parents, and personnel from other schools within Western Australia, for future action and continuing research. There is a collective responsibility to ensure all students maximise their learning outcomes through the educational programs provided in the schooling system.

The study also has the potential to provide a framework at both the national and international level as the outcomes of this research have potential significance for a number of interested organisations involved in providing educational and other programs for 'at risk' students.



## **DECLARATION**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Irene Ioannakis

December 1997

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## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

This chapter provides a brief overview of the background information on school non-attendance in order to establish the rationale for the study. First, an examination of recent literature on school non-attendance is considered in the context of the study, that is, Australia and Western Australia, which confirmed the need for the research. This is followed and supported by an examination of international literature which supports the overall significance of the research being undertaken. A set of definitions of key terms is provided to assist the reader to assimilate the information presented in the context of the purpose of the research.

The initial examination of literature in this field revealed an array of terms many of which are used interchangeably. The terms “school non-attendance” and “truancy” are constantly interchanged and depending on the impact required, or the audience, definitions and figures can become exaggerated. The impact can focus on political gain, organisations seeking additional funding, community members seeking answers to the juvenile activity within the community, or schools highlighting attendance figures. If the point of discussion is to highlight the number of young people not at school in relation to the juvenile crime rate, the term used tends to be “truancy”. If, however, educational authorities are challenged on the issue of equal educational opportunities for all students and the number of students who are absent from school, the term invariably used is “non-attendance”. The need for consistency in a working definition is apparent and long overdue. “Truancy” and “non-attendance” are distinctly different terms that define the action of students who are absent from school. “Truancy” is assigned to students who absent themselves from school without the permission of parents, guardians, teachers or any other person in authority. Whereas “school non-attendance” is used to describe the action of students

who are absent from school but may have a legitimate reason. The term “school non-attendance” is used as an interim term while the absence is under investigation to ascertain whether the student was legitimately absent, that is, ill, away on holidays with the family, or at the dentist, or in fact had no permission to be absent from school and thus was truanting. Chapter Two elaborates on the definitions and poses a working definition for this research.

Even more critical than the definition of the terminology is the need to ascertain the magnitude and the extent of the phenomena of non-attendance. That is, which students choose to absent themselves from school? Are the same students constantly away? Why do students choose to stay away from school? What is happening within the school that motivates students to choose an alternative to attending scheduled classes?

The main purpose of the study was to identify emergent patterns of non-attendance, critical periods of absence and key factors within the school and beyond that might contribute to school non-attendance and the impact on the students education and perception of schooling. A review of the literature related to the research on school non-attendance suggested that a number of variables impact on students’ attendance patterns. Student attendance records were examined in order to highlight those factors external and internal to the school that might prompt non-attendance.

The research is a retrospective study of the patterns of absence of compulsory age students in one State Government secondary school in metropolitan Perth, Western Australia. It focussed on the examination of recorded absences of these students over a seven year period from 1989 to 1995 inclusive, with emergent trends, patterns of absence and critical periods, established from the empirical data available from the school. The cohort of Year 10 students used as the sample for this research was selected on the basis that these students had completed their primary years of schooling at one of the five contributory (or feeder) primary schools and were currently enrolled in the secondary school (1995) having also completed the first two years of compulsory secondary education at the secondary school. Data were also

obtained from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with students selected from the cohort of students.

## **1.2 INTRODUCTION**

Within Australia the policies and procedures influencing primary and secondary education are the responsibility of the State and Territory Governments. Policies concerning structure, curriculum, accreditation, assessment and attendance are also operationalised at the State and Territory level. In Western Australia education is compulsory for all students until the end of the year in which they turn fifteen. The Education Act 1928 (1992) under section 13(1) outlines the criteria for attendance unless some reasonable excuse for non-attendance is shown. The definition of compulsory education is also equated with full-time enrolment whereby students attend school on a regular basis. However, although school is compulsory, some students choose not to attend school for significant periods of time. The time missed by these students impacts significantly on their learning.

The compulsory years of schooling are designed to provide students aged 6 to 15 the educational opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to access further education or training, or to gain employment. Missed educational opportunities limit the individual's ability to participate in further education and training beyond the compulsory years of schooling as they might have not mastered the necessary prerequisites to continue on the path of life long learning.

School non-attendance is a major contributory factor on the student's ability to successfully complete the compulsory years of schooling and graduate at the end of Year 10. Significant periods of non-attendance make it increasingly difficult for a student to catch up on missed work while continuing with the current classroom activities. Motivated and dedicated students would commit to catch up while others became disenchanted and sometimes alienated whereby their inability to cope or keep up with the work in class was used as a good excuse to make statements such as "I'm no good at Maths", "the teacher picks on me" or "school sucks". The pattern of non-

attendance and ability to cope with the school work become intertwined and a major reason why students find it easier not to attend rather than face the reality of potential failure (Carlson, 1995). Frequent non-attendance places the student in an 'at risk' category within the school. Students 'at risk' fail to master and achieve the necessary knowledge and skills throughout the developing years to adolescence to enable them to access further opportunities and to be productive in the adult world.

At a national level, concern about school non-attendance was evident in a number of Federal Government inquiries including the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Report of the inquiry into *Truancy and Exclusion of Children from School* (Fitzgibbon, 1996) and the *Select Committee on Youth Affairs Final Report* (Watkins, 1992). As stated by Fitzgibbon:

Children and young people who chronically truant or are excluded from school are severely educationally disadvantaged. The causes of truancy and exclusion, taken individually are serious problems, which require urgent remedial action. When an individual experiences several of these causal factors, the likelihood of that individual's marginalisation is greatly increased. (1996, ix).

Similar concerns were highlighted in Watkins (1992) and Carlson (1995) whereby students choosing to absent themselves from school for considerable periods of time were deemed 'at risk' of not completing their compulsory years of schooling and not attaining the necessary levels of competency. The lack of academic achievement further manifests itself in the broader community when these young people attempt to access further training and/or employment. Their lack of skills, often including literacy, numeracy and communication, is a severe impediment in their attempt to find employment or access training. Young people not acquiring the necessary skills while at school, have limited opportunity to accessing further training and employment.

Evidence submitted by individuals and organisations to the *Select Committee on Youth Affairs* questioned the issue of equity in education for these students by indicating that:

The available evidence suggests that chronic truants are especially vulnerable in terms of ability to access future employment and training from their involvement in criminal activity. In fact, the close association between truancy and juvenile crime should be sufficient reason to make truancy a priority issue for Government. (Watkins, 1992, p. 61)

At the school level, teachers are concerned and frustrated by the lack of appropriate programs to assist students who fall into the ‘at risk’ category (Bradley, 1992). At times of economic constraint additional funding and staffing is difficult to justify and in turn an external perception is that the school is not responding. It is often difficult to offer the attention required by the students when they return to class while continuing the education program for the remainder of the class. The lack of necessary resources for existing educational programs, coupled with the lack of appropriate programs to address the issue of school non-attendance, contribute to the overall phenomenon of ‘at risk’ students. Resources including physical, human and financial do exist, but can only be distributed in restricted ways using what appear to be outdated formulae prescribed by higher authorities.

Watkins (1992) and Fitzgibbon (1996) investigated secondary students classified ‘at risk’ due to school non-attendance and found that they share a number of characteristics including age, low achievement, learning difficulties, low self-esteem, socio-economic status, and lack of parental interest. While truancy and overall non-attendance is suggested “among the most worrying indicators of inequity in the school system” (Watkins, 1992, p.61), the incidence of truancy and non-attendance do not necessarily occur in isolation or independent of factors that may contribute to students non-attendance behaviour. It is a complex issue comprised of at least three components namely the individual, the family, and the school.

### **1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

Recent research conducted in Western Australia has confirmed that significant numbers of students are deemed ‘at risk’ due to excessive patterns of absence (Bonjolo, 1991; Watkins, 1992). These studies also confirmed the difficulties that



absenteeism represents for the student, home, school and the community at large. The true magnitude of the 'at risk' problem in both Western Australia and Australia is unclear due to insufficient data. Although the volume of research relating to school attendance and related variables continues to increase, research into patterns of attendance of compulsory age students, identification of emergent trends and critical periods is limited. This was confirmed recently by Fitzgibbon who stated:

The main difficulty in discussing the issue of alienation from education is that there has to date, been no uniform, national statistical measure of the number of young people under the legal school-leaving age who 'go missing' from school for whatever reason. Some individual schools and some systems regularly record meaningful data on absenteeism and others have acknowledged the need to do so. The perception is that the number of young people who absent themselves from school, and 'disappear' because of effects of formal or informal exclusions is growing and the anecdotal evidence seem to support this, but any attempt to remedy any unacceptable situation must be based on a thorough identification of the problem, of its size, nature and causes. (1996, p.viii)

A great deal of research on absenteeism, including truancy has been documented over several decades. The focus, however, has been on the identified truant or persistent absentee after the pattern of behaviour (that is, non-attendance) is entrenched, rather than on early identification and prevention. There is also no apparent statistical evidence to say whether truancy is declining, increasing or stabilising. Research has generally been conducted in upper primary through to lower high school, often with limited samples of known truants or deviants (Bell, Rosen & Dynlacht, 1994) and has not included students with acceptable patterns of school attendance as a means by which comparisons can be made. In addition, research studies spanning the compulsory years of schooling (inclusive of Year 1 through to Year 10) and information on the patterns of absence of compulsory age students, appear non-existent. Several researchers in this field (Eaton, 1979; Estcourt, 1986; Bell, Rosen & Dynlacht, 1994) recommended further research be undertaken that includes all of the primary years of schooling with a heterogeneous sample. These researchers maintain that such an approach to research might better identify patterns of absence and factors contributing to the absence when it occurs. Hence, the need for this research is embedded in other studies and literature that have shaped the research and

methodology. Literature highlights research involving primary age students as fundamental to any program for the early identification or prevention of persistent absentees (Eaton, 1979; Mervilde, 1981, Estcourt, 1986).

From the examination of the seven years of data analysed in this research, the development of a profile of the persistent absentee was attempted in an effort to develop a template for early identification and intervention and/or prevention at the system and school level.

Research to date has identified many key factors contributing to student absences from school. Generally these variables can be clustered around the following: the student, the school and the family. Unfortunately the majority of existing research focuses on surface level factors such as age, gender, culture and ethnicity, linking these factors to students with well defined patterns of non-attendance (DeBlois, 1989; Bonjolo, 1991; Watkins, 1992). Very little information exists on early identification and prevention of school non-attendance including truancy. A comprehensive study of the compulsory years of schooling to identify patterns of absence and when students begin to absent themselves from school, and the intervening risk factors associated with the behaviour of non-attendance, appears long overdue. Consequently, this research investigated the phenomenon of patterns of absence and contributory factors to critical periods of time during the course of the compulsory years of schooling.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Schools collect their own data on attendance and at present, there is no collated, system-wide information available on attendance, non-attendance or truancy. The majority of studies to date have investigated attendance rates and related variables in predominantly secondary school students. These studies have generally been conducted over short periods of time (between one term and one year) and involved small numbers of students who are generally known ‘truants’ or ‘chronic absentees’.

Hence, this retrospective study (comprising seven years across both primary and secondary school) was established to collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative data to provide a broad base of attendance information that would highlight emergent trends, patterns and critical periods.

Six research questions framed the research. The main research question was developed with reference to a number of contextual factors and the perceived problems as these related to the schools under investigation. The question was consistent with the overall research problem and formulated as:

*What patterns of absence are evident in the analysis of attendance data of compulsory age students?*

The minor research questions that formed the basis of this research are stated as follows:

*What are the characteristics of persistent absentees?*

*What factors contribute to student's patterns of absence?*

*What is the impact of non-attendance on the achievement of students?*

*What is the nature of school policies/interventions to address the issue of absenteeism?*

*How effective are school policies and practices on absenteeism?*

## **1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The outcomes of the research offer the schools a process by which they can identify potential non-attenders based on 'typical' profiles and as such assist schools to

become proactive in their efforts to reduce further behaviour of this nature. This would contribute towards advancing understanding of participation and education and illuminate critical factors contributing to school non-attendance. In doing so, the study has the potential to benefit the students, the parents, the schools and the school district involved in the study. The significance of this research, however, is not limited to the participating schools. The findings of the study may also benefit other schools, District Offices and the Education Department. In addition, other education and service organisations such as the Family and Children's Services Department, Ministry of Justice, and the Police Department could derive benefits from the results.

The research has the potential to provide a framework at both the system and operational (or school) levels to contribute to reducing absenteeism. Finally, it is expected that the research will extend knowledge, insight and understanding about those factors contributing to school non-attendance, identification and effective intervention aimed at reducing absenteeism and the number of 'at risk' students.

## **1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

In describing the research undertaken in this study, a number of key terms are used repeatedly throughout this thesis. This section provides the working definitions for these important terms and serves to avoid any confusion and misunderstandings that might otherwise occur.

### ***School Non-Attendance***

Any justified or unjustified absence from school forms the broad category of school non-attendance. It includes absences both with and without the knowledge and consent of the parents and/or the school authorities. The major terms utilised by the Education Department of Western Australia schools to categorise absences include: 'sick'; 'note'; 'late'; 'explained'; 'unexplained'; 'truancy'; 'investigating'; 'withdrawn'; and 'period absence'.

Non-attendance encompasses compulsory age students who do not have a proper, acceptable reason for being absent from school.

### ***Truancy***

Unexplained periods of absence (or truancy) are illegal. The Western Australian Education Act 1928 (1992, p. 31) under Section 17A(1) defines truancy as “A child who, without reason which is deemed a reasonable excuse under Section 14, absents himself, although not habitually, from school when he should be attending school as required by the Act, commits the offence of truancy.” Truancy is deemed to be an offence under the Act and offenders may be required to appear in court.

Students who truant are referred to the School Welfare Officer from the District Office. Police patrols return truanting students to school or to their parents.

The broadest definition of truancy states, absence from school without the knowledge, approval or consent of the parents and/or the school authorities. The definition of truancy that has been adopted for this study is in accordance with Hibbett, Fogelman and Manor (1990) who stated that “truancy was inferred from poor attendance as revealed in school registers, and it is thus more appropriate to refer to persistent absenteeism rather than truancy in this context” (pp. 23-24). Hence, the study will take into account absences from the schools as indicated through the categories adopted by Education Department of Western Australia secondary schools. As truancy is only one category of school absence, an overall assessment of all categories pertaining to absences is necessary to ascertain the exact nature and extent of school non- attendance, and hence highlight emergent patterns, trends and critical periods.

### ***Persistent or Chronic Absentee***

Any student who has accumulated 40 days or more absence (Fitzgibbon, 1996) both justified and unjustified, in the school year and is ‘at risk’ due their school non-attendance behaviour.

### ***The Extent of School Non-Attendance***

The extent of school non-attendance refers to the magnitude of the phenomena. It takes into account the degree of the phenomena in both the compulsory years of schooling in the secondary school and years four to seven in the primary schools.

### ***The Nature of School Non-Attendees***

The nature of school non-attendees refers to the characteristics of the students who choose to absent themselves from school and include age, gender, culture, and nationality.

### ***Risk Factors***

Factors contributing to, or causing, students to truant from school.

### ***At Risk***

The term ‘at risk’ describes young people who are thought likely to fail to achieve the development in their adolescent years that would provide a sound basis for a satisfying and fulfilling adult life.

### ***Primary School***

The age of this group of students is six to twelve years. In Western Australia, the seven years of primary school are compulsory.

### ***Secondary School***

This term refers to students aged 13 to 17. Secondary schools comprise both compulsory (13-15) and post-compulsory (16-17) years of schooling.

Students in Year 10 (age 15) in 1995 formed the sample from which the final cohort was selected for this study.

The term ‘secondary school’ is used in this study to refer to students in Years 8 to 10 only.

## **1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This research was conducted as a bounded case study hence in terms of generalisability, certain limits are naturally part of the study. Caution is required in generalising beyond the bounds of the schools in the case study. The information is context specific, referring to participants, and their respective demographic characteristics, that may not be representative of other secondary Government schools within Western Australia. Although this research is not strictly generalisable, the composition of the sample makes it reasonable to suppose that many findings may apply in other Government schools. Ideally, access to more schools, preferably throughout Western Australia, would have been desirable as the results would have been more indicative of the patterns of absence of compulsory age students.

The six schools at the centre of this research made available all attendance data spanning the seven year period. Other relevant data were also made available to the overall project but because of the need to keep the names of the schools confidential throughout the study, material cited from school policy statements and obtained from the various education and service related organisations in the school district can not be appropriately and correctly referenced according to the *American Psychological Association* (1983) guidelines.

As a number of school staff, including teaching staff and administrative staff compiled and edited the attendance data and the student enrolment forms, the possibility of human error is quite possible. The analysis of the data clarified whether the attendance data has been entered with a high degree of consistency and accuracy.

The existing categories used for the many absences that are contained within the term school non-attendance are broad and difficult to define succinctly. A degree of overlap exists between categories making it difficult, and at times confusing, to support the placing a 'justified absence' in one category as opposed to another. For example, if a student is 'sick' and brings a 'note' to excuse his/her absence, is the absence recorded in the 'sick' or 'note' category?

In the case study phase the researcher assumed the role of a non-participant observer. Involvement in school activities and contact with participants was limited. However, observer bias in reporting of the information needs to be considered as cross-checking of information is not possible. Duplication and verification of some of the research is highly improbable, if not impossible.

Parents and guardians supplied and completed the information on the enrolment forms hence the accuracy of the information should be assumed. However, questions on the form may be open to interpretation, which could introduce a degree of error in the final analysis of the data. For example, “country of birth”, “nationality”, and “non-English speaking background” appear one after the other on the form with no explanation on the definition of terms. (See Appendix 1 for an adapted copy of the Student Information Form).

## **1.8 SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the concomitants of the research. The research findings hold great significance for the staff members of the schools within which the research has been conducted, system level policy makers, and personnel working with adolescents in the broader arena. The results should assist the staff to clarify and evaluate current practices employed to address school non-attendance and become more pro-active towards addressing the issue in the future.

## **1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

The resulting content in this research document is arranged in a logical sequence to reflect the natural progression adhered to in the course of conducting the research and reporting of the data.

This first chapter provides background information and a rationale for the research. A set of research questions is identified and provides the focus for the investigation. Definitions of key terms are provided to clarify the terminology used in the study.



Chapter Two consists of a review of literature relating to school non-attendance, students at risk due to non-attendance and studies on related factors over several decades. It examines the difficulty encountered in defining school absences such as ‘truancy’ as well as the many factors that are related to the broader concept of school non-attendance.

In Chapter Three the literature relating to school non-attendance reviewed in the previous chapter is utilised to construct the conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter Four describes the research design and methodology employed during the course of the study with the analysis of the research, namely the statistical findings presented in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Six case studies of the targeted students are highlighted and Chapter Seven contains the discussion and conclusions drawn from the results.

A number of recommendations are made with respect to procedures and interventions to address school non-attendance. The conclusions and recommendations are outlined in Chapter Eight as a point of reference for immediate action and further research.

## **CHAPTER 2 - THE STUDY OF SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Student absenteeism continues to be one of the most serious and intractable problems faced by both primary and secondary schools. Volumes of literature on the study of school non-attendance have accumulated during the course of this century. While the issue of how to minimise school non-attendance has not been resolved, factors related to school non-attendance are continually identified and refined in an effort to explain why some students repeatedly absent themselves from school while others attend regularly within the parameters of the same school bound by the same internal and external policies.

In this chapter, literature related to school non-attendance and patterns of absence of compulsory school age students is reviewed. The literature focuses on factors associated with school non-attendance which are discussed in detail following a review of the available definitions on school non-attendance and truancy. The perennial issues of non-attendance, students 'at risk' and risk factors are discussed in the context of the attendance patterns and attendance policies.

Although there is a difference in emphasis in the literature when comparing research spanning several decades and a number of countries (including Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Canada) many similarities in the research findings emerged.

## **2.2 AN EXPLORATION OF TERMS**

### **2.2.1 The Search for a Consistent Definition**

School non-attendance is the broad category used to denote all absences from school. The term defines the condition whereby students who are required to attend school choose not to do so. Reasons offered to explain student absences may be classified as justified or unjustified. Justified reasons include absences that are verified by parents or guardians and may be due to a variety of explanations including sickness, lateness, family business, family holidays, problems with transport, work experience, or inclement weather, with the most obvious being ill-health, medical or dental appointments. On the other hand, unjustified absences may occur with or without the parents' or guardians' knowledge or consent. Unjustified or unexcused absences are described by the general term "truancy". Broadly defined, "truancy" is persistent and unjustified failure to attend school by a child of compulsory school age.

"Truancy" is only one of several terms used to account for student absences from school. It is part of the broader dimension of school non-attendance but it is by no means the sub-category used to account for the majority of the daily absences. Truancy however, is perceived to be the major sub-category and attracts most of the attention in research into the issue of school non-attendance. This is depicted in the great proportion of the literature that discusses and refers to one example of school non-attendance behaviour, namely truancy, rather than discussing the broader context of all school absences. Definitions of truancy abound and there appears to be little consensus and some contradiction from one definition to another. For example, *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Hughes, Mitchell & Ramson (Eds.), 1992, p.1247) defines a truant as a "child who stays away from school without leave or explanation." The Western Australian Education Act 1928 (1992, p.31) under Section 17A(1) defines truancy as, "A child who, without a reason which is deemed a reasonable excuse under Section 14, absents himself, although not habitually, from school when he should be attending school as required by this Act, commits the

offence of truancy.” These definitions are limiting and fail to consider the notion of “hidden truancy” which is masked by notes and excuses.

Several simple and narrow definitions are offered by Billington (1978), Galloway (1982b) and Elburn (1983) who state that truancy is unexcused or unjustified absence from school without the knowledge or permission of the parents. While Bos, Ruijters and Visscher (1992, p.382) state that “Truancy (disallowed absence) is: pupil absence during a lesson without reason that is considered valid by the school.”

Other definitions add the notion that parents may in fact know about their child’s act of truancy and thus condone the child’s absence from school. In other words, as contended by Robins and Ratcliffe (1980), a child who is absent from school and does not provide an acceptable reason, with or without the parents knowledge or approval, may be classified as a truant and his/her actions defined as truancy. Fitzgibbon (1996, p.80) is in agreement with Ratcliffe’s definition and states that “school truancy is taken to mean the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school or a child of compulsory age, although it can occur with parental knowledge and sometimes consent.” Such broad definitions of ‘truancy’ that use unexplained absence from school as the focal point create exaggerated truancy rates.

Adding yet another dimension to the definitions above, the question of ‘lawful’ absence needs to be considered as school attendance is compulsory until the child reaches a certain age which has been predetermined. In Western Australia, for example, school attendance is compulsory until the end of the school year in which the student turns fifteen and this is regulated by the *Education Act 1928* (1992). Thus, unjustified non-school attendance (or absence) is deemed to be an offence under the Act and offenders may be required to appear in court. This is clearly stated by Coventry, Cornish, Cooke & Vinall (1984, p.2) in their definition of truancy “as non-attendance at school when attendance is expected by law, parents and/or school.” Coventry *et al.* share comparative thoughts with Tyerman and the definition that he offered 35 years ago stating that “truants are children who absent themselves from school without lawful cause and without permission of the parents” (1958, p.217).

A multiplicity of definitions exist for the term truancy. Many are confusing, are difficult to quantify, are non-functional and tend to be used in different ways. Hence any conclusions about one group of truants does not necessarily apply to another. In the context of this study, the definition offered by Coventry *et al.* (1984) is the one used throughout the study when referring to school non-attendance. That is, *“non-attendance at school when attendance is expected by law, parents and/or school”*.

As the terms “truancy”, “non-school attendance” and “persistent absenteeism” are used synonymously throughout the literature, a further clarification in keeping with this study is necessary. The clarification of the working definition is in line with Fogelman and Manor (1990, pp.23-24) who state that “truancy was inferred from poor attendance as revealed in school registers, and it is thus more appropriate to refer to persistent absenteeism rather than truancy in this context.” Also, as truancy is only one of the categories that contributes to the overall rate of absence it is important to study the broader context of school non-attendance or persistent (or chronic) absenteeism. For the purposes of this study, the key term is non-attendance with the focus of the study featuring persistent absenteeism.

There are many concerns and issues that revolve around school non-attendance that are highlighted clearly in simply attempting to define the terms. Factors such as school, parents, the law and the students themselves are mentioned in a variety of contexts. As highlighted by Mervilde (1981), students education is affected; teachers lessons are disrupted; principals are accountable for the attendance rate; superintendents are responsible for their overall district; welfare officers may need to contact parents, locate students and enforce the Education Act; and police and the community are concerned about juvenile crime, loitering and misbehaviour. Non-attendance creates long range complications for students, schools and communities.

The problem is further highlighted by Brooker (1986) who makes reference to work by Denne (1981) who made the following comments on truancy:

There are so many ways to truant. Many are not obvious enough to make a clear-cut count. Some children miss set classes only, or 'wag' after being marked present. Others forge sick notes or are covered by parents who can't get their children to school but don't want them taken to court. Others have an everlasting supply of good reasons for leaving school once they have arrived. Others are kept home by parents and some have simply been away for so long, their names are no longer on the roll. (p.5)

As a result, precise information about the nature and extent of school non-attendance is near impossible to obtain because of the many forms it takes. A variety of terms are used to this end by authors such as Tyerman (1958), Kahn and Nursten (1989) and Ozich (1989) who use the terms "frequent", "infrequent", "chronic", "persistent", "occasional", "school refuser", "school phobic" and "school withdrawal." Apart from the last three terms, there are no universal or standard definitions for the other terms. Chronic (or persistent) absentees are known by all, however, the students who miss a class here and there may be unnoticed - they may remain undetected for some time and could legitimately form yet another category known as 'hidden' absentees. (Galloway, 1976; Ozich, 1989).

The categories share the common factor 'absence from school', however, school refusers and school phobics are quite different and should not be confused with the persistent absentee or the school withdrawal. The persistent absentee is traditionally absent from school without permission from either the parent or the school while the school withdrawal is supported by the parents who openly encourage the child to stay home (Kahn & Nursten 1989; Ozich, 1989). The school refuser consciously decides not to attend school while the school phobic exhibits a degree of anxiety at the thought of leaving home and attending school - even though s/he may want to attend school. The latter categories as defined by Kahn & Nursten and Ozich denote an emotional problem in contrast to a social problem as experienced by truants. As stated by Coventry *et al.*,

For some students truancy is episodic behaviour that reflects day-to-day decisions to withdraw from certain subjects and teachers. For others, however, truancy may represent a rational response to their structurally induced exclusion from mainstream schooling activities. (1984, p.65)

While unexplained absences are unauthorised absences, explained absences also do not form part of the regular school activities. However, they are accepted because an explanation (e.g. illness) has been given.

The different meanings offered by the numerous proponents confirm that the literature cannot be regarded as dealing with an homogeneous subject. Hence, the conclusions offered in any one study on school non-attendance (or truancy) cannot, and should not, automatically be regarded as supported or disputed by conclusions reached in other studies. It is critical to ensure that the same, or at least similar, definition that is reasonably functional has been utilised. Persistent absenteeism is a symptom not a cause hence a closer assessment of the major contributing risk factors need to be undertaken.

### **2.2.2 Acceptable or Reasonable Amount of Absence**

The search for a clear and succinct definition for truancy and school non-attendance requires an additional parameter of time. How much time is an acceptable or reasonable amount for a student to be absent from school? Also, is the absence acceptable or legitimate?

Fitzgibbon (1996, p.8) states that “Chronic truants are those children who are absent without reason for twenty percent or more of school time”. He adds that “school truancy is taken to mean the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age, although it can occur with parent knowledge and sometimes consent.” Fitzgibbon’s first point is alarming in the context of the amount of time students spend at school. The twenty percent or more statement translates to students being absent from school for one day or more each week. A question could be posed to seek clarification on how close to the twenty percent is acceptable before the student is deemed to be a chronic truant. Secondly, the broad definition of school truancy to include “persistent, habitual and unexplained absence” would include a significantly large number of students who have many unexplained absences by the end of the academic year.

In direct opposition to Fitzgibbon (1996), DeLeonibus (1978) claims that 10 days absence during the course of a 180 day school year is an acceptable period of time to be absent from school. This translates to almost six percent absence and 94% attendance as opposed to Fitzgibbon's 20% absence and 80% attendance. DeLeonibus argues that 10 days absence per year is excessive except for students with severe health problems or unusual family circumstances. Many factors are presented - some are legitimate - some are not. One thing however doesn't alter - excessive absence from school is a major issue and subsequent concern.

In addition to Fitzgibbon (1996) and DeLeonibus (1978), Estcourt (1986) state that 25 or more class absences in a nine week term is excessive and this does not take illness into consideration. This figure is representative of classes missed not days or half days. Based on a minimum of a five class (or period) day, this translates to five days accepted or legitimate absence in a nine week period or 20 days across the whole school year – a figure of 11% absence.

A figure near that of DeLeonibus (1978) and Estcourt (1986) is supported by Mervilde (1981) who states that seven days absence is acceptable absence except for students with severe health problems or unusual family circumstances.

There is no clear or succinct definition of what constitutes a reasonable or acceptable attendance or absence rate. The guidelines presented above - anywhere between approximately five days and 40 days is too broad to apply to the context of school non-attendance. For the purpose of this study the figure used was 20 days absence (or 40 half-days) in any given academic year. Table 1 summarises the acceptable periods of absence identified by the key proponents outlined above.



**Table 1 :**  
**Summary of Acceptable Absence Rates**

Source	Statement	Equivalent (%)	Number of Days (based on 180 school days)
Fitzgibbon (1986)	20%	20%	36
Mervilde (1981)	7 days	4%	7
Estcourt (1986)	25 classes/term		
	• 5 period day	11%	20
	• 8 period day	6.6%	12
DeLeonibus (1978)	10 days	5.6%	10
This Study (1997)	20 days	11%	20

### 2.3 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE

The literature highlights a number of influential risk factors associated with or related to school non-attendance and attendance patterns. Many of these factors do not occur in isolation and appear to be interrelated. The risk factors are multiple and interactive including the individual's demographic characteristics, personal factors, psychological factors, family and home-related factors, and school-related factors. More specifically, some of the factors outlined by Abernethy and Serfass (1992); Bempechat and Ginsberg (1989); Brimm, Forgety and Sandler (1978); de Jung and Duckworth (1986); and Withers and Battern (1995) within the categories of the individual, the family and the school are highlighted in Table 2.

**Table 2 :**  
**Factors Within the Categories of the Individual, the Family and the School**

<b>The Individual</b>	<b>The Family</b>	<b>The School</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ability to achieve at school</li> <li>• level of self-esteem</li> <li>• level of motivation</li> <li>• academic ability</li> <li>• friends</li> <li>• gender</li> <li>• physical factors (ie. health, illness and disability)</li> <li>• psychological factors</li> <li>• drug abuse and substance abuse</li> <li>• experience outside school more pleasurable than in school</li> <li>• goals</li> <li>• physical appearance</li> <li>• specific handicaps</li> <li>• clean clothes</li> <li>• food</li> <li>• medical history</li> <li>• race and ethnicity</li> <li>• age</li> <li>• language background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• domestic violence</li> <li>• parental occupation(s)</li> <li>• emotional and/or physical and/or sexual abuse</li> <li>• size of family</li> <li>• blended family</li> <li>• number of siblings</li> <li>• socio-economic context</li> <li>• conflict</li> <li>• modelling</li> <li>• family composition</li> <li>• family income</li> <li>• home language</li> <li>• race and ethnicity</li> <li>• parental education</li> <li>• value placed on education by parents/guardians</li> <li>• domestic violence</li> <li>• parent-child relationship</li> <li>• home environment</li> <li>• economic circumstances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• peer relationships</li> <li>• teacher-student relationships</li> <li>• policies and practices</li> <li>• discipline</li> <li>• curriculum</li> <li>• teachers</li> <li>• school climate</li> <li>• school-home relationships</li> <li>• teachers understanding of students and their needs</li> <li>• school size</li> <li>• pastoral care and support</li> <li>• school organisation</li> <li>• teacher morale</li> <li>• parental involvement</li> <li>• class size (student-teacher ratio)</li> </ul>

Factors related to the individual, the family and the school were significant in the context of this study and form the conceptual framework that is discussed in Chapter Three.

### **2.3.1 Demographic Characteristics**

#### **An Overview of the Persistent Absentee**

The current picture of a persistent absentee conjures up an image of a boy approximately 15 years of age who absents himself from school as he feels like it for no other reason than his sheer dislike of school, its teachers and curriculum. This perspective is in direct contrast to “The romantic Tom Sawyer-like picture of a truant spending sunny afternoons fishing by the creek” (Elburn, 1983, p.19). Instead, as Tyerman (1958) and Ovard (1978) found, persistent absentees tend to be unhappy, lonely and insecure. Also, they appear to have a lower educational ambition and are less concerned about poor school results than the average students. Elburn (1983) and DeBlois (1989), agreed that these youngsters are generally behind their respective peers in reading and mathematics skills. Galloway (1982a) and Little and Thompson (1983) added that these students generally see themselves as academic failures, finding it difficult to succeed in school, work and relationships with other students, teachers and their parents. Galloway (1982a), supported by Jones (1980), maintained that students who persist in absenting themselves from school, may miss more classes than others because they perceive the lessons as boring or too difficult, there is a fear or dislike of the teacher or some of the curriculum areas, or a variety of other reasons that may be related to cultural and racial discrimination, social or emotional issues. These students often have a poor self-image, a low level of self-esteem, and lack motivation. These young people have the capacity to learn and gain a minimal education. As stated strongly by DeBlois (1989), these young people are not ignorant and they do care about their future but they may need some direction. As stated by Tyerman (1968) and Raffe (1986) persistent absentees can come from both deprived social and educational backgrounds.

Identifying the ‘typical’ persistent absentee is not an easy task. Although certain characteristics are attributed to persistent absentees, a concise description does not exist. The greatest difficulty in identifying and hence stereotyping the typical absentee is the problem of nothing being typical, or standard, amongst any of the students who are deemed to be persistent absentees. As has been highlighted previously there are

many and varied factors involved with this phenomena and an oversimplified view would be dangerous in its conclusions. Persistent absentees do not constitute a homogeneous group as the behaviour may be attributed to a variety of factors. Reasons for the behaviour, like the homes and schools that the students come from, are quite varied and diverse. While certain conditions and circumstances are assumed to be of particular importance namely, school, home, society, relationships, teachers and curriculum, there is no definitive cause-effect relationship. As pointed out by Tyerman (1958):

... there is no one cause and no one treatment. Two children may play truant from the same class in the same school at the same time, but their homes, their personalities and the reasons for playing truant may be very different. Every truant is unique. (p.104)

This is confirmed by deJung and Duckworth (1986, p.4) who state that “Different persons “play truant” at different times for different reasons.” Persistent absenteeism is more appropriately seen as a symptom not a cause hence a closer assessment of the major contributing risk factors need to be undertaken.

### **Age**

Data on the nature of school non-attendance is easier to report and interpret than data on the extent of school non-attendance. Generally, attendance levels in primary school are higher than in secondary schools. This fact was attributed to primary school children spending most of the school day with only one teacher who was able to follow-up on any irregular behaviour such as school non-attendance on a daily basis. Also, parents tend to be involved more with activities at the primary school and are kept informed about their children’s behaviour and/or performance. Also, there is no doubt that the degree of school non-attendance increases from the end of the primary school years and peaks at the end of the compulsory years of schooling as found by Tyerman (1958), Billington (1978), Elburn (1983) and Eaton (1979).

## **Gender**

Tyerman (1958) found that girls tend to be absent from school more than boys, due to a greater incidence of illness among teenage girls, and they tend not to truant as often as boys. However, in analysing attendance figures, studies conducted by Billington (1978), Galloway (1982a), Coventry *et al.* (1984) and Person (1990) indicated no significant difference in attendance rates when comparing boys and girls. There is no conclusive evidence to indicate that boys or girls absent themselves from school more than each other. Hence, gender appears not to be a significant factor.

### **2.3.2 Personal/Psychological Factors**

#### **Academic Ability**

Research conducted by Reid (1982) confirmed that persistent absentees displayed significantly lower intelligence and were underachievers. This was confirmed by Levanto (1975) who found that students with a high IQ score also displayed a high rate of attendance. This was supported by Estcourt (1986) who questioned whether low achievement resulted in a high rate of absenteeism or vice versa.

#### **Level of Self-Esteem**

The concepts of self-esteem and self-image are highlighted frequently on the list of characteristics attributed to students 'at risk' due to school non-attendance.

Reid (1982), Englander (1986) and Person (1990) confirmed that persistent absentees have significantly lower self-concepts and highlighted that a positive feeling of self-worth was a strong motivational construct.

Students with low self-esteem have an inability to feel part of the school culture, may become frustrated and bored with school, and dislike the teachers and any form of authority (Tyerman, 1968; Neilson & Gerber, 1979; Birman & Natriello 1978; Bell, Rosen & Dynlacht, 1994).

### **Motivation**

Motivation is linked with the notion of self-esteem and the intrinsic sense of belonging and self-worth. As stated by Person (1990) several factors including self-esteem, achievement, recognition and self affiliation are strong motivators.

The overall rates of absence from school, as stated by Birman and Natriello (1978), are also influenced by the value that the students place on school attendance. A correlation was highlighted between school attendance and the perceived value of school attendance. Schools where students had little regard, or place little value on school attendance, tended to experience higher absence rates than schools where students placed value on attending school.

### **Behavioural Factors**

How schools define persistent absenteeism, and their efforts to also define and understand the antecedents of the problem, tend to heighten the problem rather than reduce or minimise it. Generally, as suggested by Galloway (1976), Nielson and Gerber (1979), Jones (1980) and Scherer and Bidmeade (1982), persistent absentees are perceived as discipline problems and are punished for their actions and behaviours.

This further compounds the problem and confirms anti-school attitudes and the dislike of authority figures who deal with the problem. Also, schools tend to focus their attention on the individuals abilities and attributes (or lack of) which may reinforce the sense of failure with some students and thus continue to perpetuate the problem rather than resolve it. Programs are initiated and implemented to deal with these individuals who display behaviour that is defined to be outside the bounds of what is typically 'normal'. Information to support the relationship between poor academic performance and behaviour such as persistent absenteeism is readily available within any school.

Coventry *et al.* (1984) supported this statement by acknowledging the work of Denne as depicted in the following quote to describe some Australian students who have been identified as persistent absentees:

Academically they were underachievers, though only a few were of low intelligence. Three-quarters had not yet mastered basic arithmetic. Over half were two years behind in their reading but most of the other half had reading ages equal to or far higher than their real ages. Very importantly, even those who were intelligent or had achieved quite well at school regarded their own achievement as hopeless. (pp.28-29)

Tennent (1971) and Coventry *et al.* (1984) agree that the relationship between persistent absentee and delinquency is unclear. The age old debate of ‘absenteeism versus delinquency’ is still currently unresolved. Much has been reported about the factors contributing to the two phenomena but little substantial evidence has been found to end the debate. A step closer to clarifying any causal connection has been the suggestion that persistent absenteeism and delinquency may be attributed, in part, to common antecedents. An association rather than a causal relationship may be more applicable. Factors contributing to persistent absenteeism such as home, school, peers, gender, culture and socio-economic environment, may also contribute to delinquency. This was supported by evidence made available to the *Select Committee on Youth Affairs* (Watkins, 1992, p.55) which precipitated the conclusion that “there is high correlation between school failure and antisocial behaviour including truancy, classroom disruption and juvenile crime”. This is confirmed by Reid (1982) who found that persistent absentees display disruptive behavioural patterns and have committed at least one ‘delinquent’ offence. Tennent (1971) is quick to point out that delinquents may have a history of high levels of absenteeism but this doesn’t necessarily mean that a similar proportion of persistent absentees will have a history of delinquency. He did conclude, however, that persistent absentees did constitute a high risk category for delinquency. This was supported by Wilson and Braithwaite (1977, p.74) who stated that school non-attendance “is best considered to be a phenomena on its own, not, subsumed under the diverse range of activities associated with delinquency.” Scherer and Bidmeade (1982) also pointed out that the phenomena of non-attendance may lead to delinquency and not the reverse.

The tenuous link between persistent absenteeism and delinquency gathers some of its momentum from the concerns voiced within the community about the increasing

crime rate. Birman and Natriello (1978) strongly supported this notion by adding that:

The immediate problems are the delinquency and crime which occur when large numbers of adolescents out of school and employment are left with nothing constructive to occupy their time. The long term problem is created by these same students when they fail to acquire the basic competencies necessary for productive life. (p.31)

Rather than a link between persistent absenteeism, delinquency and the associated influences, persistent absenteeism and delinquency may be better viewed as being parallel to one another with similar factors contributing or influencing each of them.

However, a little caution needs to be exercised when using research to form any conclusions about the relationship between persistent absenteeism and delinquency. The available literature tends to draw on research conducted with known truants and/or juvenile offenders who have been accounted for by the police and/or court authorities. (Coventry *et al.*, 1984, p.47). A final comment by Tyerman (1958) places the persistent absenteeism versus delinquency debate into perspective. This author stated:

Truancy is an offence against the law, and is, therefore, a delinquent act. In contrast to other delinquents, however, the truant has neither overtly injured anyone nor damaged any property. His offence is primarily one of omission rather than commission, though from truancy a considerable number of other delinquencies originate. (p.217)



### **2.3.3 Physical Factors**

#### **Health and Illness**

As stated by Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton, and Lawrence (1997),

Schools have a primary mandate to provide for the education of children. They also have an interest in their students' health and emotional well-being in so far that these can have important implications for learning and development. Schools are also faced with dealing with a range of student behavioural and emotion problems, many of which can have a significant bearing on student learning and the general environment of the school. (p.63).

The behavioural and emotion problems eluded to in the Zubrick *et al.* (1997) research include terms that feature too often in the media including: bullying, smoking, drinking, drugs, eating disorders and suicide. However, as stated by Zubrick *et al.*, “Without adequate baseline data, this assertion is difficult to validate (p.63).”

### **2.3.4 Family and Home Characteristics**

The variables associated with a persistent absentees home background may not have a direct association with the act of being absent from school. The difficult circumstances that families find themselves in, coupled with the added stress and disadvantage, make it difficult to attribute absenteeism to a single cause. All factors must be considered in the overall scenario.

Morris (1972), Burdekin (1989) and Bonjolo (1991), have stated strongly that experiences at home which may include extremes in social and emotional support, discipline, abuse, financial security, and parental involvement, compound the ‘truants’ feelings of insecurity, lack of self-worth, and belonging which may manifest themselves in compensatory behaviours such as long term absence from school. Also, different cultures have different values related to school and the long term benefits. In some instances, it may not be a high priority.

As stated by Coleman (1987), families are becoming increasingly ill-equipped to provide a home environment that is conducive to academic achievement. He further suggest that parents are increasingly abdicating responsibility for their children and are turning the task of socialisation over to the schools, as in the case of sex education. However, there is a lack of understanding by the general public of the amount of effort and resources which schools put into their attendance processes.

Parents must be made aware of their role in reinforcing practices which provide incentives for students who attend school regularly, while providing de incentives for non-attendance.

### **Socio-Economic Status**

Socio-economic status is a universal variable that may be defined incorporating parental education, parental occupation, unemployment rates, family composition and family income.

Socio-economic hardship, which may equate to lower class or working class families and manifest itself in poor housing conditions and periods of unemployment or erratic employment, is often associated with persistent absenteeism (Tyerman, 1958; Denney, 1974; Galloway, 1976; Fogelman, 1978; Farrington, 1980; Reid, 1982; Holmes, 1989).

While inadequate housing and unemployment may be a consequence of a families low socioeconomic status, absenteeism has no direct correlation to the family's status. Persistent absenteeism may be caused by a variety of other factors. The correlation, or association, of absenteeism with any of the mentioned factors is almost impossible to qualify. However, socio-economic status has been found to be associated with staying at school (Rosier, 1978; Williams, Clancy, Batten & Girling-Butcher, 1980).

Other factors related to the socio-economic level including, questionable child-rearing practices, questionable role modelling by the parent as a significant other, marital conflict/break-up, negative parental attitudes, expectations, and interests in the child's

education (and the school), can further add to the picture of the circumstances that may be a very realistic part of the persistent absentee's life (Tyerman, 1958; Nielson & Gerber, 1979; Farrington, 1980; Elburn, 1983; Ozich, 1989; Bonjolo, 1991). On the contrary, Bell, Rosen and Dynlacht (1994) state that there is no significant value as a predictor of persistent absenteeism and the parent's status. This is in direct contrast to established literature in support of a variety of factors related to home

conditions generally. Specifically, Galloway (1982b) found a high correlation between absenteeism and the father's socio-economic status.

While socioeconomic status and school absenteeism are associated, there is insufficient information to determine which factor or factors contributing to or associated with socio-economic status are most influential.

### **Composition of Family**

Families may be classified as two-parent, single-parent, no-parent, blended or extended. Society has undergone considerable social change. Extended families have given way to the nuclear and the single parent family. However, this alone is not enough evidence to support the issue of absenteeism based on family composition.

Research conducted by Reid (1982) highlighted that persistent absentees were more prone to live in defacto, single, separated, divorced or remarried families.

Fragmented and reconstituted family structures and family size are also considered variables in the discussion on school attendance and students 'at risk' (Withers & Battern, 1995). This coupled with family functioning, that is, conflict, abuse, modelling and mobility, may be significant factors in the overall issues of school attendance.

Conversely, Levanto (1995) found that students living with both parents have a lower rate of absenteeism than those from single parent homes.

### **Parents' Education**

Students' academic outcomes are affected negatively by low levels of parent education. Parent participation mediates students' academic achievement independent of social class. Involved and concerned parents manage to communicate their concern about their children's school progress whether or not they are highly educated themselves.

### **Parents' Attitude to School Attendance**

Home background and attitude of the parents' is highlighted as a contributing factor to the level of absenteeism, with parental attitude to school attendance one of the major concerns. With truancy contributing to a small proportion of the overall absences, the greater proportion of unauthorised absences has been attributed to parental knowledge, whereby parents have approved or consented to the child's absence, or in some extreme cases, the parents have been unable or unwilling to ensure the child returns to school. In other words, children are more likely to be home with the parents' knowledge and consent than truanting as confirmed by Galloway (1976, 1982a, 1982b) through his research and supported by Elburn (1983). Also, both Burdekin (1989) and Bonjolo (1991) have stated strongly that experiences at home which may include extremes in social and emotional support, discipline, abuse, financial security, and parental involvement, compound the 'truants' feelings of insecurity, lack of self-worth and belonging which may manifest themselves in the students attitude and display of compensatory behaviours such as long term absence from school.

Parents attitudes, expectations, beliefs about schooling, and learning, guide their behaviour with their children and have a causal influence on the development of the children's achievements, attitudes and behaviours.

### **2.3.5 School Related Factors**

Education systems and schools tend to address the symptoms not the cause. Therefore the same problems resurface in other forms later on.

Absence from school is not a new phenomena and school alone does not contribute, perpetuate or cause absenteeism. However, the community, and society in general, continue to attempt to place the entire problem back within the school context and demand that appropriate and relevant programs are made available to youth so that they gain basic competencies necessary to enter, and be productive in, adult life.

The problem has been dealt with on an individual and school level for many years. Maybe the time has come for intervention at the community level to assist in addressing the problem that plagues the individual, the family, the school, and the community at large.

As concluded by Bonjolo (1991), the relationship between the school and the home is a very significant one. This was supported by the *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia* (Beazley, 1984) with the recognition that:

. . . the first major step which needs to be taken is to ensure that all schools, regardless of their locality and community circumstances, have a thorough understanding of the home backgrounds of their students...too many schools and teachers have only a sketchy knowledge of their students' out-of-school circumstances and that they therefore respond inadequately and, on some occasions, incorrectly . . . many schools are not geared to recognise and respond to the special needs of disadvantaged students. (pp.290-291)

Absenteeism represents different sets of difficulties for the student, the home, the school and the community at large. Absence from school alone can be viewed from many perspectives starting with a clear definition of the problem. However, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, a universal definition is lacking, hence schools are also disadvantaged by not having a concise working definition to implement at their level.

As stated by Reid (1983), schools differ from one another in countless and varying ways including curriculum, and the emphasis on academic subjects, as opposed to vocational subjects, the nature of the staff, including ability, qualifications and

experience, through to factors highlighted by Jones (1980), such as size of school, buildings, resources, geographic isolation, classroom management and discipline, pastoral care policies and school climate. However, studies conducted by Galloway (1976) and Bos, Ruijters and Visscher (1990) indicated that the size of the school has no correlation with truancy and absentee rates.

The school may serve as an enabler for students who become unaccountable for their irregular attendance. Enabling behaviours may include failure to confront excessive absences, accepting ‘excused absences’ from parents, establishing vague or unenforceable discipline policies, attributing attendance problems to the family but not involving the family in the solution, failure to establish school expectations and recognition of regular attendance, and setting low expectations for students.

A number of the contributory factors are within the schools control such as policies, rules and curriculum.

### **School Climate**

The school ethos (also referred to as the school atmosphere or climate) is associated with truancy and attendance rates according to Bryk and Thum (1989). However, no single factor makes a school more effective than another. This has been demonstrated by schools with similar structural and administrative characteristics, and similar intakes of students having different rates of absenteeism. Unfortunately, some of these variables are not easy to access, separate and measure. Collectively, as suggested by Mortimore and Blackstone (1982), these processes are the product of the school ethos. In light of the notion of school ethos, Cooper (1966), Bryk and Thum (1989) and Mortimore and Blackstone (1982), tend to support one another’s findings by concluding that absenteeism appears to be higher in schools where there is a greater incidence of discipline problems and where there is diversity among the students’ academic experience and social background. It was also agreed that absenteeism tends to be lower, or reduced, in schools where the students feel safe and perceive discipline to be fair and effective; students have a strong academic background and a high percentage are enrolled in academic programs; there is a push towards doing homework, getting good grades and an interest in the academics;

individual differences and rates of learning are acknowledged; students are involved in the organisation of the school and there is close parent-school relations; rewards not punishments are on offer, and school experiences are enjoyed by the students. The internal organisational features of schools can have significant educative consequences for all students especially 'at risk' students. Similarly, estimated school effects may

also be a function of the kinds of students enrolled rather than the organisational characteristics of the school. As stated by Tyerman (1968):

A child who enjoys school is unlikely to play truant. But if he is to enjoy school, he must feel that he is liked, that he can do the work, and that his parents and other adults have a good opinion of the school. I have never met a persistent truant who had these three assurances. (p.71)

Tyerman's statement was confirmed by Moos and Moos (1978) who confirmed that classrooms with high competition and teacher contact but low in teacher support had high rates of absenteeism. However, in classrooms where the teachers established control early and help the students to understand the rules of the class had lower absentee rates.

### **Peer Influence and Relationships**

Wilson and Braithwaite (1977) and Coventry *et al.* (1984) supported the notion that peers are 'significant others' in the lives of students choosing to absent themselves from school. Eaton (1979) reported the relationship between peers and teachers was significant. Research conducted by these writers found that students are more likely to miss school while in the company of their peers (or friends). Peer groups have the ability to coerce or persuade students into the act of truancy. As contended by Wilson and Braithwaite (1977, p.89), "Truancy is very much a peer group activity." Bishop (1980) supported these earlier findings and added that the influence of peer groups on students decisions to miss school was not restricted to students attending the same school. Students were known to be absent with friends from other schools.

## **2.4 MEASURING ATTENDANCE**

Schools are required legally to record student attendance. It is the parent's/guardian's statutory responsibility to ensure that the student is regularly at school. It is the school's responsibility to monitor, seek explanation from parents/guardians for non-attendance and ensure that once students come to school they attend their classes.

Keeping track of attendance is no easy matter for schools. Typically, schools require parents to provide a note of explanation or make contact with the school by some other method following an absence.

Traditional record keeping, reporting and monitoring of attendance (or absences) are questionable. Although schools have developed general procedures for recording attendance, including the provision of additional procedures to cater for students who arrive late or have to leave early, it is impossible to account for all absences. Official daily absentee figures may under-estimate the true magnitude of the absence rate and question the overall validity of the data (deJung & Duckworth, 1986). Also, accurate data on truancy are generally not kept. This is partly due to the difficulty inherent in determining whether an absence is legitimate or not.

In primary schools, an attendance register is utilised to record half day absences and the reasons for the absence (see Appendix 2). The classroom teacher is responsible, and accountable, for the accurate recording and maintenance of this information.

High schools on the other hand, utilise a variety of mechanisms including computerised systems. General procedures for recording attendance vary with schools recording attendance during the first lesson, before recess, after lunch, at the end of the day or at the beginning of every lesson. To account for the absences on a daily basis, an absentee report is compiled and published by staff allocated to this task, then amended and updated as information comes to light during ensuing stages. The introduction of computerised recording procedures are being adopted by more and more of the larger secondary schools in an effort to short cut some of the procedures



used in the past. However, other complications may be introduced. The complications involve human error which can take place in the process of checking attendance and communicating all data to the staff, parents, students and other authorities if necessary. As outlined by Hammer and Landau (1981), data may become contaminated during the initial phases of recording and classification. School attendance records may not be accurate due to inconsistent procedures for recording absences, errors made in entering teacher absence reports into office records and

procedures not uniformly followed. For example, if a student is absent and submits a note to explain his illness upon return to school, is the absence recorded as 'sick' or 'note'?

Accurate accounting of daily absences and the subsequent need to monitor the absences are crucial. Regardless of who is designated this role, be it the class teacher, form teacher, attendance officer or the deputy principal, problems surface with regard to the amount of time necessary to trace an absence, verify it as a justified or unjustified absence and then communicate the finding/s to the appropriate person to update the necessary records. In the past, very few schools had someone appointed to this position on a full time basis. Similarly, the degree to which it is possible to thoroughly investigate some absences is questionable. In addition, should the concern be with known persistent absentees only or also with the students who miss the odd lesson here and there? As Duckworth (1988) contended:

Scepticism is widespread among school personnel about the absentee excuses presented by students or parents. Some suggest that it would be better to eliminate the distinction between excused and unexcused altogether: An absence is an absence. The strongest argument for this simplification of policy is that it would save resources now devoted to the processing of excuses. However, simplification could unfairly penalise students absent for unavoidable causes (e.g. illness). It could also hinder administration from focusing on students who are really beating the system. (pp.2-3)

The difficulties associated with the collection, classification, monitoring and interpretations of data further complicates, and has far reaching ramifications on, the

true indication of the nature and extent of school non-attendance - be it justified or unjustified. The lack of accurate data and a clear, universal definition are significant shortcomings in the research of the topic under study.

The *Select Committee on Youth Affairs* (Watkins, 1992) highlighted the lack of accurate school non-attendance data throughout Western Australia and between various departments and organisations. Coupled with the inaccuracy of the existing data is the added difficulty of collecting, classifying and monitoring data. There are

no mechanisms in place to accurately measure the level of school non-attendance throughout the state of Western Australia. Hence, the interpretation of any data in existence are always questionable as they may not be a true representation of the overall population. As a consequence, the release of non-attendance figures at the local, state or national level, will always draw some criticism with regard to validity and reliability, which is partly due to the lack of consistent reporting and monitoring procedures. As suggested by Bos, Ruijters & Visscher (1990), a clear and consistent definition is necessary to represent the data accurately. The accuracy of the figures is not sufficient. There must be an indication of the data collection techniques as well as the period of time such as day, week, month, term or year, but also the nature of the students and the absences. Mortimore and Blackstone (1982) made mention of concerns highlighted in the *Select Committee on Youth Affairs* (Watkins, 1992) in their view that interpretations (or misinterpretations) add to the discrepancies that exist on the reporting of the extent of truancy and school non-attendance at any level. The reporting of absentee figures can vary markedly from department to department and even from school to school. Non-attendance figures are difficult to collect as the term includes genuine and justified absences as well as truancy and questionable absences. It is difficult to make any conclusive statements about the nature and extent of school non-attendance while there is both a lack of accurate data, and a large discrepancy in the data that does exist.

Existing school data may be questioned further with regard to the procedures employed at the school level to collect and monitor attendance. As contended by

Birman and Natriello (1978), Brooker (1986) and Duckworth (1988), several problems are inherent at this level due to the nature and complexity of clearly delineating school non-attendance patterns. Although schools have developed general procedures for recording attendance and the provision of additional procedures to cater for students who turn up late to school or have to leave early, it is almost impossible to account for all absences. Hence, concerns centre on the fact that official daily absence figures may under-estimate the true magnitude of the problem and thus question the validity of the data (Raffe, 1986).

Absenteeism rates cannot be accurately measured by counting the number of students not present at any one designated time during the school day. There is a common reliance on attendance rolls/registers to calculate the attendance rate. Attendance rolls/registers may systematically under-report the rate of non-attendance as they miss the students who 'wag' class after the count is taken – be it at the beginning of the morning or afternoon. Calculating the attendance rate is only part of the story.

The importance of statistical records to answer pertinent questions in relation to school non-attendance was supported and highlighted as a key strategy in the *Report of the Junior Secondary Review* undertaken by the Education Department of South Australia (Eyers, 1992) which stated:

If the system wants to monitor what happens in one of the most volatile areas of its activity, then records, statistical collections, and analyses of what is actually going on are very important. The schools have always had these data in a raw form in their roll books. The system needs to collect the information, consider and then act on it. (p.40)

## **2.5 PATTERNS OF ATTENDANCE**

Accurate information on the nature and extent of school non-attendance is difficult to obtain. Currently there are no substantive or comprehensive descriptions available in Western Australia, Australia or internationally. The traditional procedures of

checking and monitoring attendance give information on the extent of school non-attendance, but very little information about the nature of school non-attendance.

In Western Australia, the *Select Committee on Youth Affairs* (Watkins, 1992) highlighted the significant variance in reports about the extent of truancy, and thus the lack of adequate and appropriate data about youth deemed 'at risk' due to their school non-attendance patterns and behaviour.

Several figures exist with regard to the extent of school non-attendance within other States in Australia. Elburn (1983, p.18) highlighted figures gathered by Dom (1981)

which revealed that "in any one week more than 100,000 days were lost by children truanting from schools around Australia. In New South Wales and Victoria alone more than 12,000 children truant from school each day" and "In South Australia, up to 16,000 children, or 7% of the total government and private school population, are absent from school on any one day. Some absences are legitimate, of course; many are not." Figures published in Burdekin (1989, p.272) state that "In New South Wales it was estimated in 1985 that at least 22,000 children were absent from school each day without any known reason." The use of the above figures as a basis for estimating the extent of school non-attendance needs to be treated with caution. There was no reference in the report to the time of the data collection, methodology, the student population or any working definition. In other words, studies vary with regard to their terms of reference. For example, Dom (1981) refers to truants while Elburn (1983) talks about school absences.

A significant difference also appears to exist when comparing days of the week and school terms within the academic year. Billington (1978) and Galloway (1985) found that attendance tends to increase towards the end of the week and the end of the school year.

Although the figures presented in this section are cause for concern as they stand, Billington (1978) and Duckworth (1988) agree on two remaining facts - truancy represents a minor proportion of all absences and the actual figures are probably

higher than indicated. Thus, the true extent and magnitude of what has been reported has significant implications and ramifications for our current education system.

## **2.6 SUMMARY**

This literature review has addressed the issue of definition for both truancy and non-attendance and concentrated on the more common factors associated with school non-attendance. It has been difficult to define truancy due to a lack of clarity of the issue and contributory factors. Thus any discussion on truancy must be set within the broader context of school non-attendance or student absenteeism. Although there

exists wide attention, the empirical data on the extent of school non-attendance is limited. The studies on school non-attendance have a number of limitations including lack of a clear and consistent definition, lack of information on the data collection methodology, the measure of truancy and/or school non-attendance and the sample size.

The explanations on the cause and nature of school non-attendance have not been conclusive. Any factors associated with school non-attendance can not be delineated as they are often dependent on one another and form an intriguing mass of information. It is difficult to interpret and make conclusive statements about the nature and extent of truancy and school non-attendance in isolation.

Truancy is only one of several terms used to account for student absence from school. It is part of the broader dimension of school non-attendance but it is by no means the reason used to account for the majority of the daily absences.

On an international scale, the literature concludes that there is no 'typical' template for an 'at risk' student or a truant and the concept of a single cause-effect relationship in the phenomena of non-attendance does not exist. It is also difficult to define relationships between risk factors and educational outcomes with precision because the relationships are highly complex and, ultimately, not known. The wide variety of students display different needs and capacities, with each of them exposed to different

combinations of risk factors. All students are in some sense at risk due to the pressures that surround them - physical, psychological or sociological. Due to these pressures and the individual 'make up' of each individual student, it is not possible to identify a single program or one particular strategy to meet effectively the needs of students deemed to be at risk. The body of knowledge is still limited and the phenomena of school non-attendance is difficult to measure. Further longitudinal and large scale research in the field is vital.

The next chapter outlines the conceptual framework derived from this literature review.

## **CHAPTER 3 - THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

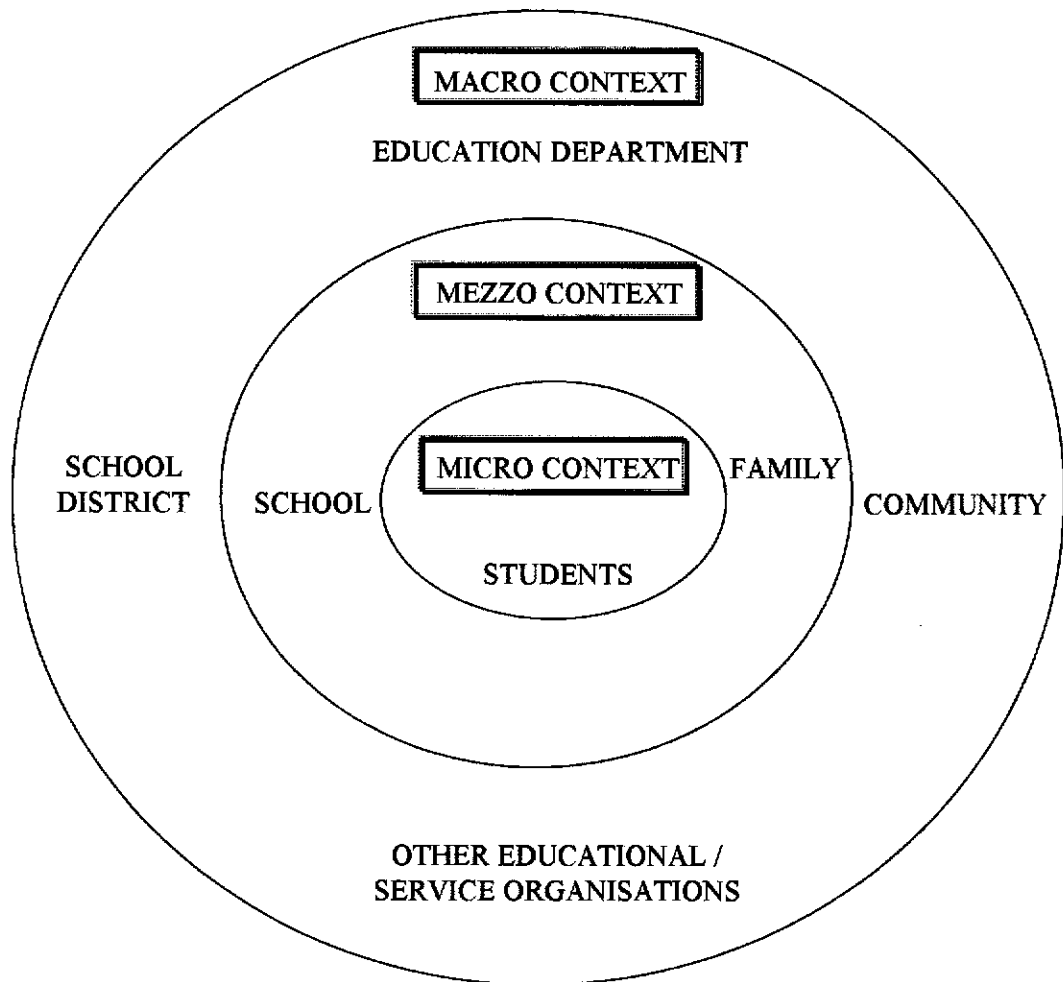
### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study proposed and subsequently identified a number of influential factors inherent in the overall focus on school non-attendance. In the preceding chapter a review of the literature was conducted to provide the basis for the development of a rationale for this study. More specifically, relationships between variables, trends and patterns emerged.

This chapter discusses the conceptual considerations derived from the literature review which underpin the framework and research questions to ensure the orienting ideas of the inquiry are represented adequately.

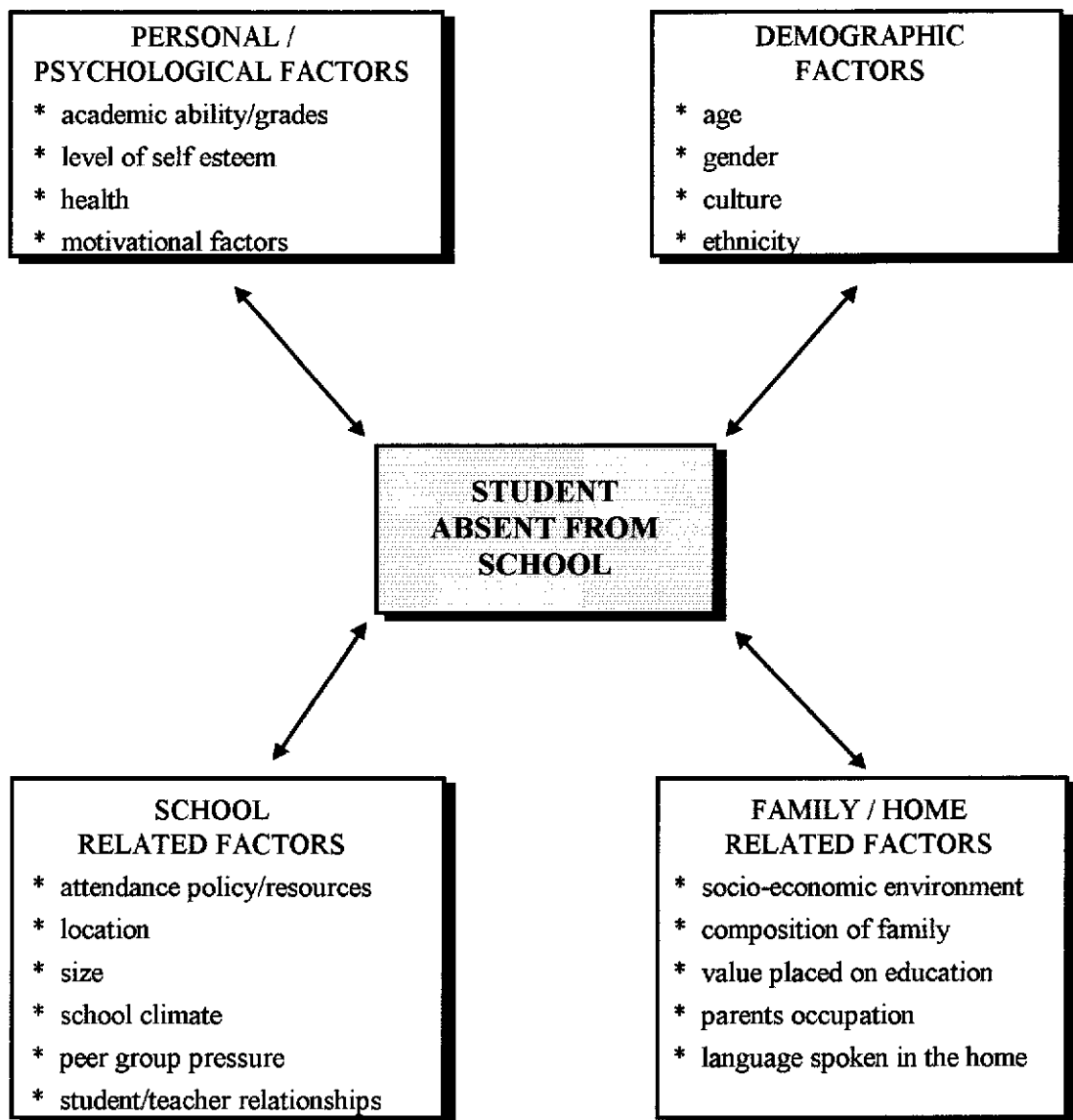
### **3.2 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

While the central focus is on the student, the study occurs within a complex and dynamic context. The context is in fact comprised of the three levels – macro, mezzo and micro, as outlined in Figure 1. These contexts are important given the interrelationship between the levels – the system level, where policies and regulations are formulated, impacting on the school and its staffing and resourcing which in turn impact on the individual student.

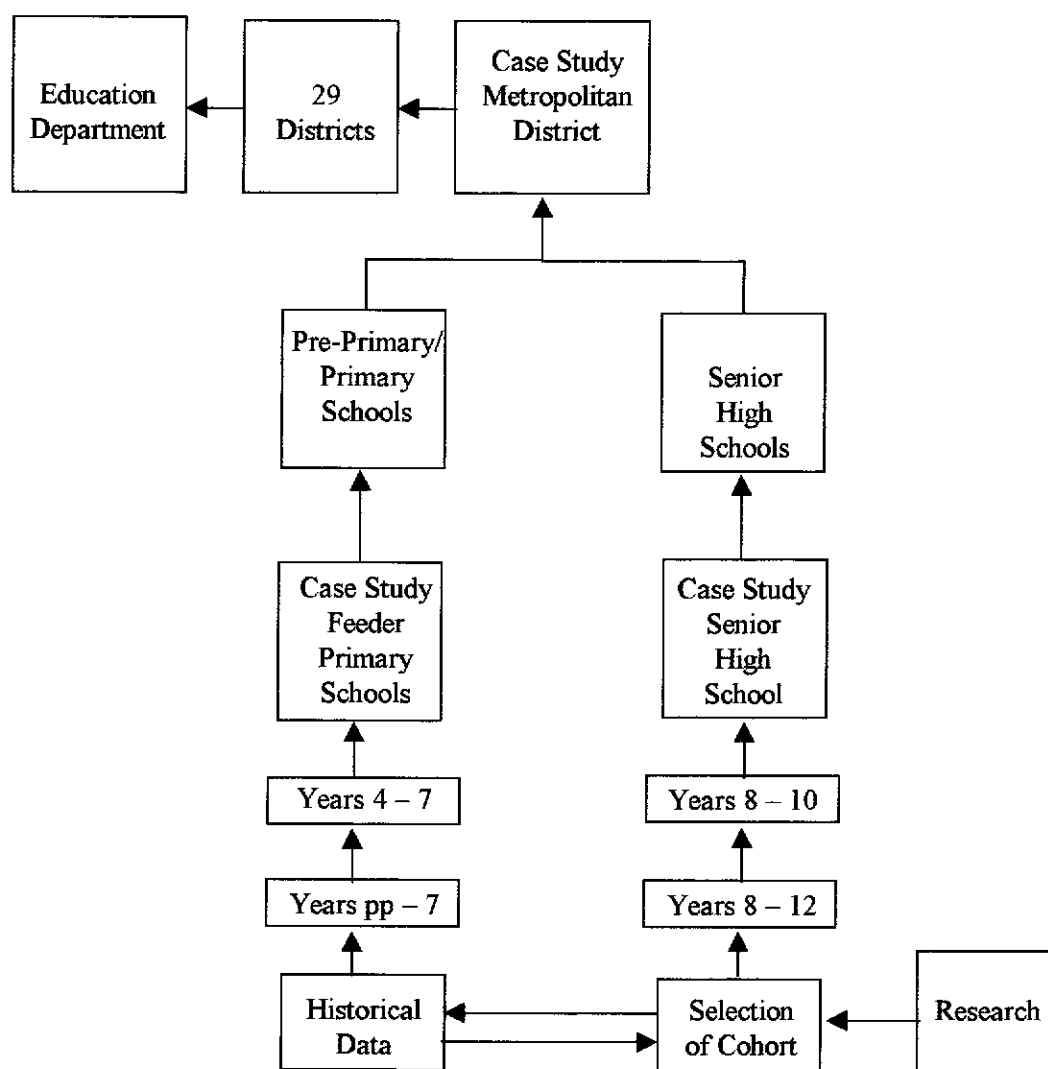
**Figure 1.** Context of the study.

The study proposed that a number of influential factors are inherent in the overall focus on school non-attendance. The influential factors are identified in the literature review and are vital in the context of the study. The factors include the individuals demographics, school, home, personal factors and psychological factors which are summarised in the framework as depicted in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Conceptual framework.**

The context of the study is further refined in Figure 3 which delineates the individual components within the macro and mezzo contexts, namely Education Department, School District, and the school. This diagrammatic representation, pertaining to the Education Department of Western Australia structure, highlights the derivation of the sample and its subsequent size.

**Figure 3. Research framework.**

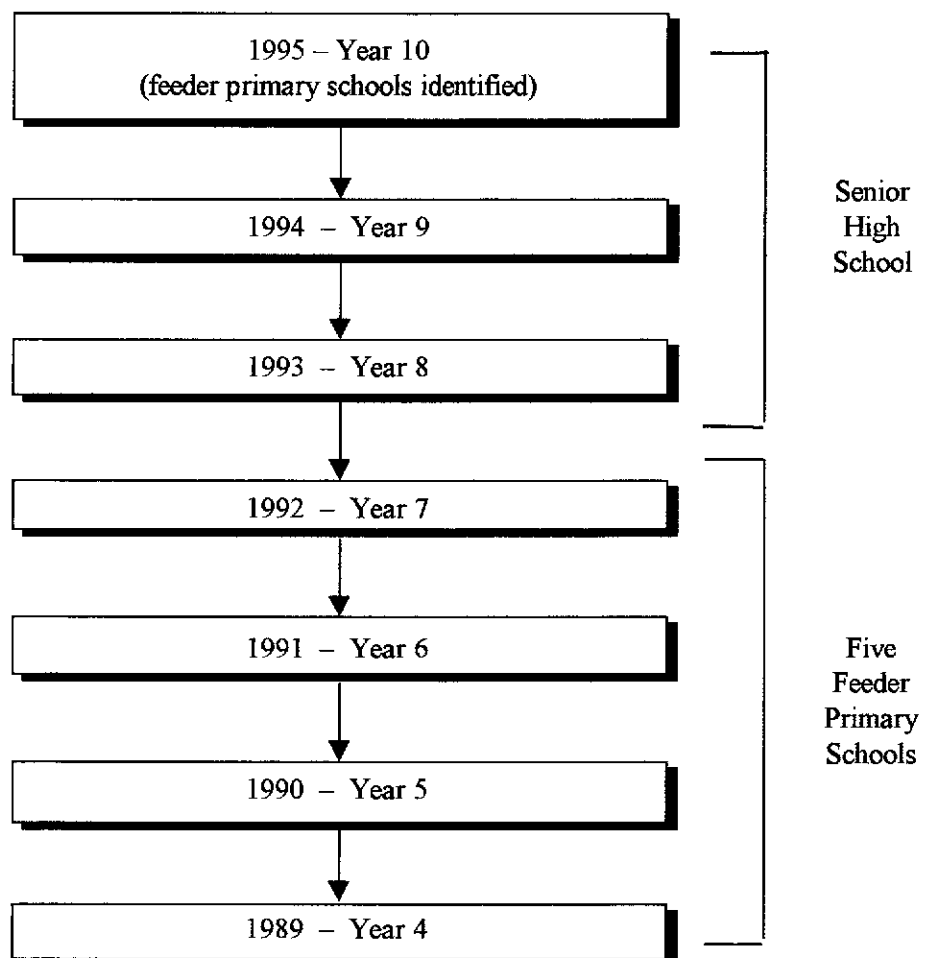
Western Australia has one central Education Department located in metropolitan Perth and the State is divided into 29 Districts. For the purpose of this research, one metropolitan district was selected and the cohort of students were selected on the basis that they had attended one of the feeder primary schools, were currently enrolled in year 10, and complete historical data could be accessed on each of the students. Historical data was made available by the feeder primary schools and the high school.

As primary schools are only required to keep attendance records for seven years, the data utilised was for the enrolment period from year four to year 10. This seven-year period was comprised of the last four years of primary school and the first three years

of high school. This period constitutes the majority of the compulsory school attendance years.

The six schools at the centre of the study made available all attendance data to enable the completion of this research. The attendance data spanned a seven-year period as outlined in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Seven years of attendance data.**



### **3.3 SUMMARY**

The development of the conceptual framework was guided by the literature review undertaken in the previous chapter. It confirmed the need for, and significance of, research of this nature to clarify misconceptions and contradictions when examining such a topical issue as school non-attendance.

The conceptual framework will be examined in the next three chapters which describe the methodology used to investigate the research questions identified in chapter one, examine a number of case studies, and discuss the findings as a result of the research.

## **CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The research investigated and reported on the patterns of non-attendance evident in the analysis of attendance data of compulsory age students. At the secondary level, the research also highlighted the characteristics of persistent absentees and identified factors that contributed to their patterns of absence.

The Western Australian education system is divided into 29 Districts comprising metropolitan and country areas. There is one central education office in metropolitan Perth that oversees the State education system and each district is responsible for the schools that are within its boundaries. Each district may have a number of secondary high schools, high schools, district high schools, primary schools, junior primary schools, educational support schools, senior colleges, distance education, remote community schools, and agricultural institutions, which are referred to as classifications. The Government education system of Western Australia includes the following classifications as outlined in Table 3.

Individual districts do not contain each of the classifications listed above. For example, the district selected for this research is comprised of two junior primary schools, 21 primary schools, one district high school, three senior high schools, and five educational support schools.

**Table 3**  
**Western Australia School Classifications**

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Number</b>
Early Childhood Education Centres	5
Junior Primary Schools	7
Remote Community Schools	29
Primary Schools	509
District High Schools	60
High Schools	2
Senior High Schools	85
Agricultural Institutions	4
Distance Education	1
Senior Colleges	4
Educational Support Schools	61
Other Educational Support Schools	7

This chapter describes the design of the research, the sample selection procedures, construction and validation of the questionnaire, as well as procedures employed for the collection and analysis of data.

There were two distinct phases in the research, the statistical analysis of patterns of attendance and the targeted student case studies, that combined quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The two phases will be discussed further after the research design for the study has been described.

## **4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research constituted a bounded case whereby one secondary state Government school and its five feeder primary schools, from within the Western Australian education system constitute the case under investigation.

The case study approach to this research was characteristic of research conducted within the naturalistic inquiry paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

The research approach adopted for this study included a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. A mixed method approach was deemed appropriate given the complexity of the research focus and the multiple variables. The phenomenon under investigation in the context of this research was associated with a number of variables that would have been too difficult to observe if other methods were selected. As stated by Yin (1989, p.13), “In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” and “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context”. Also, as stated by Miles and Huberman (1984b) a case study is

... a bounded context in which one is studying events, processes and outcomes. Note that a “case” could include a wide range of settings; a school, a program, a specific project, a network, a family, a community, and even the behaviour of an individual over time in a specified environment. (p.28)

Simply defined, the case study mode promotes an in-depth investigation of a single case to identify factors, and the relationship among the factors, that are influencing the situation that in this case is school non-attendance. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989), and Gay (1990), add to this definition by highlighting the importance of isolating factors within the case for further discussion. Stake (1978) and Marshall and Rossman (1989), stated that case studies are significant, further supporting this notion as they illuminate, in detail, larger contextual complexities. The major characteristic of the case study is its intense focus of a single context in order to explain the various interactions that have contributed to certain outcomes. This definition was confirmed by Yin (1989) who stated: A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- investigated a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and
- multiple sources of evidence are used. (p.23)

Merriam (1990) supported Yin's definition and added the following statement in relation to case studies

... focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon ... the end product of a case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study ... case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study ... for the most part, case studies rely on inductive reasoning. (p.13)

For this study a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques were utilised to gather and analyse the data. Data were gathered through school attendance register, computer records, students' personal files, questionnaires and interviews. The main form of data collection and analysis however, consisted of those records of attendance obtained from the secondary school under study and its feeder primary schools. The analysis of the data was an ongoing activity that is supported by Merriam (1990, p. 123) who stated that "A qualitative design is emergent : One does not know whom to interview, what to ask, or where to look without analysing data as they are collected".

It was important to observe the Year 10 cohort in their school setting and elicit patterns of attendance within the context of the school, with its attendance policies and support mechanisms, in an effort to understand the sample in the study that may be indicative of other Year 10 students portraying similar characteristics, in similar contexts and with similar attendance patterns. In the context of the study, the researcher was a non-participant observer.

This retrospective study was conducted during the 1995 school year whereby seven years of attendance data were collected from six schools. A retrospective study was critical in an effort to gather in the first instance historical data on students identified as 'at risk' of not successfully completing their compulsory education and recent data through questionnaires and interviews of the students themselves. The collection and analysis of the historical data provided a framework for the understanding and explanation of past events that were instrumental in identifying causes, effects and trends to explain present events and anticipated future outcomes. The research was



predominantly descriptive, non-experimental and inductive in nature utilising and analysing the empirical data, questionnaires and interviews.

The major focus was on the patterns of absence of compulsory school age students. Patterns of school non-attendance were ascertained and factors associated with the issue were identified, isolated, investigated and are discussed. Techniques that allowed for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data were utilised to examine the situation from different perspectives to determine the research findings.

The focus of the research highlighted the need to identify the students 'at risk' of not completing Year 10 due to their school non-attendance patterns and any contributory factors. To effect this phase of the research, demographic and attendance data was a vital element. The data in the primary schools are recorded manually in attendance registers while in the secondary school the records are computerised. The recording process is similar for both primary and secondary schools whereby absences are recorded using three distinguishing features namely, the date of the absence, half-day absences and the type of absence.

Based on the assumption that data were available, the issue of data storage was critical. As the data were either represented as paper records or computerised records, a decision was necessary as to which method of storage was adhered to for the duration of the research. While paper records are easy to prepare, they are difficult to analyse. On the other hand, the computerised data were easy to transfer, and descriptive and analytical reports were designed and implemented for the initial phase of analysis.

The decision was made to use the database currently in use in the secondary school. Even so, a large amount of the data collected was completed manually after clearing the research with the feeder primary schools, in line with the 'Policy on Research in Government Schools' (see Appendix 3), and then accessing the attendance registers for the period 1989 to 1995.

#### **4.2.1 Site Selection**

The research was the result of a collaborative effort between the researcher and the schools at the focus of this study. The initiative rested with the secondary school administration team who requested that further research take place in the schools to identify and assess the rates and possible reasons for school non-attendance. A case study of the secondary school was proposed and accepted. The schools at the centre of this study supported the issue of school non-attendance as a priority area and have undertaken a number of initiatives to combat the problem. This research complemented studies undertaken to date and would further guide the schools in relation to future directions and strategies for ongoing and continued improvement.

#### **4.2.2 Sample**

The secondary school at the centre of the study was selected from the Education Department of Western Australia system. The secondary school at the focus of this research has five feeder primary schools and was established in 1974 and is situated in an inner city Government housing area. Considerable private development has taken place but basically it is low cost housing for low-income families. Schools set within areas comprised of low socio-economic backgrounds are faced with many unique problems that impact on the education of the students.

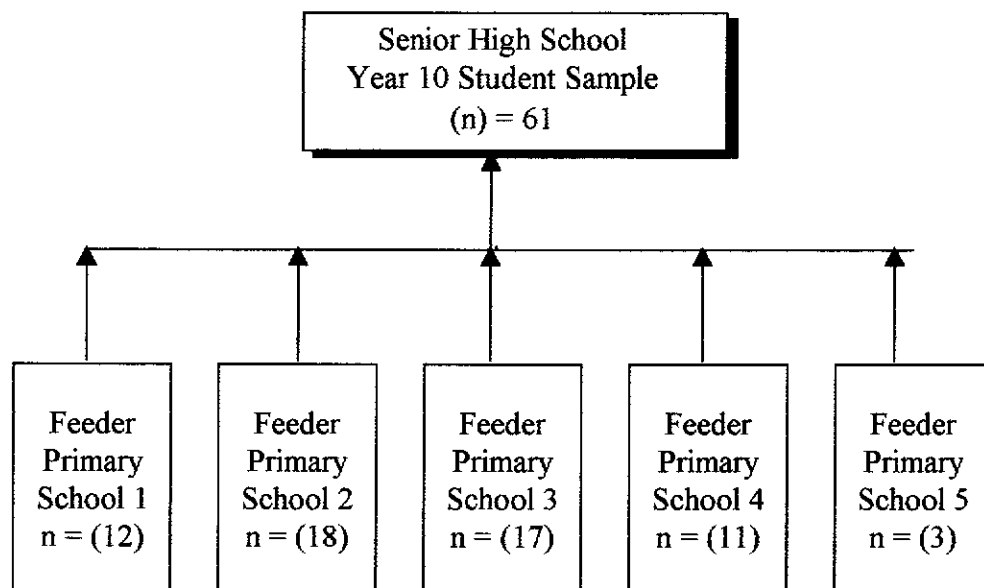
The research intent and requirements were discussed with the six school principals and access to the attendance data was approved. The seven years of data from the primary and secondary schools were scanned to ensure they were complete.

In this research, the school is identified as the 'case' and the units of analysis are the students. Each student represents a unit and the collective data are aggregated for further analysis. The primary unit of analysis of data were the students involved in the study ( $n = 61$ ). The students were selected based on the availability of complete attendance records, their attendance at one of the feeder primary schools, and the availability of demographic information.

The cohort of year 10 students were an important source of data for the construction of individual absence profiles for a sample of students identified as ‘at risk’ due to their school non-attendance behaviour.

Only students who had attended one of the five feeder primary schools were considered in the sample population as a means by limiting the number of variables impacting on school non-attendance. Figure 5 is a display of the study sample, that is, the six schools and the number of students who attended each of the feeder primary schools.

**Figure 5: Study sample.**



#### 4.2.3 Data Sources

The major source of data was the schools’ attendance records, which required use of quantitative techniques in the processes of collection and analysis. The secondary school attendance data were stored and monitored through the extensive use of the school computerised administrative system MAZE (which is a euphemism for making sense of the ‘maze’ of timetabling), employed in Government schools. MAZE is the standard record keeping mechanism employed by many of the Education Department

secondary schools. In this system absences are recorded according to type of absence (sick, note, truant, unexplained, excursion, late) and total number of half day absences. The attendance records from the primary schools were recorded and monitored through use of the prescriptive Education Department attendance registers.

In addition to the analysis of the attendance records all students were invited to complete a questionnaire designed to elicit their perception on school non-attendance. The targeted case study students also participated in an open-ended interview.

Rich sources of data, from within in the schools and the students themselves, emerged during the course of the study which allowed for an intensive examination within the natural setting of the school. Patterns of absenteeism were highlighted and factors associated with the issue identified, isolated, investigated and discussed. Quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques were employed to examine the context of the study from different perspectives to determine the research findings. Data was gathered from school policy documents, interviews, and questionnaires.

#### **4.2.4 The Development and Validation of the Instruments**

The procedure adopted in developing the questionnaire included identifying the categories, item writing, field-testing, and item analysis.

Preliminary discussion with key personnel (including Administration Staff, i.e. Principals and Deputy Principals, psychologists, social workers, and teachers) identified a number of issues related to school non-attendance. These issues were used to frame a preliminary version of the questionnaire.

Based on a review of the literature a further assessment was made about the comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the questionnaire design.

### **Identifying the Categories**

The purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain and obtain detailed information about students' reasons for school non-attendance and establish a pattern for their non-attendance. This included posing questions that elicited feedback in the form of the students' perceptions.

The complexity of the questionnaire was minimised by posing 27 questions that focused on and highlighted specific information about school attendance and the importance of schooling as perceived by the students. As stated by Cohen and Manion (1989),

Typically, surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of (a) describing the nature of existing conditions, or (b) identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or (c) determining the relationships that exist between specific events. Thus, surveys may vary in their levels of complexity from those that provide simple frequency counts to those which present relational analysis. (p.97)

Questions were designed around eight categories consistent with the literature on non-attendance including:

1. attitude to school;
2. parental expectations;
3. wagging - general;
4. wagging - specific (ie. classes);
5. attitudes to school subjects;
6. perceptions of best subjects;
7. perceptions of least preferred subjects; and
8. future goals/aspirations.

### **Item Writing**

The categories were further refined into a series of questions that related to both the purpose of the questionnaire and the categories, and further highlighted specific issues related to this study. The main focus of the questions was on why students 'wag' school (ie. choose to absent themselves from school without permission), history or

when chronic absenteeism began, parents' role or influence on attendance, peer influence on attendance, where students go and what they do when they 'wag' school, which subjects students least/most prefer, how success or failure influences attendance, students perception of the value of school, and students long term goals.

### **Field Testing**

The questionnaire was subject to a range of field testing procedures. The questionnaire was piloted at a secondary school in the adjacent district which has a similar socio-economic and school environment to the school utilised in the study. In the first instance, the questionnaire was presented to a number of the secondary

school teachers for their views as to the face validity and content of the questionnaire. Also, a sample of 40 Year 10 students completed the questionnaire and provided feedback on its complexity and clarity of wording. Teachers within the school administered the questionnaire. The minor concerns highlighted by the trial sample of teachers and students enabled the refinement and amendments to be undertaken before the final version of the questionnaire was undertaken by the 61 students in the study. The modifications included changing the following terms:

- 'skipping' and 'cutting class' to 'wagging';
- 'valuable' to 'important';
- 'plan' to 'intend';
- 'finish' to 'complete'; and
- 'enjoy' to 'like'.

Also, suggestions were made to take the focus away from attending school and phrase questions in terms of 'wagging'.

### **Item Analysis**

Data were subjected to a comprehensive item analysis that involved coding the 27 questions and sorting them according to the categories mentioned previously. A further sort of the raw data categories into sub-categories was undertaken to identify

typical and atypical student responses. The item analysis is discussed further in Chapter 5.

### **4.3 PHASE ONE – STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF DATA**

In this research, techniques that allowed for the collection of both of quantitative and qualitative data were combined to examine the situation from different perspectives to determine the research findings. The techniques are highlighted in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Data Collection and Analysis Techniques**

Context	Method	Function	Analysis
<b>Students</b>	• empirical data (school records)	• data collection • data reduction	• quantitative – statistical analysis (descriptive statistics)
	• questionnaire	• detailed description of school non-attendance	• qualitative – content analysis and coding • quantitative – statistical analysis (descriptive statistics)
	• interview	• gather data on students' perceptions	• qualitative – content analysis and coding
<b>Schools (year 10 cohort 1995)</b>	• empirical data (school records)	• data collection • data reduction	• quantitative – statistical analysis (descriptive statistics)
	• attendance policy	• document analysis	• quantitative – statistical analysis (descriptive statistics)
	• MAZE	• devise storage and recording mechanisms	• quantitative – statistical analysis (descriptive statistics) • graphical representation • discrete lists of specific items
	• attendance registers	• data reduction	• quantitative – statistical analysis (descriptive statistics)
	• documentation	• data display	• quantitative – statistical analysis (descriptive statistics)
<b>Education Department</b>	• attendance policy documentation on attendance and truancy	• document analysis	• qualitative analysis
	• MAZE	• devise storage and recording mechanisms	• discrete lists of specific items



A systematic method was applied to the processes of data collection, data reduction and drawing of conclusions as advocated by Miles and Huberman (1984a,1984b). The data reduction and data display process were continuous throughout the study whereby data were collected, selected, coded, transformed, summarised and organised into meaningful representations. Finally, conclusions were drawn, and action statements formulated, from the displays of reduced data.

An initial analysis of the data in terms of completeness and value highlighted the need to reduce the number of students in the sample to be examined by looking at complete records only. The initial cohort of 173 was gradually reduced to 61 in terms of complete absence records for the period 1989 to 1995 and in terms of the inclusion of essential demographic information.

This phase was critical in establishing the storage mechanisms that would be utilised for the duration of the research. Initially, this involved the preparation of summary sheets so that the data collected manually from the primary schools could be transferred from the attendance registers to spreadsheets and then tallied and aggregated. The collection of the raw data was in half days across three academic years and four absence categories including 'sick', 'note', 'unexplained' and 'truant'. Collection of the raw data from the secondary school mirrored the data from the primary schools. The data from the secondary school included much of the demographic data that were identified as critical to this research.

The storage of the data was structured such that each student had a master record with multiple transactions. The smallest unit of time was a term hence each transaction correlated to one term. Across the seven year period, each student had 28 absence transactions which were recorded under the four absence types (sick, note, unexplained, truant) and in half day absences.

In designing the database, it was necessary to identify a coding method for the translation of the descriptive and anecdotal data so that the data could be downloaded to a statistical package for analysis. This process involved meetings with academic

staff at Curtin University of Technology who were experienced in data analysis to explain the context of the research, identify key variables and assist in the development of a 'code book'. The key variables were confirmed, coded and cross-checked with academic staff. Further discussions highlighted concerns about several of the variables and suggestions were offered for the improvement and refinement of the selected variables and the subsequent codes. The coding scheme was amended to include 'location' of variables and hence the code book template was established and completed. This was once again cross-checked with the relevant academic staff and finalised with each variable now identifiable by a code and a location, that is, position by column for each variable as represented in Table 5. The codes were entered onto the database in preparation for the statistical analysis.

**Table 5**  
**Coding of Variables**

No	Variable	Codes	Key	Location
1.	<b>A. Student Identification</b> ID	01-63		01-02
2.	<b>B. Demographic Characteristics</b> gender	0 or 1	Male = 0 Female = 1	03
3.	culture	0 or 1	Aboriginal = 0 Australian = 1	04
4.	country of birth	01-08	Australia (1) = 1 Germany (3) = 2 India (6) = 3 Malaysia (10) = 4 NZ (11) = 5 UK (15) = 6 Vietnam (16) = 7 Yugoslavia (17) = 8	05
5.	<b>C. Individual Characteristics</b> IQ	01-34		06-07
6.	health data	0-7	no health data = 0 asthma = 1 bee sting allergy = 2 hay fever/sinus = 3 left cerebral hemisphere = 4 sore ears/swimming = 5 heart murmur = 6 one kidney = 7	08
7.	<b>D. School</b> feeder primary school	1-5		09
8.	<b>E. Family</b> place of birth	father 01-8 mother 01-8	See B above See B above	10 11
10.	occupation	father 0-7 mother 0-7		12 13
12.	main language	0 or 1		14
13.	<b>F. Days Absent</b> 1995 sick	000-400		15-17
14.	note	000-400		18-20
15.	unexplained	000-400		21-23
16.	truant	000-400		24-26
17.	1994 sick	000-400		27-29
18.	note	000-400		30-32
19.	unexplained	000-400		33-35
20.	truant	000-400		36-38
21.	1993 sick	000-400		39-41
22.	note	000-400		42-44
23.	unexplained	000-400		45-47
24.	truant	000-400		48-50

25.	1992	sick	000-400		51-53
26.		note	000-400		54-56
27.		unexplained	000-400		57-59
28.	1991	sick	000-400		60-62
29.		note	000-400		63-65
30.		unexplained	000-400		66-68
31.	1990	sick	000-400		69-71
32.		note	000-400		72-74
33.		unexplained	000-400		75-77
34.	1989	sick	000-400		78-80
35.		note	000-400		81-83
36.		unexplained	000-400		84-86

The data structure was created using the syntax and facilities available within the database utilised in the secondary school (MAZE) which had the added advantage in that extra fields can be added or modified at any stage.

The manual entry of data required the creation of data entry screens due to the fact the database, once created, needs to be ‘populated’. If the data is entered from the keyboard then it is entered via some screen layout that reflects the data required and its logical order of entry. The data as entered via a ‘screen’.

The secondary school data required the creation of import routines to allow electronic entry of data. To populate a database, it is common to read the data from a file on disk. The data may have been obtained from another database with an entirely different structure. If the file contains logical records that match the structure of the database to be populated, the data can be imported. To perform the import an ‘import routine’ is required that reads the disk and places the data into the correct location for each record. Most modern databases provide an import routine.

The secondary school data were available from the computerised source and collected on a number of data tapes that were created across the three-year period including 1993 to 1995. All of the data pertaining to the students were downloaded onto data tapes instead of disks due to the volume of raw data contained within MAZE. This was instigated while the transfer of data from the primary schools was being summarised onto the spreadsheets.

The secondary school data were rationalised to remove all extraneous information pertaining to factors such as finance, family and timetabling which ensured that the remaining data were the essential information in relation to the context of the research. The data included absence presented in terms of type of absence, number of days absent, absences based on academic years, IQ, gender, culture, nationality, and parents' occupation and place of birth. The data from the secondary school was transferred from the data tapes via a PC to a working computer. A data file was produced that identified each student and the number of half days absence classified as 'sick', 'note', 'unexplained' or 'truant' for each term. The data were imported to a specially created database and a transaction file for absences was created for each student.

The database and subsequent reports had the capacity to separate the students according to their demographic characteristics that included academic year, gender, culture, nationality, feeder school and IQ. The key demographic variables were identified in association with the phenomena of school non-attendance and delineated for further investigation. Other factors such as school term, school year as well as type of absence recorded were also identified as key variables pertaining to the study and worthy of further analysis.

The statistical reports were written and modified in keeping with the identification of the significant data essential to the context of the study. The reports included the mechanisms to extract data and format the output in terms of frequency and cumulative frequency representative of the key variables. This process that is inherent to MAZE provided a thorough interrogation of the database.

The last data tape (term four 1995) contained the most current and complete demographic information which was extracted and then imported.

The primary school data were only available by accessing the attendance registers. The data pertaining to the students were manually transcribed onto spreadsheets (see

Appendix 3). There was an extensive retrieval and analysis process for the data obtained from both the secondary school and the feeder primary schools.

The empirical data, (attendance data), were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) and the questionnaires and interviews were analysed in terms of frequency response and type of response. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the strength of relationships and any statistically significant differences in absence rates between students from different feeder primary schools, gender, IQ levels, and cultural and ethnic backgrounds, across the seven academic years (Ferguson & Takane, 1989).

As there is no statistical analysis facility within MAZE to analyse the school attendance data, specific reports were developed to highlight and eliminate key variable identified as the focus of the study. The data were rationalised so that only data pertaining to the context of the study remained on the computer system.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which is considered to be a highly functional, easy to use statistical software package that provides a wide range of basic and advanced data analysis capabilities, as well as organising and analysing data, and reporting results of statistical analysis, was employed to calculate one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). This procedure determined whether there was a significant difference between the means of the students from different feeder primary schools, different school years, cultures and genders.

#### **4.4 THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

After the collection and initial preparation for analysis of attendance data were completed, all of the students were invited to complete the questionnaire with 51 out of the 61 students submitting a return questionnaire, which is approximately an 84% response rate.

The questionnaire was undertaken during a form class in term 4, 1995 under the direct supervision of the form teachers. The teachers were given explicit instructions on the administration of the questionnaire and the researcher was in the school during this session in case the students or teachers required any further clarification or assistance.

The student responses to the items on the questionnaire were coded and sorted according to categories arising from the data itself and aligned closely to the conceptual framework. In addition the questionnaire data were analysed in terms of frequency and type of response.

A further sort of the raw data categories into sub-categories was undertaken to identify atypical student responses. The significant features here were the identification of convergent (or positive) and divergent (or negative) statement contributed by the students. Table 6 displays the categories (including the items from the questionnaire) utilised to identify the typical and atypical student responses.

**Table 6 :**  
**Questionnaire Items Sorted By Category**

Category	Questionnaire (Items)
1. Attitude to School	1, 2, 3
2. Parental Expectations	10, 11
3. Wagging - General	4, 5, 6, 7
4. Wagging - Specific (ie. classes)	8, 9, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22
5. Attitudes to School Subjects	14, 15
6. Perceptions of Best Subjects	16, 17
7. Perceptions of Least Preferred Subjects	18, 19
8. Future Goals/Aspirations	23, 24, 25, 26, 27

The Year 10 cohort selected as the sample constituted an important data source. These students were invited to complete the questionnaire as outlined in Appendix 5. The questionnaire was semi-structured and coding of the items occurred at the end of the data collection stage. Students were invited to participate with the understanding that they could decline to participate at the point of invitation or at any time during the research. Students were assured that the information gathered would be treated in the strictest confidence, ensuring complete anonymity and privacy.

#### 4.5 PHASE 2 - CLOSER CASE STUDY OF TARGET STUDENTS

From the 51 students who completed the questionnaire nine students were selected and interviewed, and nine case studies reported. An analysis of the rank outcomes based on the non-attendance data was conducted to select the case study students. Table 7 outlines the relative rank of the students' absence. The table highlights the top nine students, based on their total unexplained absences over the seven years.

**Table 7**  
**Analysis of Rank Outcome**

Student ID No	Total Rank $\Sigma (S + N + U + T)$		Unexplained Rank	
	Rank	Total (half days)	Rank	Total (half days)
52	1	544	1	379
14	4	288	2	240
57	3	301	3	226
12	2	445	4	174
65	7	233	5	149
68	19	164	6	145
60	31	118	7	110
66	10	198	8	107
54	18	165	9	102

Key: *S* = sick; *N* = note; *U* = unexplained; *T* = truant

The top four ranked students based on total absences are the same top four students based on unexplained absences. The decision was made to undertake case studies of the top nine students who had unexplained absence totals greater than 100 half days. This total translates to a total of 50 days unexplained absence over the seven year period.

Based on 40 weeks in an academic year, the average absence rate per week is 0.4 days. Based on a 10-month academic year, the average absence rate per month is 1.6 days. The nine students chosen as the case studies have been away from school on



average 16 or more days for each of the years 1989 to 1995 inclusive. This absence rate is between the figures highlighted in Chapter Two which ranged from five days to 40 days as the total number of days ‘acceptable’ absence before the student was classified as a chronic or persistent absentee, with the figure set at 20 days absence for this research.

The interview elaborated on the purpose of the questionnaire and sought to collect more specific and detailed responses that were particular to the site used in the study and to illuminate factors that might have contributed to non-attendance from which generalisations could be drawn in relation to similar sites throughout Western Australia. The interview constituted an essential source of case study information.

Although an interview schedule was designed, the questions were not administered in a set order and additional questions were posed as deemed necessary to elicit additional information from the students. The intention of the interview schedule was to provide relatively open questions that would allow responses to reveal issues that the students deemed of relevance and importance. While probing took place during the conduct of the interview, specific probes were responsive and not predetermined in the text of the instrument.

Questions on the interview schedule included:

- If you ‘wag’ school what do you do? Where do you go?
- Do you ‘wag’ school with your friends?
- Why do you ‘wag’ school?
- Do you think ‘wagging’ school will affect your results? Why?
- Which classes do you ‘wag’?
- What does the school do when you ‘wag’?
- Does the school always find out?

The interviews were recorded onto a cassette tape with an account of the complete transcripts and the interview schedule in Appendix 6. The interviews provided first

hand information from the students on their perceptions of their attendance patterns and the effect of non-attendance on their future destination post the compulsory years of schooling. A distinct advantage of the interview as a data collecting method is depth of information that it can generate.

The analysis of the interviews necessitated listening to the complete tape several times before attempting to transcribe any of the information. This allowed time for the complete picture as portrayed by the students to be placed in the context of the site-specific school. The transcripts were read many times in an effort to highlight emergent trends within each of the individual interviews, and then the nine interviews as a whole.

#### **4.6 TECHNIQUES FOR ENSURING DATA RELIABILITY**

The collection of data employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The data were collected and analysed independently using techniques outlined earlier in this Chapter in Table 3. The combination of the quantitative and qualitative techniques is referred to as triangulation. As stated by Cohen and Manion (1989, p. 269) and Burns (1990, p.248), “Triangulation may be defined as *the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour*”. In this study, multiple sources of evidence including documentation, records, interviews and questionnaires, were analysed to provide multiple measures, and convergence of information, on the same phenomena (Yin, 1989).

Additional control of the quality and accuracy of the quantitative data was ensured through the extensive use of SPSS, a computer program designed to analyse data on the basis of highlighting degrees of significance and correlation of the key variables as identified in this study.

Also, MAZE constitutes software specifically written for school administration, accounting, timetabling, marks recording and student reporting. The database employs 'query language' which is inherent to MAZE, a product of CAZ (AUST) Computer Software, which has evolved considerably since being established in 1977. The data output were regularly scanned and examined for consistent and meaningful results.

As this research focused on one school and a specific cohort in that school that could effect the extent to which the results of the research are reliable and generalisable to the whole population, it is worth noting that case study research is frequently based on the notion of naturalistic generalisability (Yin, 1989). Here, given a similar context and setting, data from the study may have transfer value to a school with similar context and setting.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the research design and methodology. The research section provides an overview of the context within which the research was conducted. The broad context of the study was identified as the Education Department of Western Australia from which the case under study was identified and taken through a number of processes to establish the final number of students in the cohort. The processes enabled 171 students to be assessed against a number of criteria for inclusion in the research. Based on the criteria that students' completed their primary school years at one of the feeder primary schools, and complete attendance records and demographic data were accessible, a number of final 61 students comprised the cohort.

The section on the methodology highlighted the case study approach as the most appropriate methodology for this research. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth investigation of a single school and the relationships among a number of factors that influenced school non-attendance.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques were employed and hence highlighted the importance of each method to this research.

Data were collected through a variety of strategies including attendance registers, computer records, student files, questionnaires and interviews. Each strategy was employed at a different phase of the research to further delineate the required and relevant information.

The study was retrospective in nature and critical in terms of collecting the historical data on students identified as the cohort. This data provided the framework for the subsequent phases of the research that attempted to identify causes, effects and trends.

The research focused on the patterns of absence of compulsory age students and highlighted the need to identify students 'at risk' of not completing year 10 due to their non-attendance patterns.

The major source of data was the schools' attendance records with completed student questionnaires adding the extra dimension of 'perception' to the data. Data were collected, reduced and displayed continuously throughout the research. This involved collection, selection, coding, transforming, summarising and organising the data into comprehensive and meaningful representations. From the displays of reduced data, conclusions and action statements were formulated.

Also, appropriate storage mechanisms were employed to contain the quantity of data. This necessitated the design of a database specific to this research to allow for coding of numerous variables. Similarly, codes were developed for the sorting phase of the questionnaire. Of the 61 students in the cohort, 51 returned completed questionnaires. From this 51, nine students were then selected and interviewed using a semi-structured schedule. The nine students were selected based on their total half day absence according to the category 'unexplained'. The nine students had unexplained totals greater than 100 half days which was used as the criteria to identify

the students to be interviewed. Additional questions were posed during the interview as required with the interviews recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.

The design and methodology of this research provided a rich pool of data and results from which schools in similar contexts can benefit by incorporating in research based on their own specific 'case'.

The next chapter outlines the research findings from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data collected.

## **CHAPTER 5 – RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter deals with the research findings which resulted from the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the school attendance records, and the questionnaires and interviews completed by the students. The presentation of the attendance data is in terms of types of absence and number of half-day absences accumulated by each student over a seven-year period. Descriptive statistics, namely mean and standard deviation, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were applied to identify students ‘at risk’ due to non-attendance and calculate any differences in absence rates between feeder schools, school years, genders and cultures.

The presentation of the results of the questionnaire is in terms of frequency and type of student response and the transcripts of the interviews were analysed in terms of content and “type” of student response.

### **5.2 THE RESEARCH SAMPLE**

Critical to the analysis of the research findings is a clear understanding and appreciation of the context in which the data were gathered. A description of the school, its feeder district and sample cohort of Year 10 students is presented to place this research in the appropriate context. A number of critical factors impacting on the school population used in this research are identified and analysed.

The critical factors provide an insight to the district and the schools that constitute the focus of this research. These factors are highlighted in the “Staff Information

Book” and were also derived and confirmed by the collection and analysis of the data. The research is bound by the major factors in this context including:

- transience;
- truancy;
- ethnicity of student population;
- language background;
- family structure;
- educational background;
- employment; and
- levels of income.

### **Transience**

The area in which the schools associated with this study are located experiences a high transience rate. Families in the area are often in rental rather than in owner occupied accommodation. Consequently, they appear to have little financial commitment to the area and tend to move frequently. This movement may be related to seeking more employment opportunities, accommodation factors or due to a breakdown in the family unit. The transience rate in the high school for the period February 1995 to October 1995 was 28% (Staff Information Book, 1995, p.2).

### **Truancy**

Schools such as the secondary school under investigation have a high absentee rate. The 1995 average daily absence rate was approximately 18%. In addition some ethnic groups consistently exceeded this figure. Only a small proportion of these students were constant offenders, and those students who returned to school after casual absences needed individual attention from teachers to allow them to continue studying the curriculum. Unless this individual attention was available, students became disaffected and alienated which lead to further truancy (Staff Information Book, 1995, p.2).

### **Ethnicity of Student Population**

The student population comprising 830 students included a large proportion of students from many diverse ethnic backgrounds. The ethnic breakdown of the student population was as follows:

- 68% Anglo European/Australian;
- 18% Vietnamese/Asian;
- 8% Non-English speaking, European extraction; and
- 8% Aboriginal (Staff Information Book, 1995, p.2).

### **Language Background**

Significant proportions of the project students came from a non-English speaking background. These students faced extra difficulties in learning curriculum and needed greater attention from teachers in order to successfully come to terms with the curriculum (Staff Information Book, 1995, p.2).

### **Family Structure**

There was a high proportion of single parent families within this area, as well as many second marriage families, with parents bringing children from previous marriages into their new families (Staff Information Book, 1995, p.3).

### **Educational Background**

Approximately 70% of the population within this area did not have an education or skills qualification (Staff Information Book, 1996, p.3).

### **Employment**

Consistently there was a higher level than average of unemployment within this area and this level is consistently higher than the general state average (Staff Information Book, 1995, p.3).



### **Levels of Income**

Given the high levels of unemployment and the low levels of skills/qualifications in the area, income levels of families in the area were very low (Staff Information Book, 1995, p.3).

The attendance rate of the secondary school at the focus of this research for the 1995 academic year was approximately 82%. As a statistic, this rate would not generally present a reason for concern. The converse of attendance, that is, non-attendance or absenteeism, represented by the remaining 18% is a statistic that would not generally represent a reason for concern. The attendance or non-attendance percentages only say something about the degree to which all students miss school days on average. The rate provides no insight into the population of students who were absent or into the average number of missed lessons or days per student over a certain period of time. In other words, an attendance rate of 82% does not mean that 18% of the students were absent. The missing 18% could come from a small number of students with lengthy absences or from a higher percentage of students with brief absences. In a school population of 850 students an absentee rate of 18% correlates to 153 students absent each day. Similarly, the 153 students who were absent could mean a number of things. It might mean that the same students were periodically absent or the absences may be attributed to a combination of persistent absentees and casual absentees with some students absent for several weeks and others absent for only several days. In addition, data indicate that some ethnic groups consistently exceeded this figure. Unless individual attention was available, students may have become disaffected and alienated which may have lead to further absences and truancy. As stated by Carlson (1995),

... students who have had aversive experiences in the past may find it hard to break away from negative perceptions, even when conditions improve ... those who have little or no success eventually may come to believe that achievement simply is beyond their control ... (pp. 474-475)

Attendance rates by themselves do not say enough. It is also important to investigate the number of students absent. It is only then that school can explore whether there

are any patterns to students' absence and identify the underpinning characteristics of these students.

### **5.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

Descriptive statistical analysis and one-way analysis of variance were used to analyse the school attendance data. The rates and patterns of absence were analysed to determine the amount of school non-attendance and absence across the seven years was present in one secondary school and five of its feeder primary schools involved in this retrospective study. Data were analysed against the variables of gender; culture; nationality; birth place of the student, mother and father; health status of the student; feeder primary school; main language spoken in the home; IQ; mother's occupation; and father's occupation to identify and establish patterns and emergent trends in non-attendance which place effective education at risk.

#### **5.3.1 Emergent Trends**

The trends emerging from the research findings are related to data from the seven years of compulsory school attendance, gender, feeder primary schools, types of absences, IQ and the persistent absentee. It is worthy to note that although a number of other variables did not indicate any statistical significance, each one-way analysis of variance has been dealt with as a separate entity and the variables in each analysis have been considered. Although in some cases there has been no significant difference in the application of the statistics, there are factors that appear highly important and worth discussing that may impact on the final findings of the research.

As outlined in Table 8 a number of one-way analyses of variance were calculated. This table highlights the fact that there were a limited number of significant relationships between the dependent and independent variables which supports the notion that each one-way analysis of variances must be treated as a separate entity in an effort to contribute to the final research findings. As such, variables including culture, nationality, health, mother's birthplace, father's birthplace, mother's occupation, father's occupation, and grades in the core subjects were analysed in

terms of highlighting any emerging trends and identifying individual students to be involved in the interviews.

The majority of variables that were not significant may highlight that absenteeism is a social problem and isn't confined to a set number of factors. Similarly, the variables that resulted in a significant relationship require thoughtful consideration.

This chapter will focus on the results of the one way analysis of variance between the dependent variable 'unexplained' and the statistically significant differences in relation to the independent variables. It is no surprise that the variable 'truant' did not register any statistically significant differences against the other variables. The lack of data in this category is further confirmed by no significant relationships when analysed against the other variables. Tables displaying the one-way analyses of the 'sick and note' and 'total absence' categories are included in Appendix 7. While these results were not discussed in the course of this research, the data are significant in terms of the amount of time some students are absenting themselves from school – be it legitimately or not.

**Table 8**  
**Summary of One-Way Analysis of Variance**

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Academic Years							
		4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Unexplained	feeder primary school	✓	✓	0	✓	0	✓	✓	
	gender	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	IQ	0	✓	0	✓	0	0	0	
	mothers occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	fathers occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	mothers place of birth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	fathers place of birth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Sick and Note	feeder primary school	✓	0	0	✓	0	0	0	
	gender	0	0	0	0	0	0	✓	
	IQ	✓	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	
	mothers occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	fathers occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	mothers place of birth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	fathers place of birth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Truant	feeder primary school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	gender	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	IQ	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	mothers occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	fathers occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	mothers place of birth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	fathers place of birth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total Absences	feeder primary school	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	✓	
	gender	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	IQ	0	✓	0	✓	0	0	0	
	mothers occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	fathers occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	mothers place of birth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	fathers place of birth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Key: ✓ statistically significant at the 0.05 level  
 0 not statistically significant at the 0.05 level

### **5.3.2 Seven Years of Compulsory School Attendance**

The attendance data for the cohort of 61 students was initially analysed in terms of the absences as they occurred in relation to the seven academic school years from 1989 to 1995 (academic years 4 to 10). Table 9 represents an overall summary of the demographics and the total absences for each of students across the seven years.

The columns ‘unexplained’ and ‘truant’ have been highlighted to demonstrate and confirm the literature as discussed in Chapter 2. The discussion centred on the notion of truancy or non-attendance as the focus and concluded that truancy should not be the issue under investigation. In fact, the issue under investigation and of concern to schools and the community is the great proportion of unexplained absences.

Every student in this cohort has a number of unexplained absences recorded against their name over the seven year period. The primary school absences represent less than the secondary school absences with a marked increase in a number of students absences during their secondary years. The unexplained absences range from three half days to 379 half days absence. Nine students have in excess of 100 unexplained half days or the equivalent of 10 weeks of school. It is difficult to imagine that this number of half days absence has been allowed to accumulate and not been investigated further.

Table 9 represents each of the students in the cohort in terms of their demographic characteristics and attendance patterns across the seven years.





The total number of half-day absences was analysed further in terms of type of absence. Table 10 represents the number of half day absences according to the categories ‘sick’, ‘note’, ‘unexplained’ and ‘truant’ across the seven academic years including year 4 to 10.

The term ‘truant’ has been recorded against seven students only, which confirms once again the earlier decision to focus on ‘unexplained’ absences and chronic absenteeism.

While the ‘unexplained’ category features in this table, the ‘sick’ and ‘note’ categories also feature in a general sense, and quite significantly for a number of students. Every student in this cohort has absences recorded against each of the three categories. The number of half days varies considerably from student to student and across the categories. Student #52 for example has 110 half days recorded in the ‘sick’ category, 55 half days in the ‘note’ category and 379 half days in the ‘unexplained’ category. This student may have a medical or personal problem that equated to the 165 half days absence attributed to the acceptable absence categories, but 379 half days of absence have accumulated in the unexplained category over this period of time and have remained unexplained.

**Table 10**  
**Absences By Types Over Seven Years (1989 – 1995)**

Student ID No.	Sick	Note	Unexp	Truancy	Total	
1	39	14	4	0	57	
3	18	48	12	4	82	
4	98	23	23	1	145	<
5	51	24	46	0	21	<
6	48	12	10	0	70	
8	12	29	30	0	71	
9	9	80	54	0	143	<
10	118	27	45	0	190	<
11	37	16	4	0	57	
12	210	61	174	0	445	<<<
14	40	8	240	0	288	<<
15	37	33	99	0	169	<
16	94	22	73	0	189	<
17	62	34	49	0	145	<
18	20	26	15	32	93	
19	7	30	15	0	52	
20	69	62	64	0	195	<
21	17	18	39	0	74	
22	77	9	15	0	101	<
23	32	52	44	0	128	<
24	90	57	89	0	236	<<
26	7	25	7	0	39	
27	69	39	25	0	133	<
28	75	21	81	0	177	<
29	19	15	44	0	78	
30	19	9	10	0	38	
31	61	26	15	0	102	<
32	40	15	56	0	111	<
33	34	8	16	0	58	
34	40	12	8	0	60	
35	20	9	36	0	65	
36	67	68	46	0	181	<
37	0	0	7	0	7	
39	59	32	85	0	176	<
40	48	46	64	0	158	<
42	26	22	23	0	71	
43	6	51	14	0	71	
44	19	1	14	0	34	
45	20	25	98	0	143	<
46	32	18	9	0	59	
47	6	13	46	2	67	
48	76	31	22	0	129	<
49	28	11	3	0	42	
50	39	12	32	0	83	
52	110	55	379	0	544	<<<
53	5	19	62	0	86	
54	27	36	102	0	165	<
56	9	41	26	0	76	
57	59	16	226	0	301	<<<
58	149	61	57	0	267	<<
59	146	60	21	0	227	<<
60	7	1	110	0	118	<
62	12	17	30	2	61	
63	20	0	11	0	31	
64	65	101	57	2	225	<<
65	27	41	149	16	233	<<
66	73	18	107	0	198	<
67	56	38	37	0	131	<
68	15	4	145	0	164	<
69	8	32	29	0	69	
70	61	12	70	0	143	<

Key: < more than 100 half days absence / << more than 200 half days absence / <<< more than 300 half days absence



Over 50% of this cohort of 61 students had in excess of 100 unexplained half-day absences in the seven-year period.

In an attempt to highlight any patterns across the types of absences based on primary school attendance and secondary school attendance, the data were delineated accordingly.

Table 11 categorises the half-day absences according to each type for each of the four years of the primary school data and Table 12 represents the three years in the secondary school.

Patterns of non-attendance begin to emerge from the primary data as documented in Table 11. A number of students have accumulated between 50 and 100 half day absences in the ‘unexplained’ category in this period of their schooling. A number of students also feature significantly in the ‘sick’ and ‘note’ categories.

Table 12 is enlightening from the point of view that students who had few or no ‘unexplained’ absences in the primary school years accumulated a number of ‘unexplained’ absences in the secondary school years. These students also continued to accumulate numerous absences accounted for in the ‘sick’ and ‘note’ categories.

The number of absences across the absence types is considerably high.

**Table 11**  
**Primary School Attendance According to Type and Year**

ID	Year 4			Year 5			Year 6			Year 7			Total by Type				Grand Total
	S	N	U	S	N	U	S	N	U	S	N	U	Sick	Note	Unexp	Truant	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	5	0	5
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	12	11	13	12	11	0	36
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	0	6	8	0	20	4	0	32	0	0	2	4	0	60	16	0	76
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	0	2	23	0	2	6	0	1	37	0	0	25	0	5	91	0	96
14	0	3	77	0	0	17	0	0	31	6	0	8	6	3	133	0	142
15	0	12	23	0	4	2	4	0	19	0	0	13	4	16	57	0	77
16	0	0	12	0	4	26	0	2	14	0	1	1	0	7	53	0	60
17	8	1	4	0	0	1	2	0	6	2	5	0	12	6	11	0	29
18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
19	0	0	2	0	8	3	0	2	3	0	0	2	0	10	10	0	20
20	0	0	4	0	18	14	3	12	17	0	0	11	3	30	46	0	79
21	0	0	4	0	1	11	0	3	2	0	0	4	0	4	21	0	25
22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
23	0	4	8	0	8	4	2	0	7	0	0	6	2	12	25	0	39
24	2	15	14	3	2	19	0	4	25	0	0	14	5	21	72	0	98
26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
27	6	2	2	0	4	0	0	4	13	0	9	4	6	19	19	0	44
28	0	0	6	0	8	0	0	5	0	0	2	2	0	15	8	0	23
29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
31	6	0	0	0	0	2	22	0	4	8	8	0	36	8	6	0	50
32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
35	0	1	6	0	2	12	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	20	0	23
36	0	0	0	1	1	18	0	0	8	0	3	10	1	4	36	0	41
37	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
39	0	26	35	3	1	23	4	2	6	0	0	9	7	29	73	0	109
40	2	6	8	0	25	2	0	6	15	0	6	30	2	43	55	0	100
42	14	0	0	0	0	8	2	2	0	0	11	3	16	13	11	0	40
43	0	2	0	0	9	1	0	3	2	0	5	2	0	19	5	0	24
44	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
45	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	8	0	2	9	0	11
46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
47	0	4	8	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	2	6	0	7	17	0	24
48	8	12	6	2	3	1	10	10	3	0	4	7	20	29	17	0	66
49	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
50	0	0	2	0	0	8	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	12	0	13
52	0	20	2	0	3	5	0	2	2	0	0	9	0	25	18	0	43
53	0	10	14	5	2	11	0	2	15	0	5	22	5	19	62	0	86
54	0	9	13	0	2	3	0	2	10	0	0	6	0	13	32	0	45
56	0	2	0	0	4	2	0	5	0	0	3	1	0	14	3	0	17
57	0	0	37	1	5	50	23	0	64	0	0	65	4	5	216	0	245
58	0	0	22	4	12	1	24	0	6	8	21	5	36	33	34	0	103
59	40	4	2	28	12	4	20	13	3	4	20	6	92	49	15	0	156
60	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	1	101	0	0	2	2	1	106	0	109
62	0	0	3	0	6	0	0	3	10	0	1	6	0	10	19	0	29
63	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
64	0	5	12	1	1	16	6	4	4	0	0	1	7	10	43	0	60
65	0	1	2	0	8	6	0	0	65	0	1	4	0	10	77	0	87
66	0	0	15	0	0	2	0	1	20	0	6	25	0	7	62	0	69
67	10	4	4	0	4	15	0	1	1	4	8	6	14	17	26	0	57
68	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	41	0	0	42	0	42
69	0	1	10	0	1	1	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	2	24	0	26
70	3	0	18	2	0	20	0	2	3	12	2	15	17	4	56	0	77

A total of 18 students had a perfect attendance record in primary school. The remaining 43 students recorded absences across the three absence categories.

**Table 12**  
**Secondary School Attendance According to Type and Year**

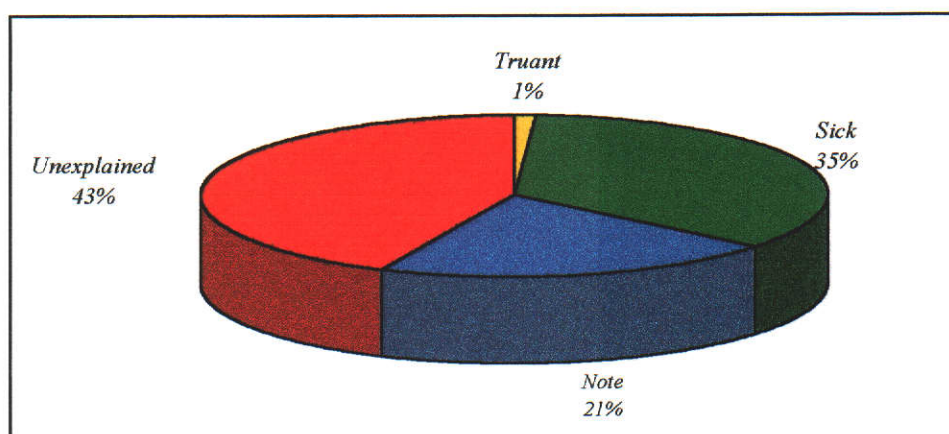
ID	Year 8				Year 9				Year 10				Total by Type				Grand Total
	S	N	U	T	S	N	U	T	S	N	U	T	Sick	Note	Unex	Truant	
1	14	0	0	0	6	2	4	0	19	12	0	0	39	14	4	0	57
3	0	1	0	0	8	27	4	4	10	20	3	0	18	48	7	0	77
4	10	4	10	0	24	11	8	0	64	8	5	1	98	23	23	0	145
5	20	10	13	0	4	0	17	0	14	2	5	0	38	12	35	0	85
6	14	0	0	0	13	0	2	0	21	12	8	0	48	12	10	0	70
8	2	0	2	0	6	11	9	0	4	18	19	0	12	29	30	0	71
9	0	3	8	0	6	7	10	0	3	10	20	0	9	20	38	0	67
10	40	8	12	0	40	2	16	0	38	17	17	0	118	27	45	0	190
11	10	2	4	0	9	4	0	0	18	10	0	0	37	16	4	0	57
12	34	2	11	0	49	22	19	0	127	32	53	0	210	56	83	0	349
14	20	4	25	0	11	0	36	0	3	1	46	0	34	5	107	0	146
15	7	4	12	0	5	8	17	0	21	5	13	0	33	17	42	0	92
16	9	4	4	0	55	7	4	0	30	4	12	0	94	15	20	0	129
17	4	6	8	0	33	11	12	0	13	11	18	0	50	28	38	0	116
18	5	8	6	0	11	16	4	32	4	2	5	0	20	26	15	0	93
19	6	0	0	0	0	20	1	0	1	0	4	0	7	20	5	0	32
20	14	10	8	0	31	7	3	0	21	15	7	0	66	32	18	0	116
21	0	0	0	0	7	1	5	0	10	13	13	0	17	14	18	0	49
22	16	1	6	0	35	3	5	0	26	5	4	0	77	9	15	0	101
23	12	4	8	0	8	0	6	0	10	36	5	0	30	40	19	0	89
24	22	2	2	0	31	20	10	0	32	14	5	0	85	36	17	0	138
26	4	10	0	0	2	10	2	0	1	5	5	0	7	25	7	0	39
27	8	6	0	0	18	5	4	0	37	9	2	0	63	20	6	0	89
28	22	1	22	0	23	0	12	0	30	5	39	0	75	6	73	0	154
29	2	0	5	0	17	6	27	0	0	9	12	0	19	15	44	0	78
30	2	0	5	0	5	7	3	0	12	2	2	0	19	9	10	0	38
31	13	11	2	0	6	3	3	0	6	4	4	0	25	18	9	0	52
32	7	0	21	0	21	7	17	0	12	8	18	0	40	15	56	0	111
33	9	1	2	0	13	3	3	0	12	4	11	0	34	8	16	0	58
34	6	4	3	0	2	4	1	0	32	4	4	0	40	12	8	0	60
35	0	0	0	0	6	2	4	0	14	4	12	0	20	6	16	0	42
36	10	2	0	0	34	54	0	0	22	8	10	0	66	64	10	0	140
37	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	3
39	18	3	2	0	20	0	6	0	14	0	4	0	52	3	12	0	67
40	24	0	2	0	14	0	1	0	8	3	6	0	46	3	9	0	58
42	5	1	1	0	3	3	8	0	2	5	3	0	10	9	12	0	31
43	2	9	0	0	2	8	2	0	2	15	7	0	6	32	9	0	47
44	4	0	2	0	11	0	8	0	4	1	4	0	19	1	14	0	34
45	2	0	8	0	0	0	19	0	18	23	62	0	20	23	89	0	132
46	2	3	2	0	15	8	5	0	15	7	2	0	32	18	9	0	59
47	4	0	2	2	0	0	9	0	2	6	18	0	6	6	29	0	43
48	26	0	0	0	16	0	1	0	14	2	4	0	56	2	5	0	63
49	2	2	2	0	4	5	0	0	22	4	1	0	28	11	3	0	42
50	21	0	11	0	6	1	3	0	12	10	6	0	39	11	20	0	70
52	32	6	10	0	68	20	92	0	10	4	259	0	110	30	361	0	501
53	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
54	27	9	18	0	0	10	26	0	0	4	26	0	27	23	70	0	120
56	3	2	4	0	4	24	12	0	2	1	7	0	9	27	23	0	59
57	16	6	0	0	8	0	6	0	11	5	4	0	35	11	10	0	56
58	13	2	8	0	50	3	6	0	50	23	9	0	113	28	23	0	164
59	20	2	0	0	10	4	2	0	24	5	4	0	54	11	6	0	71
60	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	5	0	4	0	9
62	4	1	1	0	4	4	5	2	4	2	5	0	12	7	11	0	32
63	8	0	2	0	4	0	5	0	8	0	4	0	20	0	11	0	31
64	10	22	9	0	28	26	1	2	20	43	4	0	58	91	14	0	165
65	4	6	27	0	2	6	9	0	21	19	36	16	27	31	72	0	146
66	11	3	12	0	23	4	19	0	39	4	14	0	73	11	45	0	129
67	2	1	2	0	20	16	5	0	20	4	4	0	42	21	11	0	74
68	10	2	15	0	1	2	30	0	4	0	58	0	15	4	103	0	122
69	2	12	3	0	4	16	0	0	2	2	2	0	8	30	5	0	43
70	17	3	2	0	0	1	2	0	27	4	10	0	44	8	14	0	66



Only one student from this cohort of 61 students had a perfect attendance record in the secondary years. Two students had a minimum number of absences while the remainder recorded significant numbers of half-day absences.

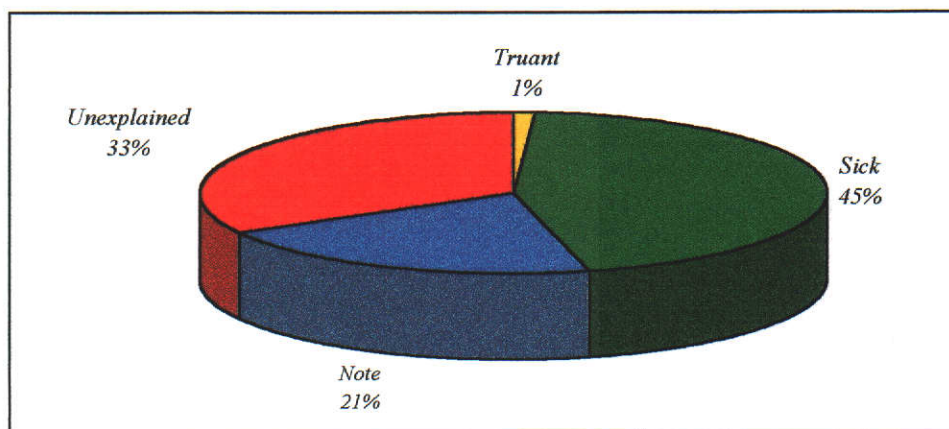
As indicated in Tables 10, 11 and 12 the category ‘truant’ is the category least represented in terms of half-day absences. This is further highlighted in Figures 6 and 7 whereby absences are represented as a percentage for each type. Figure 6 represents the total absences for the seven years with 1% attributed to ‘truant’, 34% to ‘sick’, 22% to ‘note’ and 43% to ‘unexplained’.

**Figure 6. Total absences as a percentage by type.**



An overview of the students’ absences for the three-year period of secondary school attendance is highlighted in Figure 7. The categories ‘truant’, ‘sick’, ‘note’ and ‘unexplained’ are represented by 1, 45, 21 and 33 percent respectively.

**Figure 7. Secondary absence as a percentage by type.**



Tables 13 further delineates the individual students non-attendance patterns according to the categories ‘sick’ (S), ‘note’ (N), ‘unexplained’ (U) and ‘truant’ (T) respectively in the secondary school.

Each student was absent due to illness at some stage during the secondary years. A minimum number of days to account for winter colds and other minor ailments is understandable and acceptable however, a number of students were absent for a significant period of time. Similarly, with respect to the category ‘note’.

The unexplained category is of particular concern to educators and was the focus of this research. Prolonged unexplained absences remain unaccountable and a mystery beyond the students’ school life.

Truants only just featured in this research with a small number of half days recorded in the ‘truant’ category in years 8, 9 and 10. The most significant figure was 32 half days over the three-year period.

Table 13

**Secondary School Non-Attendance According To Category**

ID	Year 8				Year 9				Year 10				Total by Type				Grand Total
	S	N	U	T	S	N	U	T	S	N	U	T	Sick	Note	Unex	Tru	
1	14	0	0	0	6	2	4	0	19	12	0	0	39	14	4	0	57
3	0	1	0	0	8	27	4	4	10	20	3	0	18	48	7	4	77
4	10	4	10	0	24	11	8	0	64	8	5	1	98	23	23	1	145
5	20	10	13	0	4	0	17	0	14	2	5	0	38	12	35	0	85
6	14	0	0	0	13	0	2	0	21	12	8	0	48	12	10	0	70
8	2	0	2	0	6	11	9	0	4	18	19	0	12	29	30	0	71
9	0	3	8	0	6	7	10	0	3	10	20	0	9	20	38	0	67
10	40	8	12	0	40	2	16	0	38	17	17	0	118	27	45	0	190
11	10	2	4	0	9	4	0	0	18	10	0	0	37	16	4	0	57
12	34	2	11	0	49	22	19	0	127	32	53	0	210	56	83	0	349
14	20	4	25	0	11	0	36	0	3	1	46	0	34	5	107	0	146
15	7	4	12	0	5	8	17	0	21	5	13	0	33	17	42	0	92
16	9	4	4	0	55	7	4	0	30	4	12	0	94	15	20	0	129
17	4	6	8	0	33	11	12	0	13	11	18	0	50	28	38	0	116
18	5	8	6	0	11	16	4	32	4	2	5	0	20	26	15	32	93
19	6	0	0	0	0	20	1	0	1	0	4	0	7	20	5	0	32
20	14	10	8	0	31	7	3	0	21	15	7	0	66	32	18	0	116
21	0	0	0	0	7	1	5	0	10	13	13	0	17	14	18	0	49
22	16	1	6	0	35	3	5	0	26	5	4	0	77	9	15	0	101
23	12	4	8	0	8	0	6	0	10	36	5	0	30	40	19	0	89
24	22	2	2	0	31	20	10	0	32	14	5	0	85	36	17	0	138
26	4	10	0	0	2	10	2	0	1	5	5	0	7	25	7	0	39
27	8	6	0	0	18	5	4	0	37	9	2	0	63	20	6	0	89
28	22	1	22	0	23	0	12	0	30	5	39	0	75	6	73	0	154
29	2	0	5	0	17	6	27	0	0	9	12	0	19	15	44	0	78
30	2	0	5	0	5	7	3	0	12	2	2	0	19	9	10	0	38
31	13	11	2	0	6	3	3	0	6	4	4	0	25	18	9	0	52
32	7	0	21	0	21	7	17	0	12	8	18	0	40	15	56	0	111
33	9	1	2	0	13	3	3	0	12	4	11	0	34	8	16	0	58
34	6	4	3	0	2	4	1	0	32	4	4	0	40	12	8	0	60
35	0	0	0	0	6	2	4	0	14	4	12	0	20	6	16	0	42
36	10	2	0	0	34	54	0	0	22	8	10	0	66	64	10	0	140
37	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	3
39	18	3	2	0	20	0	6	0	14	0	4	0	52	3	12	0	67
40	24	0	2	0	14	0	1	0	8	3	6	0	46	3	9	0	58
42	5	1	1	0	3	3	8	0	2	5	3	0	10	9	12	0	31
43	2	9	0	0	2	8	2	0	2	15	7	0	6	32	9	0	47
44	4	0	2	0	11	0	8	0	4	1	4	0	19	1	14	0	34
45	2	0	8	0	0	0	19	0	18	23	62	0	20	23	89	0	132
46	2	3	2	0	15	8	5	0	15	7	2	0	32	18	9	0	59
47	4	0	2	2	0	0	9	0	2	6	18	0	6	6	29	2	43
48	26	0	0	0	16	0	1	0	14	2	4	0	56	2	5	0	63
49	2	2	2	0	4	5	0	0	22	4	1	0	28	11	3	0	42
50	21	0	11	0	6	1	3	0	12	10	6	0	39	11	20	0	70
52	32	6	10	0	68	20	92	0	10	4	259	0	110	30	361	0	501
53	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
54	27	9	18	0	0	10	26	0	0	4	26	0	27	23	70	0	120
56	3	2	4	0	4	24	12	0	2	1	7	0	9	27	23	0	59
57	16	6	0	0	8	0	6	0	11	5	4	0	35	11	10	0	56
58	13	2	8	0	50	3	6	0	50	23	9	0	113	28	23	0	164
59	20	2	0	0	10	4	2	0	24	5	4	0	54	11	6	0	71
60	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	5	0	4	0	9
62	4	1	1	0	4	4	5	2	4	2	5	0	12	7	11	2	32
63	8	0	2	0	4	0	5	0	8	0	4	0	20	0	11	0	31
64	10	22	9	0	28	26	1	2	20	43	4	0	58	91	14	2	165
65	4	6	27	0	2	6	9	0	21	19	36	16	27	31	72	16	146
66	11	3	12	0	23	4	19	0	39	4	14	0	73	11	45	0	129
67	2	1	2	0	20	16	5	0	20	4	4	0	42	21	11	0	74
68	10	2	15	0	1	2	30	0	4	0	58	0	15	4	103	0	122
69	2	12	3	0	4	16	0	0	2	2	2	0	8	30	5	0	43
70	17	3	2	0	0	1	2	0	27	4	10	0	44	8	14	0	66

Key: S = sick

N = note

U = unexplained

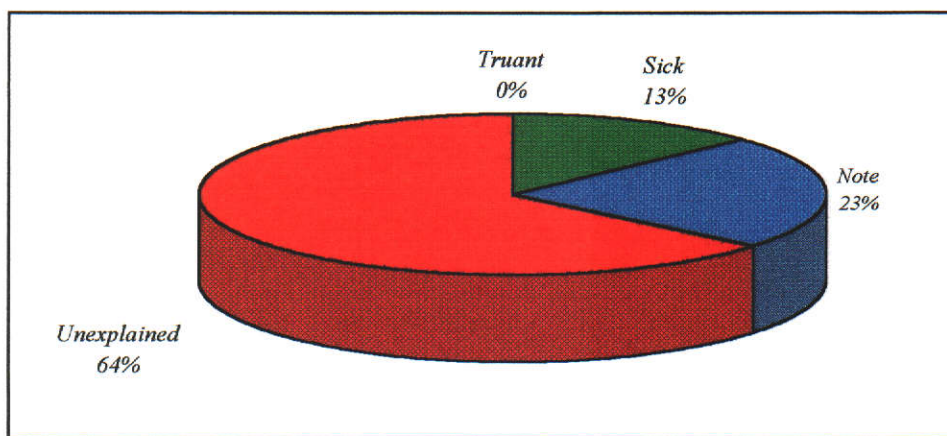
T = truant



A comparison between secondary and primary attendance rates was deemed an important feature of this research to further attempt to delineate and highlight significant factors and trends in the search for answers to the phenomena of school non-attendance.

The students' primary school absence figures are highlighted in Figure 8. The primary figures for the categories 'truant', 'sick', 'note' and 'unexplained' are represented by 0, 12, 24 and 64 percent respectively.

**Figure 8. Primary absence as a percentage by type.**



In both of the primary and secondary school attendance data outlined in Figures 7 and 8, 'truant' does not represent a major concern. The category that dominates the figures and requires further analysis is 'unexplained'. Of the total absences in the primary schools combined, 64% were unexplained. In the secondary school 33% of the total absences were 'unexplained'. The category 'unexplained' is unacceptable in terms of student absenteeism. It represents a significant proportion of lost schooling time and missed opportunities for education and learning.

Table 14 outlines the individual students' non-attendance patterns across the primary school years according to the type 'sick', 'note' and 'unexplained' respectively.

**Table 14**  
**Primary School Non-Attendance According to the Category**

ID	Year 4			Year 5			Year 6			Year 7			Total by Type				Grand Total
	S	N	U	S	N	U	S	N	U	S	N	U	Sick	Note	Unexp	Truant	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	5	0	5
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	12	11	13	12	11	0	36
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	0	6	8	0	20	4	0	32	0	0	2	4	0	60	16	0	76
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	S	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	0	2	23	0	2	6	0	1	37	0	0	25	0	5	91	0	96
14	0	3	77	0	0	17	0	0	31	6	0	8	6	3	133	0	142
15	0	12	23	0	4	2	4	0	19	0	0	13	4	16	57	0	77
16	0	0	12	0	4	26	0	2	14	0	1	1	0	7	53	0	60
17	8	1	4	0	0	1	2	0	6	2	5	0	12	6	11	0	29
18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
19	0	0	2	0	8	3	0	2	3	0	0	2	0	10	10	0	20
20	0	0	4	0	18	14	3	12	17	0	0	11	3	30	46	0	79
21	0	0	4	0	1	11	0	3	2	0	0	4	0	4	21	0	25
22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
23	0	4	8	0	8	4	2	0	7	0	0	6	2	12	25	0	39
24	2	15	14	3	2	19	0	4	25	0	0	14	5	21	72	0	98
26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
27	6	2	2	0	4	0	0	4	13	0	9	4	6	19	19	0	44
28	0	0	6	0	8	0	0	5	0	0	2	2	0	15	8	0	23
29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
31	6	0	0	0	0	2	22	0	4	8	8	0	36	8	6	0	50
32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
35	0	1	6	0	2	12	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	20	0	23
36	0	0	0	1	1	18	0	0	8	0	3	10	1	4	36	0	41
37	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
39	0	26	35	3	1	23	4	2	6	0	0	9	7	29	73	0	109
40	2	6	8	0	25	2	0	6	15	0	6	30	2	43	55	0	100
42	14	0	0	0	0	8	2	2	0	0	11	3	16	13	11	0	40
43	0	2	0	0	9	1	0	3	2	0	5	2	0	19	5	0	24
44	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
45	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	8	0	2	9	0	11
46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
47	0	4	8	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	2	6	0	7	17	0	24
48	8	12	6	2	3	1	10	10	3	0	4	7	20	29	17	0	66
49	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
50	0	0	2	0	0	8	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	12	0	13
52	0	20	2	0	3	5	0	2	2	0	0	9	0	25	18	0	43
53	0	10	14	5	2	11	0	2	15	0	5	22	5	19	62	0	86
54	0	9	13	0	2	3	0	2	10	0	0	6	0	13	32	0	45
56	0	2	0	0	4	2	0	5	0	0	3	1	0	14	3	0	17
57	0	0	37	1	5	50	23	0	64	0	0	65	4	5	216	0	245
58	0	0	22	4	12	1	24	0	6	8	21	5	36	33	34	0	103
59	40	4	2	28	12	4	20	13	3	4	20	6	92	49	15	0	156
60	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	1	101	0	0	2	2	1	106	0	109
62	0	0	3	0	6	0	0	3	10	0	1	6	0	10	19	0	29
63	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
64	0	5	12	1	1	16	6	4	4	0	0	1	7	10	43	0	60
65	0	1	2	0	8	6	0	0	65	0	1	4	0	10	77	0	87
66	0	0	15	0	0	2	0	1	20	0	6	25	0	7	62	0	69
67	10	4	4	0	4	15	0	1	1	4	8	6	14	17	26	0	57
68	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	41	0	0	42	0	42
69	0	1	10	0	1	1	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	2	24	0	26
70	3	0	18	2	0	20	0	2	3	12	2	15	17	4	56	0	77



This category featured in 22 of the students' overall attendance data. The remaining 39 students were not absent due to any excuses that could be placed in the 'sick' category.

The category 'note' featured more than the 'sick' category with 40 students absent for a period of time during years 4 to 7 that were justified by the provision of a note. The remaining 21 students did not provide notes for any of their absences.

During the primary school years 17 of the students had unexplained absences recorded against their names. The unexplained period of time ranged from one half day to 101 half days. These unexplained absences remain unexplained beyond the school year in which they were recorded.

The category 'truant' is not generally used in the primary school. However there isn't a table devoted to this category.

As a comparison of 'acceptable' and 'non-acceptable' absences, Table 15 has combined the 'sick' and 'note' categories and presented these alongside the 'unexplained' absences. While the focus of the research is on the 'unexplained' absences, it is worth noting the significantly high numbers of absences that have accumulated in the 'sick' and 'note' categories. While these categories constitute acceptable absences, the amount of time some students are absent from school can not be deemed acceptable.

**Table 15**  
**Comparison of Acceptable and Non-Acceptable Absences**

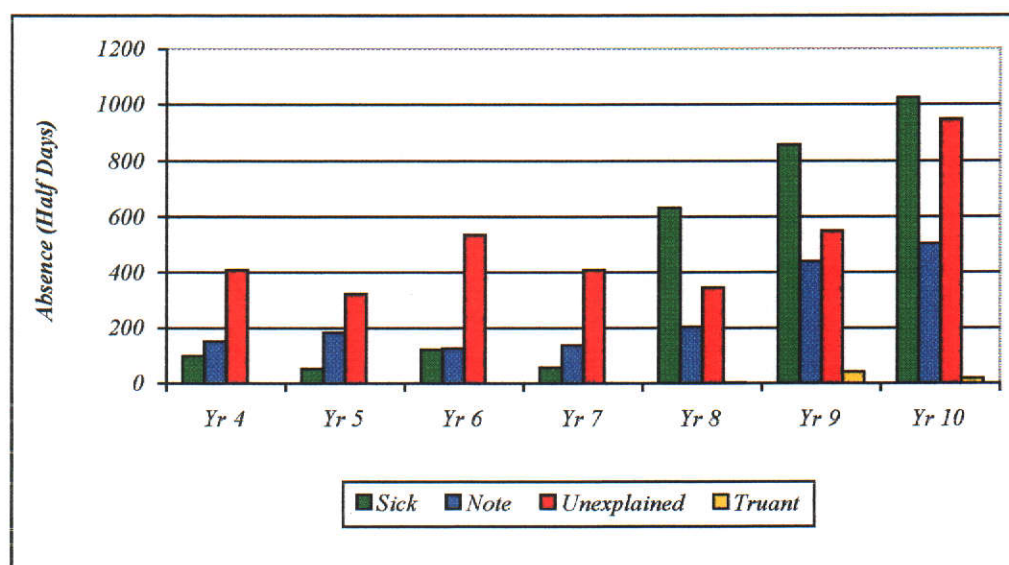
ID	Year 4		Year 5		Year 6		Year 7		Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			Totals			Total
	S/ N	U	S/ N	U	S/ N	U	S/ N	U	S/ N	U	T	S/ N	U	T	S/ N	U	T	S/N	U	T	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	8	4	0	31	0	0	53	4	0	57
3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	35	4	4	30	3	0	66	12	4	82
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	10	0	35	8	0	72	5	1	21	23	1	145
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	11	30	13	0	4	17	0	16	5	0	75	46	0	121
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	13	2	0	33	8	0	60	10	0	70
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	17	9	0	22	19	0	41	30	0	71
9	6	8	20	4	32	0	2	4	3	8	0	13	10	0	13	20	0	89	54	0	143
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	12	0	42	16	0	55	17	0	145	45	0	190
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	4	0	13	0	0	28	0	0	53	4	0	57
12	2	23	2	6	1	37	0	25	36	11	0	71	19	0	159	53	0	271	174	0	445
14	3	77	0	17	0	31	6	8	24	25	0	11	36	0	4	46	0	48	240	0	288
15	12	23	4	2	4	19	0	13	11	12	0	13	17	0	26	13	0	70	99	0	169
16	0	14	4	26	2	14	1	1	13	4	0	62	4	0	34	12	0	116	73	0	189
17	9	4	0	1	2	6	7	0	10	8	0	44	12	0	24	18	0	96	49	0	145
18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	6	0	27	4	32	6	5	0	46	15	32	93
19	0	2	8	3	2	3	0	2	6	0	0	20	1	0	1	4	0	37	15	0	52
20	0	4	18	14	15	17	0	11	24	8	0	38	3	0	36	7	0	131	64	0	195
21	0	0	1	11	0	0	0	0	17	6	0	38	5	0	31	4	0	86	15	0	74
22	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	6	0	38	5	0	31	4	0	86	15	0	101
23	4	14	8	4	2	7	0	6	16	8	0	8	6	0	46	5	0	84	44	0	128
24	17	0	5	19	4	25	0	14	24	2	0	51	10	0	46	5	0	147	89	0	236
26	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	12	2	0	6	5	0	32	7	0	39
27	8	6	4	0	4	13	9	4	14	0	0	23	4	0	46	2	0	108	25	0	133
28	0	0	8	0	5	0	2	2	23	22	0	23	12	0	35	39	0	96	81	0	177
29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	23	27	0	9	12	0	34	44	0	78
30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	12	3	0	14	2	0	28	10	0	38
31	6	0	0	2	22	4	16	0	24	2	0	9	3	0	10	4	0	87	15	0	102
32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	21	0	28	17	0	20	18	0	55	56	0	111
33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	2	0	16	3	0	16	11	0	42	16	0	58
34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	3	0	6	1	0	36	4	0	52	8	0	60
35	1	6	2	12	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	8	4	0	18	12	0	29	36	0	65
36	0	0	2	18	0	8	3	10	12	0	0	88	0	0	30	10	0	135	46	0	181
37	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	7	0	7
39	26	35	4	23	6	6	0	9	21	2	0	20	6	0	14	4	0	91	85	0	176
40	8	8	25	2	6	15	6	30	24	2	0	14	1	0	11	6	0	94	64	0	158
42	14	0	0	8	3	2	5	2	6	1	0	6	8	0	7	3	0	41	24	0	65
43	2	0	9	1	3	2	5	2	11	0	0	10	2	0	17	7	0	57	14	0	71
44	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	11	8	0	5	4	0	20	14	0	34
45	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	8	2	8	0	0	19	0	41	62	0	45	98	0	143
46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	23	5	0	22	2	0	50	9	0	59
47	4	8	0	2	1	1	2	6	4	2	2	0	9	0	8	18	0	19	46	2	67
48	20	6	5	1	20	3	4	7	26	0	0	16	1	0	16	4	0	107	22	0	129
49	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	9	0	0	26	1	0	39	3	0	42
50	0	2	0	8	1	0	0	2	21	11	0	7	3	0	22	6	0	51	32	0	83
52	20	2	3	5	2	2	0	9	38	10	0	88	92	0	14	259	0	165	379	0	544
53	10	14	7	11	2	15	5	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	62	0	86
54	9	13	2	3	2	10	0	6	36	18	0	10	26	0	4	26	0	63	102	0	165
56	2	0	4	2	5	0	3	1	5	4	0	28	12	0	3	7	0	50	26	0	76
57	0	37	6	50	23	64	0	65	22	0	0	8	6	0	16	4	0	75	226	0	301
58	0	22	16	1	24	6	29	5	15	8	0	53	6	0	73	9	0	210	57	0	267
59	44	2	40	4	33	3	24	6	22	0	0	14	2	0	29	4	0	206	21	0	227
60	0	0	2	3	1	101	0	2	1	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	0	8	110	0	118
62	0	3	6	0	3	10	1	6	5	1	0	8	5	2	6	5	0	29	30	2	61
63	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	2	0	4	5	0	8	4	0	20	11	0	31
64	5	12	2	16	10	4	0	11	32	9	0	54	1	2	63	4	0	166	57	2	225
65	1	2	8	6	0	65	1	4	10	27	0	8	9	0	40	36	16	68	149	16	233
66	0	15	0	2	1	20	6	25	14	12	0	27	19	0	43	14	0	91	107	0	198
67	14	4	4	15	1	1	12	6	3	2	0	36	5	0	24	4	0	94	37	0	131
68	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	41	12	15	0	3	30	0	4	58	0	19	145	0	164
69	1	10	1	1	0	13	0	0	14	3	0	20	0	0	4	2	0	40	29	0	69
70	3	18	2	20	2	3	14	15	20	2	0	1	2	0	31	10	0	73	70	0	143

Whether the absences above are deemed ‘acceptable’ or ‘not acceptable’, a significant proportion of this cohort were absent during the seven year period which in turn must have compromised their opportunity to take full advantage of the educational opportunities provided for all students.

A comparison of the total absences across the seven years, as represented in Figure 10, highlights the phenomena of unexplained absences in each individual year. In the primary years, the unexplained absences represent significantly higher numbers more than the other categories. Conversely, in the secondary years, the absences justified by the sick category feature in each of the years 8 to 10, with the unexplained absences increasing significantly in year 10. This cohort was not diligent with reference to providing explanations in the primary years for their absence. This reason could, in part, be that in primary school, students are predominantly with the one teacher for the whole day. A certain familiarity is cultivated and some of the absences may have been reported verbally and not noted in the attendance registers. However, there should not be any unexplained absences not accounted for at the end of any academic year.

In the secondary school years, (years 8 to 10), there is a high proportion of unexplained absences and absences due to sickness. This later category encompasses a myriad of reasons including colds, headache, toothache, sore throat, asthma, hay fever, and any other ailment that appears feasible as a justification for days absent from school.

While the focus of this research was the unexplained absences, it is worth noting the significant increase in the categories of 'sick' and 'note'. Figure 9 highlights absences by type and academic year.

**Figure 9. Academic year absence by type.**

Were the students in this cohort “ill” for a significant period of their secondary schooling or were there other factors at play? In the secondary school a daily attendance summary (see Appendix 8) is produced prior to the morning break and every teacher has access to this list to undertake the attendance procedures throughout the day. Part of the daily attendance check is also reminding students who were absent or late on previous days that there is a set procedure to be followed upon their return. This constant check may account for the increase in absences according to the categories ‘sick’ and ‘note’ rather than simply an alarming increase in the rate of unexplained absences. However, the unexplained absence rate should not be ignored. For example, the school day represented by the attendance summary sheet in Appendix 8 indicates that 155 students were not in class at 9.00am. This figure represents approximately 18% of the school population. In year 10, the cohort of this study, the figure not in class by 9.00am represents approximately 22% of the year 10 population. The total absent all day may not be accounted for on this day, or soon after, and may remain unexplained through to the end of the year. Each days absence is cumulative hence the high rate of absence or non-attendance within any academic school year.

Collectively, this cohort was absent for a very significant period of time during their secondary years of schooling. The complexity of non-attendance, and its many

interrelated factors, was explored further in an effort to ascertain any plausible reasons for the amount of days that students are absent from school.

### **5.3.3 Gender**

Analysis of school non-attendance across the seven years requires further delineation with respect to other variables such as gender.

The cohort of students included 32 females and 29 males. Table 16 highlights the contribution of absences by both males and females to the totals for each academic year.

Initial analysis and examination of the data signifies approximately equal absences attributed to both the male and female population.



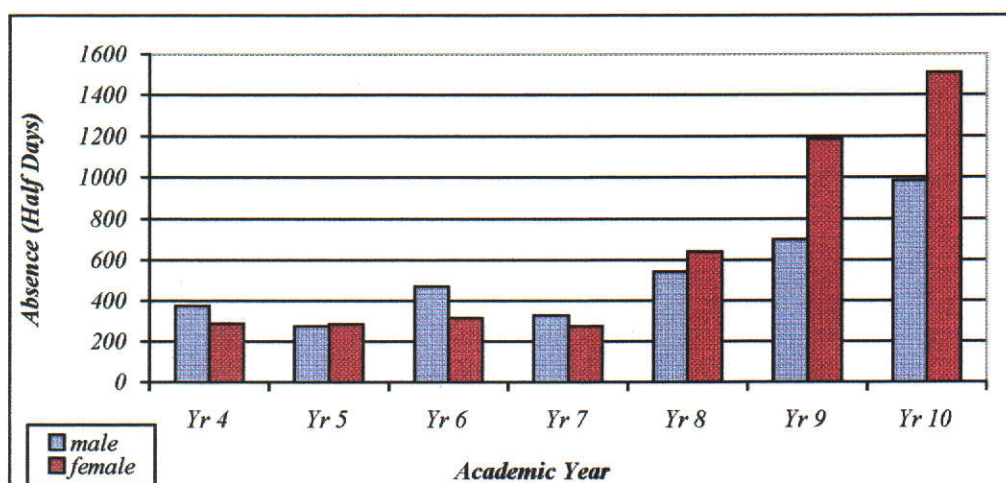
**Table 16**  
**Half Day Absences by Gender and Year**

ID	Gender	Feeder	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
1	female	2	0	0	0	0	14	12	31	57
3	female	1	1	0	0	4	1	43	33	82
4	female	4	0	0	0	0	24	43	78	145<
5	female	4	0	0	0	36	43	21	21	121<
8	female	4	0	0	0	0	4	26	41	71
9	female	2	14	24	32	6	11	23	33	143<
10	female	4	0	0	0	0	60	58	72	190<
11	female	4	0	0	0	0	16	13	28	57
12	female	3	25	8	38	25	47	90	212	445<<<
16	female	2	12	30	16	2	17	66	46	189<
18	female	2	0	0	0	0	19	63	11	93
20	female	3	4	32	32	11	32	41	43	195<
21	female	5	4	12	5	4	0	13	36	74
22	female	4	0	0	0	0	23	43	35	101<
26	female	1	0	0	0	0	14	14	11	39
27	female	2	10	4	17	13	14	27	48	133<
33	female	4	0	0	0	0	12	19	27	58
35	female	1	7	14	2	0	0	12	30	65
36	female	3	0	20	8	13	12	88	40	181<
43	female	2	2	10	5	7	11	12	24	71
46	female	3	0	0	0	0	7	28	24	59
48	female	1	26	6	23	11	26	17	20	129<
49	female	5	0	0	0	0	6	9	27	42
50	female	2	2	8	1	2	32	10	28	83
52	female	5	2	8	1	2	32	10	28	83
53	female	2	24	18	17	27	0	0	0	86
54	female	3	22	5	12	6	54	36	30	165<
58	female	1	22	17	30	34	23	59	82	267<<
59	female	1	46	44	36	30	22	16	33	227<<
66	female	2	15	2	21	31	26	46	57	198<
67	female	1	18	19	2	18	5	41	28	131<
69	female	3	11	2	13	0	17	20	6	69
6	male	2	0	0	0	0	14	15	41	70
14	male	3	80	17	31	14	49	47	50	288<<
15	male	3	35	6	23	13	23	39	39	169<
17	male	1	13	1	8	7	18	56	42	145<
19	male	2	2	11	5	2	6	21	5	52
23	male	3	12	12	9	6	24	14	51	128<
24	male	3	31	24	29	14	26	61	51	236<<
28	male	2	6	8	5	4	45	35	74	177<
29	male	3	0	0	0	0	7	50	21	78
30	male	4	0	0	0	0	7	15	16	38
31	male	1	6	2	26	16	26	12	14	102<
32	male	4	0	0	0	0	28	45	38	111<
34	male	4	0	0	0	0	13	7	40	60
37	male	3	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	7
39	male	3	61	27	12	9	23	26	18	176<
40	male	2	16	27	21	36	26	15	17	158<
42	male	1	14	8	4	14	7	14	10	71
44	male	4	0	0	0	0	6	19	9	34
45	male	3	0	2	1	8	10	19	103	143<
47	male	2	12	2	2	8	8	9	26	67
56	male	2	2	6	5	4	9	40	10	76
57	male	3	37	56	87	65	22	14	20	301<<<
60	male	1	0	5	102	2	3	2	4	118<
62	male	2	3	6	13	7	6	15	11	61
63	male	2	0	0	0	0	10	9	12	31
64	male	3	17	18	14	11	41	57	67	225<<
65	male	2	3	14	65	5	37	17	92	233<<
68	male	3	0	0	1	41	27	33	62	164<
70	male	1	21	22	5	29	22	3	41	143<

Key: < more than 100 half days absence  
 << more than 200 half days absence  
 <<< more than 300 half days absence

A diagrammatical representation as displayed in Figure 10 highlights the trends and patterns with respect to the absences on a gender basis across the seven years.

**Figure 10. Comparison of half day absences by gender and year.**



A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in absentee rates based on gender across the seven years compared with the absence type. There was no significant difference between the males and females from within the cohort.

### 5.3.4 Feeder Primary Schools

Five feeder primary schools were represented in this study. A total of 12 students completed their primary school years at feeder school one, 18 at feeder school two, 17 at feeder school three, 11 at feeder school four and three at feeder school five.

Complete records for each of the students were available within the respective feeder primary.

Table 17 lists the students according to their feeder primary school and summarises the total absences across the seven years represented in this study.



**Table 17**  
**Individual Absences by Year and Feeder**

Feeder	ID	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Total
1	3	1	0	0	4	1	43	33	82
1	17	13	1	8	7	18	56	42	145<
1	26	0	0	0	0	14	14	11	39
1	31	6	2	26	16	26	12	14	65
1	35	7	14	2	0	0	12	30	65
1	42	14	8	4	14	7	14	10	71
1	48	26	6	23	11	26	17	20	129<
1	58	22	17	30	34	23	59	82	267<<
1	59	46	44	36	30	22	16	33	227<<
1	60	0	5	102	2	3	2	4	118<
1	67	18	19	2	18	5	41	28	131<
1	70	21	22	5	29	22	3	41	143<
2	1	0	0	0	0	14	12	31	57
2	6	0	0	0	0	14	15	41	70
2	9	14	24	32	6	11	23	33	143<
2	16	12	30	16	2	17	66	46	189<
2	18	0	0	0	0	19	63	11	93
2	19	2	11	5	2	6	21	5	52
2	27	10	4	17	13	14	27	48	133<
2	28	6	8	5	4	45	35	74	177<
2	40	16	27	21	36	26	15	17	158<
2	43	2	10	5	7	11	12	24	71
2	47	12	2	2	8	8	9	26	67
2	50	2	8	1	2	32	10	28	83
2	53	24	18	17	27	0	0	0	86
2	56	2	6	5	4	9	40	10	76
2	62	3	6	13	7	6	15	11	61
2	63	0	0	0	0	10	9	12	31
2	65	3	14	65	5	37	17	92	233<<
2	66	15	2	21	31	26	46	57	198<
3	12	25	8	38	25	47	90	212	445<<<
3	14	80	17	31	14	49	47	50	288<<
3	15	35	6	23	13	23	30	39	169<
3	20	4	32	32	11	32	41	43	195<
3	23	12	12	9	6	24	14	51	128<
3	24	31	24	29	14	26	61	51	236<<
3	29	0	0	0	0	7	50	21	78
3	36	0	20	8	13	12	88	40	181<
3	37	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	7
3	393	61	27	12	9	23	26	18	176<
3	45	0	2	1	8	10	1	103	143<
3	46	0	0	0	0	7	28	24	59
3	54	22	5	12	6	54	36	30	165<
3	57	37	56	87	65	22	14	20	301<<<
3	64	17	18	14	11	41	57	67	225<<
3	68	0	0	1	41	27	23	62	164<
3	69	11	2	13	0	17	20	6	69
4	4	0	0	0	0	24	43	78	145<
4	5	0	0	0	36	43	21	21	121<
4	8	0	0	0	0	4	26	41	71
4	10	0	0	0	0	60	58	72	190<
4	11	0	0	0	0	16	13	28	57
4	22	0	0	0	0	23	43	35	101<
4	30	0	0	0	0	7	15	16	38
4	32	0	0	0	0	28	45	38	111<
4	33	0	0	0	0	12	19	27	58
4	34	0	0	0	0	13	7	40	60
4	44	0	0	0	0	6	19	9	34
5	21	4	12	5	4	0	13	36	74
5	49	0	0	0	0	6	9	27	42
5	52	22	8	4	9	48	180	273	544<<<

Key: < more than 100 half days absence / << more than 200 half days absence / <<< more than 300 half days absence

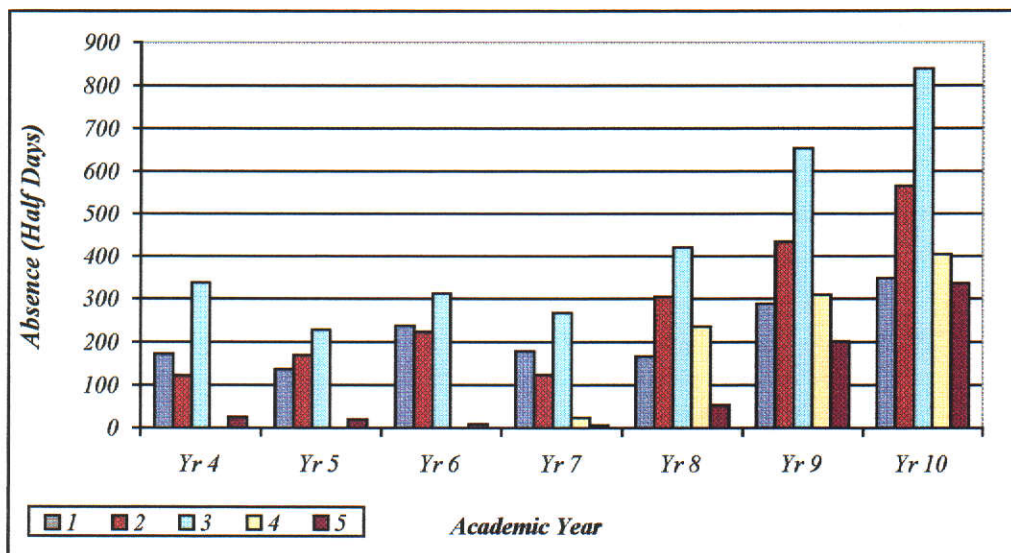


Feeder primary school three featured significantly with 13 out of the 17 students (or 76%) absent for more than 100 half days during the years four to seven. Also, feeder primary school three accounted for 38% of all students who were absent for more than 100 half days.

Seven students (or 58%) from feeder school one were absent for more than 100 half days, five students (45%) from feeder school four, seven students (39%) from feeder school two, and one student (33%) from feeder school five.

A diagrammatical representation as displayed in Figure 11 highlights the patterns and trends with respect to absences on a feeder school basis across the seven years.

**Figure 11. Comparison of total absences by year and feeder.**



A further analysis of the absences according to feeder school is undertaken in Table 18 whereby absences are listed according to absence type across the seven years.

Feeder school number four had minimal absences attributed to any of the categories with only one student (#5) recording absences totalling 36 half days in year seven. The students in the remaining four primary schools were absent in varying quantities in the 'sick', 'note' and 'unexplained' categories.

**Table 18**  
**Absences by Feeder, Year and Type**

Feeder	ID	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Total
		S N U	S N U	S N U	S N U	S N U T	S N U T	S N U T	
1	3	0 0 1	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 4	0 1 0 0	8 27 4 4	10 20 3 0	82
1	17	8 1 4	0 0 1	2 0 6	2 5 0	4 6 8 0	33 11 12 0	13 11 18 0	145
1	26	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	4 10 0 0	2 10 2 0	1 5 5 0	39
1	31	6 0 0	0 0 2	22 0 4	8 8 0	13 11 2 0	6 3 3 0	6 4 4 0	102
1	35	0 1 6	0 2 12	0 0 2	0 0 0	0 0 0 0	6 2 4 0	14 4 12 0	65
1	42	14 0 0	0 0 8	2 2 0	0 11 3	5 1 1 0	3 3 8 0	2 5 3 0	71
1	48	8 12 6	2 3 1	10 10 3	0 4 7	26 0 0 0	16 0 1 0	14 2 4 0	129
1	58	0 0 22	4 12 1	24 0 6	8 21 5	13 2 8 0	50 3 6 0	50 23 9 0	267
1	59	40 4 2	28 12 4	20 13 3	4 20 6	20 2 0 0	10 4 2 0	24 5 4 0	227
1	60	0 0 0	2 0 3	0 1 101	0 0 2	1 0 2 0	2 0 0 0	2 0 2 0	118
1	67	10 4 4	0 4 15	0 1 1	4 8 6	2 1 2 0	20 16 5 0	20 4 4 0	131
1	70	3 0 18	2 0 20	0 2 3	12 2 15	17 3 2 0	0 1 2 0	27 4 10 0	143
2	1	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	14 0 0 0	6 2 4 0	19 12 0 0	57
2	6	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	14 0 0 0	13 0 2 0	21 12 8 0	70
2	9	0 6 8	0 20 4	0 32 0	0 2 4	0 3 8 0	6 7 10 0	3 10 20 0	143
2	16	0 0 12	0 4 26	0 2 14	0 1 1	9 4 4 0	55 7 4 0	30 4 12 0	189
2	18	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	5 8 6 0	11 16 4 32	4 2 5 0	93
2	19	0 0 2	0 8 3	0 2 3	0 0 2	6 0 0 0	0 20 1 0	1 0 4 0	52
2	27	6 2 2	0 4 0	0 4 13	0 9 4	8 6 0 0	18 5 4 0	37 9 2 0	133
2	28	0 0 6	0 8 0	0 5 0	0 2 2	22 1 22 0	23 0 12 0	30 5 39 0	177
2	40	2 6 8	0 25 2	0 6 15	0 6 30	24 0 2 0	14 0 1 0	8 3 6 0	158
2	43	0 2 0	0 9 1	0 3 2	0 5 2	2 9 0 0	2 8 2 0	2 15 7 0	71
2	47	0 4 8	0 0 2	0 1 1	0 2 6	4 0 2 2	0 0 9 0	2 6 18 0	67
2	50	0 0 2	0 0 8	0 1 0	0 0 2	21 0 11 0	6 1 3 0	12 10 6 0	83
2	53	0 10 14	5 2 11	0 2 15	0 5 22	0 0 0 0	0 0 0 0	0 0 0 0	86
2	56	0 2 0	0 4 2	0 5 0	0 3 1	3 2 4 0	4 24 12 0	2 1 7 0	76
2	62	0 0 3	0 6 0	0 3 10	0 1 6	4 1 1 0	4 4 5 2	4 2 5 0	61
2	63	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	8 0 2 0	4 0 5 0	8 0 4 0	31
2	65	0 1 2	0 8 6	0 0 65	0 1 4	4 6 27 0	2 6 9 0	21 19 36 16	233
2	66	0 0 15	0 0 2	0 1 20	0 6 25	11 3 12 0	23 4 19 0	39 4 14 0	198
3	12	0 2 23	0 2 6	0 1 37	0 0 25	34 2 11 0	49 22 19 0	127 32 53 0	445
3	14	0 3 77	0 0 17	0 0 31	6 0 8	20 4 25 0	11 0 36 0	3 1 46 0	288
3	15	0 12 23	0 4 2	4 0 19	0 0 13	7 4 12 0	5 8 17 0	21 5 13 0	169
3	20	0 0 4	0 18 14	3 12 17	0 0 11	14 10 8 0	31 7 3 0	21 15 7 0	195
3	23	0 4 8	0 8 4	2 0 7	0 0 6	12 4 8 0	8 0 6 0	10 36 5 0	128
3	24	2 15 14	3 2 19	0 4 25	0 0 14	22 2 2 0	31 20 10 0	32 14 5 0	236
3	29	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	2 0 5 0	17 6 27 0	0 9 12 0	78
3	36	0 0 0	1 1 18	0 0 8	0 3 10	10 2 0 0	34 54 0 0	22 8 10 0	181
3	37	0 0 2	0 0 0	0 0 2	0 0 0	0 0 1 0	0 0 0 0	0 0 2 0	7
3	39	0 26 35	3 1 23	4 2 6	0 0 9	18 3 2 0	20 0 6 0	14 0 4 0	176
3	45	0 0 0	0 2 0	0 0 1	0 0 8	2 0 8 0	0 0 19 0	18 23 62 0	143
3	46	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	2 3 2 0	15 8 5 0	15 7 2 0	59
3	54	0 9 13	0 2 3	0 2 10	0 0 6	27 9 18 0	0 10 26 0	0 4 26 0	165
3	57	0 0 37	1 5 50	23 0 64	0 0 65	16 6 0 0	8 0 6 0	11 5 4 0	301
3	64	0 5 12	1 1 16	6 4 4	0 0 11	10 22 9 0	28 26 1 2	20 43 4 0	225
3	68	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 1	0 0 41	10 2 15 0	1 2 30 0	4 0 58 0	164
3	69	0 1 10	0 1 1	0 0 13	0 0 0	2 12 3 0	4 16 0 0	2 2 2 0	69
4	4	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	10 4 10 0	24 11 8 0	64 8 5 1	145
4	5	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	13 12 11	20 10 13 0	4 0 17 0	14 2 5 0	121
4	8	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	2 0 2 0	6 11 9 0	4 18 19 0	71
4	10	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	40 8 12 0	40 2 16 0	38 17 17 0	190
4	11	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	10 2 4 0	9 4 0 0	18 10 0 0	57
4	22	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	16 1 6 0	35 3 5 0	26 5 4 0	101
4	30	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	2 0 5 0	5 7 3 0	12 2 2 0	38
4	32	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	7 0 21 0	21 7 17 0	12 8 18 0	111
4	33	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	9 1 2 0	13 3 3 0	12 4 11 0	58
4	34	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	6 4 3 0	2 4 1 0	32 4 4 0	60
4	44	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	4 0 2 0	11 0 8 0	4 1 4 0	34
5	21	0 0 4	0 1 11	0 3 2	0 0 4	0 0 0 0	7 1 5 0	10 13 13 0	74
5	49	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	2 2 2 0	4 5 0 0	22 4 1 0	42
5	52	0 20 2	0 3 5	0 2 2	0 0 9	32 6 10 0	68 20 92 0	10 4 259 0	544



Individual students feature in the feeder schools with reference to their perfect attendance records in primary school including students #1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 18, 22, 26, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 44, 46, 49 and 63.

One-way analyses of variance were undertaken within the variables of feeder school, year and type of absence to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates across the seven years. The statistically significant analyses of variance are outlined in the following series of tables.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in Year 4 against the total absences. The results as represented in Table 19 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 19**  
**Comparison of Year 4 Total Absences and Feeder Schools**

Analysis of Variance on FOURA					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	3128	782	3.71	0.009
Error	56	11793	211		
Total	60	14921			

Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev				
Feeder	N	Mean	StDev	
1	12	14.50	13.38	(-----*-----)
2	18	6.83	7.16	(-----*-----)
3	17	19.82	23.29	(-----*-----)
4	11	0.00	0.00	(-----*-----)
5	3	8.67	11.72	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 14.51

0 10 20

Key: DF = Degrees of Freedom  
SS = Sum of Squares  
MS = Mean Square  
F = F ratio statistic  
P = Probability  
CI = Confidence Interval

Students in feeder school three on average are absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school three was absent approximately 20 half days in year four due to unexplained reasons. Each student in

feeder school one accounted for 14.5 half days absence, in feeder school two students on average had seven half days absence, in feeder school five students had approximately nine half days absence and in direct contrast students in feeder school four did not have any absences recorded in the unexplained category. The trend for year four total absences and feeder schools is similar to the analysis of the year four unexplained absences and feeder schools. However, it is difficult to discriminate the total absences without analysis of the written reasons for the absences.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year four against the variable of unexplained. The results as represented in Table 20 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 20**  
**Comparison of Year 4 Unexplained Absences and Feeder Schools**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	1890	472	3.58	0.011
Error	56	7397	132		
Total	60	9287			

Feeder	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	5.25	7.30	(-----*-----)
2	18	4.56	5.11	(-----*-----)
3	17	15.18	19.94	(-----*-----)
4	11	0.00	0.00	(-----*-----)
5	3	2.00	2.00	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 11.49

-10      0      10      20

Students in feeder school three on average are absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school three was absent 15 half days in year four. Each student in feeder school one accounted for five half days absence, in feeder school two students on average had four half days absence, in feeder school five students had two half days absence and in direct contrast students in feeder school four did not have any absences.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year five against the variable of ‘total absences’. The results as represented in Table 21 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 21**  
**Comparison of Year 5 Total Absences and Feeder Schools**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	1325	331	2.61	0.045
Error	56	7118	127		
Total	60	8443			

Feeder	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev	
1	12	11.50	12.82	-----+-----+-----+----- (-----*-----)	
2	18	9.44	9.59	(-----*-----)	
3	17	13.47	15.15	(-----*-----)	
4	11	0.00	0.00	(-----*-----)	
5	3	6.67	6.11	(-----*-----)	
Pooled StDev = 11.27				-----+-----+-----+----- 0.0      8.0      16.0	

Students in feeder school three on average were absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school three was absent 13.5 half days in year five. Each student in feeder school one accounted for 11.5 half days absence, in feeder school two students on average had 9.5 days absence, in feeder school five students had approximately seven half days absence and in direct contrast students in feeder school four did not have any absences.

The results of the one-way analysis of variance undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year five against unexplained absences were outlined in Table 22. The results indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 22**  
**Comparison of Year 5 Unexplained Absences and Feeder Schools**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	759.0	189.8	2.66	0.042
Error	56	4001.7	71.5		
Total	60	4760.7			

Feeder	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	5.583	6.680	(-----*-----)
2	18	3.722	6.369	(-----*-----)
3	17	10.176	13.135	(-----*-----)
4	11	0.000	0.000	(-----*-----)
5	3	5.333	5.508	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 8.453

0.0      6.0      12.0

Students in feeder school three, on average, were absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school three was absent 10 half days in year five due to unexplained reasons. Students in feeder schools one and five, on average, were absent five and half days, students in feeder school two approximately four days, and students in feeder four had no absences recorded in the unexplained category.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year seven against the variable of 'unexplained'. The results as represented in Table 23 indicated a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 23**  
**Comparison of Year 7 Unexplained Absences and Feeder Schools**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	1219	305	2.71	0.039
Error	56	6309	113		
Total	60	7528			

Feeder	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	4.00	4.35	(-----*-----)
2	18	6.17	9.28	(-----*-----)
3	17	13.35	16.75	(-----*-----)
4	11	1.00	3.32	(-----*-----)
5	3	4.33	4.51	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 10.61

0.0      8.0      16.0

Students in feeder school three on average were absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school three was absent 13 half days in year seven. Each student in feeder school two accounted for six half days absence, in feeder schools one and five students on average had four half days absence and in feeder school four students had on average one half day absence.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year nine against the variable of 'unexplained'. The results as represented in Table 24 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 24**  
**Comparison of Year 9 Unexplained Absences and Feeder**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	2309	577	3.79	0.009
Error	56	8530	152		
Total	60	10839			

Feeder	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	4.08	3.34	(-----*-----)
2	18	5.89	4.97	(-----*-----)
3	17	12.41	11.82	(-----*-----)
4	11	7.91	6.32	(-----*-----)
5	3	32.33	51.73	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 12.34

0 15 30 45

Students in feeder school five on average were absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school five was absent 32 half days in year nine however, this must be kept in context with one student accounting for 92 half days that were the majority of the absences for this feeder school.

Each student in feeder school three accounted for 12 half days absence, in feeder school four students on average had approximately eight half days absence, in feeder school two students had approximately six half days absence and students in feeder school one were absent on average four half days.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in Year 10 against the variable of 'unexplained'. The results as represented in Table 25 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.



**Table 25**  
**Comparison of Year 10 Unexplained Absences and Feeder Schools**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	19243	4811	5.10	0.001
Error	56	52814	943		
Total	60	72057			

Feeder	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	6.50	4.80	(-----*-----)
2	18	10.72	11.20	(-----*-----)
3	17	18.53	21.71	(-----*-----)
4	11	8.09	6.91	(-----*-----)
5	3	91.00	145.62	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 30.71

0      40      80      120

Students in feeder school five on average were absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school five was absent 91 half days in year 10. Again, this must be kept in context as one student in this sample accounted for most of the absences.

Students in feeder schools two and three were very close in their absences with 17 and 18 half days respectively. Similarly, feeder schools one and four were very close with 11 and 12 half days respectively.

### 5.3.5 Patterns of Non-Attendance Against IQ

Each of the 61 students completed the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Higher Test (PQ) in 1994 when they were enrolled in Year 9.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in absentee rates based on IQ. The significant differences are reported in the tables that follow.

Table 26 highlights the one-way analysis of the unexplained absences in year five that indicated a significant difference at the 0.05 level.

**Table 26**  
**Comparison of Year 5 Unexplained Absences and IQ**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
IQ	17	2891.6	170.1	3.75	0.000
Error	35	1587.6	45.4		
Total	52	4479.2			

				Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev	
IQ	N	Mean	StDev		
1	1	20.000	0.000	-----+-----+-----+	
3	2	1.000	1.414	(---*---)	
4	5	6.200	8.556	(---*---)	
5	7	4.286	5.851	(*---)	
6	8	3.625	9.070	(*---)	
7	3	6.333	10.970	(*---)	
8	3	1.667	2.082	(*---)	
9	3	5.333	5.132	(*---)	
10	2	0.000	0.000	(*---)	
11	1	4.000	0.000	(*---)	
12	2	0.000	0.000	(*---)	
13	7	4.143	4.259	(*---)	
14	2	0.000	0.000	(*---)	
15	3	7.333	7.095	(*---)	
16	1	11.000	0.000	(*---)	
20	1	0.000	0.000	(*---)	
21	1	50.000	0.000	(*---) (---*---)	
25	1	23.000	0.000	(*---)	

Pooled StDev = 6.735				-----+-----+-----+	
				0 25 50 75	

Students at each end of the IQ spectrum, that is high IQ and low IQ, appear to be absent for greater periods of time than the students placed between these two extremes. For example, the one student who scored one in the IQ test was absent, due to unexplained reasons, on average 20 half days in year five. Similarly, the students who scored 21 and 25 on the IQ test were absent on average 50 and 23 half days respectively due to unexplained reasons.

The students at the extremes of the continuum may have affected the overall significance of the relationship between year five unexplained absences and IQ. As there was a significant difference at the 0.05 level, the results were included but may have been reversed if the student with an IQ score of 21 was withdrawn from the sample. Further record analysis of this student's attendance records and interview responses may highlight a significant pattern related to other factors.

A one-way analysis of the total absences in year five indicated a significant difference at the 0.05 level. The data and results are presented in Table 27.

**Table 27**  
**Comparison of Year 5 Total Absences and IQ**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
IQ	17	4886.4	287.4	3.17	0.002
Error	35	3172.6	90.6		
Total	52	8059.0			

					Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev	
IQ	N	Mean	StDev		-----+-----+-----+-----	
1	1	22.000	0.000		(---*---)	
3	2	1.000	1.414		(---*---)	
4	5	9.800	14.429		(---*---)	
5	7	7.143	7.625		(---*---)	
6	8	5.750	10.498		(---*---)	
7	3	11.333	11.015		(---*---)	
8	3	6.000	6.000		(---*---)	
9	3	12.333	11.504		(---*---)	
10	2	0.000	0.000		(---*---)	
11	1	44.000	0.000		(---*---)	
12	2	0.000	0.000		(---*---)	
13	7	9.714	9.032		(---*---)	
14	2	0.000	0.000		(---*---)	
15	3	9.667	8.622		(---*---)	
16	1	18.000	0.000		(---*---)	
20	1	0.000	0.000		(---*---)	
21	1	56.000	0.000		(---*---)	
25	1	27.000	0.000		(---*---)	

Pooled StDev = 9.521

0 30 60

For the majority of the students there was a significant increase in the number of total absences. In particular, the students who scored 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 21 and 25 in the IQ test had a significant number of days absence comprised of a variety of reasons that were accumulated to give the final total of half days absence in year five. Again, it is difficult to discriminate without the written reasons for the absences that are attributed to reason other than unexplained. The cumulative effect of the number of half day absences, whether attributed to explained or unexplained reasons, may be

linked to possible difficulties in coping with school and not undertaking and completing the required number of units to enrol in years 11 and 12. This relationship is examined further later in this chapter.

The significant relationship between year five total absences and IQ may once again be attributed to a number of students only. If these students are withdrawn from the sample, for example the students who scored 11 and 21, the results may be reversed. That is, there may have been no significant difference at the 0.05 level.

A one-way analysis of the unexplained absences in year seven indicated a significant difference at the 0.05 level. Table 28 highlights the data and results.

**Table 28**  
**Comparison of Year 7 Unexplained Absences and IQ**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
IQ	17	4965.5	292.1	4.22	0.000
Error	35	2420.5	69.2		
Total	52	7386.0			

					Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev			
IQ	N	Mean	StDev		-----+-----+-----+-----+			
1	1	15.000	0.000		(---*---)			
3	2	12.500	17.678		(---*---)			
4	5	4.600	4.879		(--*--)			
5	7	2.857	4.018		(-*--)			
6	8	0.500	0.756		(-*--)			
7	3	8.000	5.292		(---*--)			
8	3	4.333	3.786		(--*--)			
9	3	2.667	2.309		(--*--)			
10	2	0.000	0.000		(---*---)			
11	1	6.000	0.000		(---*---)			
12	2	20.500	28.991		(---*---)			
13	7	9.286	10.291		(-*--)			
14	2	0.000	0.000		(---*---)			
15	3	10.333	13.051		(--*--)			
16	1	22.000	0.000		(---*---)			
20	1	0.000	0.000		(---*---)			
21	1	65.000	0.000			(---*---)		
25	1	9.000	0.000		(---*---)			
Pooled StDev = 8.316					-----+-----+-----+-----+			
					0	30	60	90

The results of the comparison of year seven unexplained absences and IQ produced similar results to the analysis of the year five unexplained absences in comparison to

IQ. That is, the students accounting for the greatest number of half day absences in the unexplained category in year five are the same students who, on average, were absent from school for the greatest periods of time in year seven.

The student who scored 21 on the IQ test once again appears to have influenced the overall significance of year seven unexplained absences and IQ.

The qualitative statistics presented above have served as a global investigation however, they are not necessarily as reliable as the qualitative findings. The analysis did highlight the difficulty in aligning absenteeism with any single observable cause hence the need for quantifiable evidence to support research findings.

There were no significant differences at the 0.05 level as a result of a one-way analyses undertaken on the remaining variables including; culture, nationality, health, birth place of the student, mother and fathers place of birth, mother and fathers occupation, and main language spoken in the home.

### **5.3.6 Academic Ability**

Academic ability was another variable of non-attendance patterns that was considered in the context of this research.

Secondary schools throughout Western Australia deliver the Unit Curriculum to the lower school students, that is, years eight to 10. The unit curriculum is the learning system that was implemented on a trial basis in 1987 and then implemented in 1988.

The goals of unit curriculum include excellence, equity and relevance with the structure allowing for increased curriculum flexibility and the attainment of the goals. Three features of the curriculum framework made it easier to attain these goals.

- *Increased curriculum flexibility*

As the units were much shorter than previous year-long course, schools were able to offer many different combinations of units, and students' programs may reflect their interests, needs and abilities.

- *Making schools' goals public*

Schools decided which subjects and combinations of units they would offer and described these in school handbooks. These school handbooks are a concrete and public indication of each school's values.

- *Making teaching and learning goals more explicit*

The objective of the 40-hour units are more explicit than those of the Achievement Certificate (lower school curriculum pre-1987 – see Table 34 for comparison) courses they replace. Moreover, standards-based assessment has made learning goals clearer to students, teachers and parents.

The requirements of the unit curriculum include:

- balanced general education;
- student choice;
- flexibility to change direction;
- improved transition;
- cater for individual differences;
- maintenance of academic standards;
- courses standardised to enable moderation;
- alternative patterns of school organisation;
- time as a variable;
- statewide currency; and
- empowerment for schools to be responsible.

The comparison between the achievement certificate and the unit curriculum is highlighted in Table 29.

**Table 29**  
**Comparison Between Achievement Certificate and Unit Curriculum**

<b>ACHIEVEMENT CERTIFICATE</b>		<b>UNIT CURRICULUM</b>
Core subjects Option subjects	➔	7 Curriculum components
Unequal time allocations Year long courses	➔	40-hour units
Progress based on age	➔	Progress based on achievement
Advanced      25% Intermediate   50% Norm referenced Basic            25%	➔	6 Stages of progress Standards-referenced
Grades: Credit pass Pass	➔	A, B, C, D & F
Limited vertical cross-setting	➔	Increased vertical cross-setting
Student choice among option subjects	➔	Student choice among all subjects

The components are groups of subjects. All school subjects are allocated to seven components as follows:

1. English, Language and Communication
2. Mathematics
3. Personal and Vocational Education
4. Physical Education
5. Physical and creative Arts
6. Science and Technology
7. Social Studies.

The subjects have not changed except they were split into a number of roughly equal parts named units. The subjects below are grouped into their components.

1. English, Speech and Drama, Languages Other Than English (L.O.T.E.), Creative Writing
2. Mathematics
3. Business Education, Home Economics, Health Education, Manual Arts
4. Physical Education
5. Arts and Crafts, Manual Arts, Home Economics
6. Science, Computer-Related Studies
7. Social Studies.

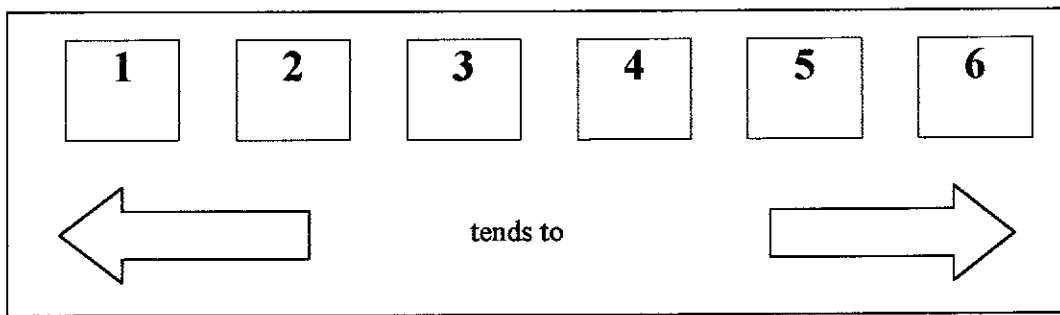
Work in the seven curriculum components was organised in units to provide short term goals, allow time to become a variable in a students program, give greater flexibility for students to change or repeat units, give choice to students, potential to better cater for individual differences, and the syllabus can be revised in small chunks. Also, students were allowed to take more or less than 40 hours of programmed time to complete a unit, which is a pool of objectives. As time was a major variable, some students needed more time to complete a unit, some students completed the unit objectives in approximately 40 hours and some students achieved the unit objectives in much less than 40 hours.

Each unit is about 40 hours work spread over about one term. Some units should be done before others.

All subjects are divided into a maximum of six stages. The stages show the levels of difficulty. To do a stage five unit, for example, the students will need to demonstrate more experience or ability than for a stage two unit.

The units in all courses are arranged in sequences representing six stages of progress as outlined in Figure 12 with a continuum of related factors listed in Table 30.



**Figure 12. Sequence of units in six stages.****Table 30****Factor Related to Students Progress in the Six Stages**

<b>A. STUDENT MATURITY</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• younger</li> <li>• dependent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• older</li> <li>• independent</li> </ul>
<b>B. PEDAGOGICAL FACTORS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recall</li> <li>• concrete</li> <li>• less content</li> <li>• simple sensory motor</li> <li>• simple concepts</li> <li>• lower order intellectual processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• application</li> <li>• abstract</li> <li>• more content</li> <li>• complex sensory motor</li> <li>• difficult concepts</li> <li>• high order intellectual processes</li> </ul>
<b>C. PURPOSE</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• link to primary education</li> <li>• foundation studies development</li> <li>• general education</li> <li>• social utility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• link to year 11 and 12 courses or TAFE or employment</li> <li>• extended and more diverse studies</li> <li>• specialised education</li> <li>• increasing academic utility</li> </ul>

Units for each of the seven curriculum components are arranged on unit maps. Table 31 represents the seventh curriculum component – Social Studies.

**Table 31**  
**Social Studies Unit Map**

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5	STAGE 6
<i>Earth &amp; People</i>	<i>Consumer &amp; the Economy</i>	<i>Australia's Government</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Australian Landscapes (G)</i>	<i>World Environmental Issues (G)</i>
<i>The Ancient World</i>	<i>West Aust.: Yest. &amp; Today</i>	<i>Australian studies</i>	<i>European Studies</i>	<i>Specialisation in the Economy (E)</i>	<i>Economic Systems &amp; Issues (E)</i>
<i>Changing World</i>	<i>Technological World</i>	<i>Asian Studies</i>		<i>Intern. Co-op. &amp; Conflict (H)</i>	<i>Aust. In the Internal. Comm. (H)</i>
				<i>Australia's Contemporary Society</i>	<i>Social Issues</i>

Stages five and six represent units that were pre-requisites for students intended to enrol in years 11 and 12. For example, students wishing to study economics must successfully complete Specialisation in the Economy at the stage five level. The other six curriculum components have similar pre-requisite units.

Schools identify the number of units that students must complete within each stage for each curriculum component. The selection of units in the curriculum component is termed the 'pathway' for the particular curriculum component. Table 32 compares three pathways for the Social Studies curriculum component.

**Table 32**  
**Pathways in Social Studies**

Pathway number 1 – 10 units

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5	STAGE 6
<i>Earth &amp; People</i>	<i>Consumer &amp; the Economy</i>	<i>Australia's Government</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Australian Landscapes (G)</i>	<i>World Environmental Issues (G)</i>
<i>The Ancient World</i>	<i>West Aust.: Yest. &amp; Today</i>	<i>Australian studies</i>	<i>European Studies</i>	<i>Specialisation in the Economy (E)</i>	<i>Economic Systems &amp; Issues (E)</i>
<i>Changing World</i>	<i>Technological World</i>	<i>Asian Studies</i>		<i>Intern. Co-op. &amp; Conflict (H)</i>	<i>Aust. In the Internal. Comm. (H)</i>
				<i>Australia's Contemporary Society</i>	<i>Social Issues</i>

Pathway number 2 – 12 units

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5	STAGE 6
<i>Earth &amp; People</i>	<i>Consumer &amp; the Economy</i>	<i>Australia's Government</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Australian Landscapes (G)</i>	<i>World Environmental Issues (G)</i>
<i>The Ancient World</i>	<i>West Aust.: Yest. &amp; Today</i>	<i>Australian studies</i>	<i>European Studies</i>	<i>Specialisation in the Economy (E)</i>	<i>Economic Systems &amp; Issues (E)</i>
<i>Changing World</i>	<i>Technological World</i>	<i>Asian Studies</i>		<i>Intern. Co-op. &amp; Conflict (H)</i>	<i>Aust. In the Internal. Comm. (H)</i>
				<i>Australia's Contemporary Society</i>	<i>Social Issues</i>

Pathway number 3 – 8 units

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5	STAGE 6
<i>Earth &amp; People</i>	<i>Consumer &amp; the Economy</i>	<i>Australia's Government</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Australian Landscapes (G)</i>	<i>World Environmental Issues (G)</i>
<i>The Ancient World</i>	<i>West Aust.: Yest. &amp; Today</i>	<i>Australian studies</i>	<i>European Studies</i>	<i>Specialisation in the Economy (E)</i>	<i>Economic Systems &amp; Issues (E)</i>
<i>Changing World</i>	<i>Technological World</i>	<i>Asian Studies</i>		<i>Intern. Co-op. &amp; Conflict (H)</i>	<i>Aust. In the Internal. Comm. (H)</i>
				<i>Australia's Contemporary Society</i>	<i>Social Issues</i>

A number of combinations exist depending the factors outlined earlier in Table 37. However, there should be a number of units offered at each stage in the sequence in

most subject areas. Bridging units have been provided where appropriate to ensure continuity in educational programs.

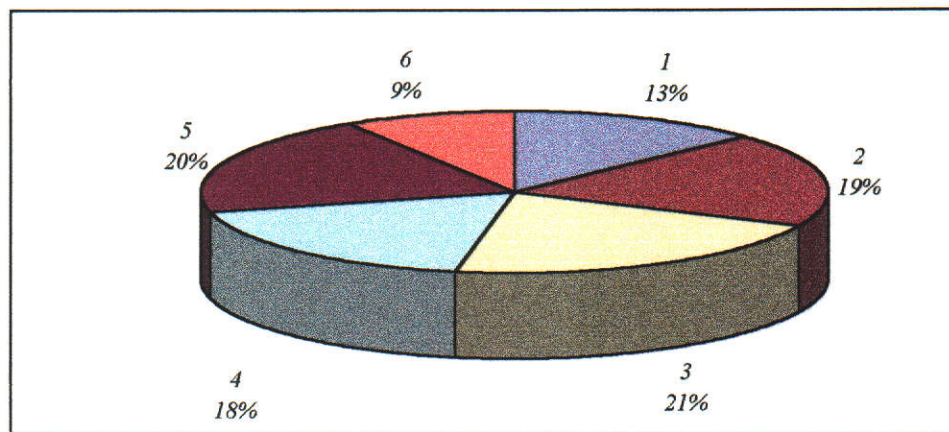
Table 33 lists the cohort for this study and the total number of units completed at each of the stages one through six and an overall total of the number of units completed in years eight, nine and 10.

**Table 33**  
**Stages Based on All Core Subjects**

IdNo	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	5	8	8	6	8	6	41
3	5	8	8	9	7	3	40
4	5	8	9	10	7	1	40
5	0	0	1	1	8	6	16
6	5	7	8	6	8	6	40
8	5	8	10	10	8	1	42
9	5	8	8	10	6	3	40
10	5	10	7	6	6	3	37
11	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
15	2	2	11	6	6	2	29
16	5	9	12	6	6	1	39
17	3	3	9	9	7	1	32
18	5	8	9	10	6	2	40
19	5	7	9	8	9	1	39
20	3	2	11	6	6	2	30
21	5	8	10	8	8	2	41
22	5	8	9	8	8	2	40
23	7	8	8	4	4	3	34
24	5	8	9	7	10	2	41
26	5	8	10	10	6	2	41
27	5	8	7	6	9	8	43
28	5	8	8	7	9	6	43
29	5	9	8	6	6	3	37
30	7	7	9	5	4	1	33
31	3	2	11	6	7	1	30
32	6	8	7	7	8	2	38
33	5	9	11	7	6	2	40
34	3	2	11	6	7	1	30
35	0	0	5	6	9	8	28
36	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
37	3	2	10	7	7	1	30
39	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
40	5	8	8	10	8	3	42
42	5	8	9	8	8	2	40
43	5	8	8	10	8	3	42
44	4	8	9	10	7	1	39
45	6	7	0	1	5	3	22
46	5	8	8	7	9	6	43
47	6	7	7	7	9	5	41
48	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
49	5	8	8	6	7	6	40
50	5	8	9	8	8	2	40
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
53	5	8	8	7	9	6	43
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
56	6	9	7	5	7	1	35
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
58	6	8	12	5	6	2	39
59	5	8	9	6	9	7	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
62	6	9	7	6	9	1	38
63	5	7	8	7	9	1	37
64	3	4	9	5	4	1	26
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
67	5	8	8	10	8	3	42
68	2	2	10	7	7	1	29
69	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
70	0	0	5	2	4	1	12
	285	419	503	408	442	195	2252

Table 33 highlights a variety of pathways that students have embarked upon in the compulsory years of schooling in the core subject areas – English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. One of the significant features of this table is the fact that more than half of the cohort completed three or less units at the stage six level. This is further highlighted in Figure 13 which gives a representation of the total percentage of units completed at each stage.

**Figure 13.** Percentage of units completed at each of the stages 1-6.



A total of 79% of all the units completed in the three years of compulsory education were in stages one through four. Of the 2252 units complete in stages one through six, 442 units were at the stage five level and 195 units at the stage six level. As some of the units in stages 5 and 6 are prerequisites for enrolment into tertiary subjects in years 11 and 12, a number of the students in this cohort have missed out on the opportunity to embark on a tertiary path at this point in their lives.

Table 34 highlights the range of grades from A through F for each student in the cohort. Again, a variety of combinations of grades are evident.

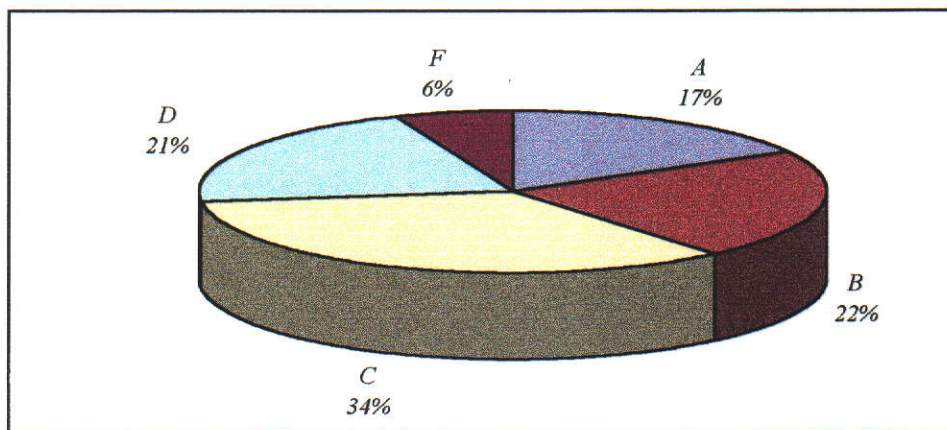
**Table 34**  
**Grades Based on All Core Subjects**

IdNo	A	B	C	D	F	Total
1	6	13	15	5	2	41
3	1	10	23	5	1	40
4	2	10	18	6	4	40
5	2	3	6	4	1	16
6	16	6	8	8	2	40
8	7	15	20	0	0	42
9	3	5	18	12	2	40
10	0	2	8	19	8	37
11	23	10	10	1	0	44
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
15	0	3	15	10	1	29
16	1	3	10	20	5	39
17	1	12	15	4	0	32
18	0	6	16	14	4	40
19	2	7	21	9	0	39
20	3	5	10	11	1	30
21	1	12	18	10	0	41
22	6	8	19	6	1	40
23	0	4	12	12	6	34
24	2	15	18	6	0	41
26	0	13	18	9	1	41
27	23	17	3	0	0	43
28	12	16	12	2	1	43
29	0	1	14	15	7	37
30	0	0	7	18	8	33
31	1	9	14	6	0	30
32	1	1	12	19	5	38
33	4	18	12	5	1	40
34	0	5	14	11	0	30
35	7	8	12	1	0	28
36	30	12	2	0	0	44
37	1	4	20	4	1	30
39	31	12	1	0	0	44
40	4	8	22	8	0	42
42	4	8	23	5	0	40
43	3	7	24	7	1	42
44	0	1	16	19	3	39
45	1	5	6	5	5	22
46	7	27	9	0	0	43
47	12	17	7	4	1	41
48	26	10	7	0	1	44
49	9	14	11	5	1	40
50	0	6	27	7	0	40
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
53	5	13	20	5	0	43
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
56	1	1	19	11	3	35
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
58	0	1	9	20	9	39
59	17	14	9	3	1	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
62	7	11	17	3	0	38
63	16	13	8	0	0	37
64	0	2	4	14	6	26
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
67	2	15	21	4	0	42
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
69	29	10	5	0	0	44
70	0	0	1	1	10	12
	385	487	777	471	132	2252

Of the total cohort, 13 students have 50% or more combined D and F grades for the units completed. The remaining students have a mix of A, B and C grades however, this needs to be kept in context with the stages at which the units were completed.

Figure 14 gives a diagrammatical representation of the percentage of grades on all the core subjects.

**Figure 14. Percentage of grades on all core subjects.**



Collectively, the students have 73% of C grades or better. However, the remaining 27% of D and F grades should not be dismissed.

#### 5.4 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE

In order to gain a more comprehensive insight into factors affecting school non-attendance, the study incorporated the case study of particular students within the cohort.

While selection of case study students could have been based on the analysis of school attendance data only, it was decided to seek additional information from the students' perspective about school non-attendance. Accordingly, an open-ended questionnaire was designed and administered to all 61 students. The combination of both data sources was deemed to be more defensible as a way of identifying the case study sample.



The collection of the qualitative data involved the sample of 61 students who were invited to complete the attendance questionnaire. A total of 51 of the 61 students completed the questionnaire and of these students nine were identified for follow up interviews. Percentage figures are based on the 51 responses.

The questionnaire contained 27 open-ended items. The questionnaires were coded upon completion and sorted according to the categories arising from the data. A further sort of the raw data categories into sub-categories was undertaken to identify atypical student responses. The questionnaire is lengthy and detailed hence, the entire summaries of the 27 items appear in Appendix 9. The results are represented in terms of a frequency of the student responses. All of the student comments have been indicated within the tables.

An overview of the detailed results will be presented in this chapter utilising the eight categories devised in Table 5 of Chapter 4.

**Category One: Attitude To School**  
**Items: 1, 2, 3**

The first category contains three items which relate to attitude to school. The summarised responses to the items indicated that most of the students ‘liked coming to school’. While the response ‘friends’ was the most popular response to the item ‘what makes school enjoyable for you?’, the majority of the students agreed that the most important part of school was to get an education.

Most of the students indicated friends, lunch, recess, sport and options as the things they enjoyed about school. These factors combined accounted for 82% of the responses.

**Category Two: Parental Expectations**  
**Items: 10, 11**

The majority of the students (86%) indicated that their parents expected them to attend school. Of these students, 21 said that their parents knew that they ‘wagged’ school.

**Category Three: Wagging - General**  
**Items: 4, 5, 6, 7**

An analysis of students who acknowledged that they wagged school (28 students out the sample of 51 students) indicated that these students preferred to stay at home, go to the shops or be with their friends. Friends also featured in the act of ‘wagging’ in that the majority of the students indicated that they wag school with their friends.

The frequency of the students ‘wagging’ school varied significantly from ‘a few times a year’ to ‘every day’ (with a variety of patterns in between).

Reasons for ‘wagging’ included ‘school is boring’, ‘I don’t like school’ and ‘better than going to school’. The response to when did you start ‘wagging’ school included one students as early as kindergarten through to four students in Year 10 (their current year of schooling). Most of the students indicated that they started ‘wagging’ in high school.

**Category Four: Wagging - Specific (ie. classes)**  
**Items: 8, 9, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22**

The classes most ‘wagged’ include Mathematics and English with the majority of the students choosing not to respond to why they chose to wag these classes. Of the students who did respond, reasons included ‘it’s boring’, ‘the teacher is boring’, ‘I don’t like the teacher’ and ‘I don’t want to do it’.

**Category Five: Attitudes to School Subjects****Items: 14, 15**

The majority of the students (82%) acknowledge, in terms of their perception, that some classes are more important than others. An analysis of what makes them important featured the following response – ‘you may need them in the future’.

**Category Six: Perceptions of Best Subjects****Items: 16, 17**

Responses indicated that students’ best subjects were divided between options (51%) and a combination of the core and option subjects (31%). The majority of the responses (75%) supplied by the students to describe their best subjects revolved around the terms ‘fun’, ‘interesting’, ‘practical’ and ‘enjoyable’.

**Category 7: Perceptions of Least Preferred Subjects****Items: 18, 19**

This category highlighted students’ dislike of the core subjects (that is, English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies). The reasons offered for the dislike of these subjects included ‘it’s boring’, ‘too complicated’ and ‘not enjoyable’.

**Category 8: Future Goals / Aspirations****Items: 23, 24, 25, 26, 27**

A significant proportion of the students (69%) acknowledged that wagging school would affect their results. A further analysis of this indicated that (77%) if the responses given by these students cited the problem with wagging as missing out on work and information. The remaining 31% of the cohort of students stated that wagging would not affect their results because ‘you don’t do much anyway’, ‘I don’t do it on important days’, ‘you wag if you have no tests’, and ‘I don’t wag enough to miss out on much work’.

Most of the students were definite in their responses regarding their future goals/aspirations with 75% stating that they intended to complete year 12. Of the 13

students who did not intend to complete Year 12, only three students did not know what they would like to do when they left school.

The great majority of the students (94%) aspired to access further training and/or education and acknowledged the benefit of attending school in that school would help them achieve their goals by ‘educating and teaching’ them.

## **5.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the research findings which resulted from the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the school attendance records and the questionnaires and interviews completed by the students.

The data were represented by types of absence and number of half-day absences accumulated by the individual students over the seven-year period.

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). A total of 252 one-way analyses were undertaken with only 18 significant differences at the 0.05 level identified.

The feeder primary schools were a significant feature. There was a significant difference in the analysis of the feeder schools against the variable ‘unexplained’ absence. For the academic school years representing years four, five, seven, nine and 10, there was a positive correlation between the feeder schools and the unexplained absences. That is, unexplained absences feature in five out of the seven years of the study.

Overall, the most significant feature of this cohort in relation to non-attendance was the total time each student was absent from school during the seven years. The category types, gender, feeder schools, culture and ethnicity, and parents’ background, pale into insignificance when compared against the average amount of

time each student was absent. Table 35 compares the means and standard deviations for the students across the seven individuals years and then as a total.

**Table 35**  
**Comparison of Non-Attendance Means and Standard Deviations**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Mean (2 d.p.)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (2 d.p.)</b>
4	10.82	15.64
5	9.13	11.76
6	12.85	19.96
7	9.90	13.07
8	19.41	14.47
9	30.97	28.19
10	40.88	43.68
4 to 7	19.14	20.97

Key: 2 d.p. = 2 decimal points

There is a slight fall in the average absence rate in years 5 and 7 but a dramatic increase from year 8 through years 9 and 10. Based on the primary school averages, the figures in the secondary school double, then triple and finally quadruple.

A comparison between the primary and secondary non-attendance highlighted 10% more unexplained absences in the primary school than the high school, with the high school recording 10% more absences in the ‘sick’ category. The high school records of acceptable and unacceptable absences warrants further research on this issue alone.

This chapter also presented the findings of the student questionnaire and individual absence profiles. The significant trends from the questionnaire were presented within the eight sub-categories. Typical and atypical student responses were translated into useful feedback for future action.

Typically, students indicated that they liked going to school and that an education was important. They also indicated that their parents expected them to attend school.

The term ‘boring’ featured when students were asked why they ‘wagged’ school. Students preferred to attend the option subject classes and miss out on the core subject classes. However, the majority of the students (75%) stated they intended to complete year 12.

The students intended to complete year 12 and pursue further education and/or training in spite of their perceptions. The value they placed on education was significantly high for them to want to complete their high schooling.

The next chapter highlights and elaborates a number of individual case studies based on the findings of this chapter coupled with student’s academic achievement.

## **CHAPTER 6 - CASE STUDIES**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Some students are at risk of not exercising their right to an education. Such students, as has been evidenced in the material in the preceding chapters, do not have a common profile. They usually exhibit one or more of the following characteristics including demonstrated lack of success in a variety of areas including school, poor literacy and communication skills, anti-social behaviour, unsatisfactory home life and low self-esteem.

To further highlight the diversity of such students, the cohort of this study ( $n = 61$ ) were ranked in terms of their total absences for the seven year period. This was delineated further in terms of the categories 'sick', 'note', 'unexplained', and 'truant'. Table 41 highlights the ranking of the students against their total absences.

**Table 36**  
**Student Ranking Against Total Absences**

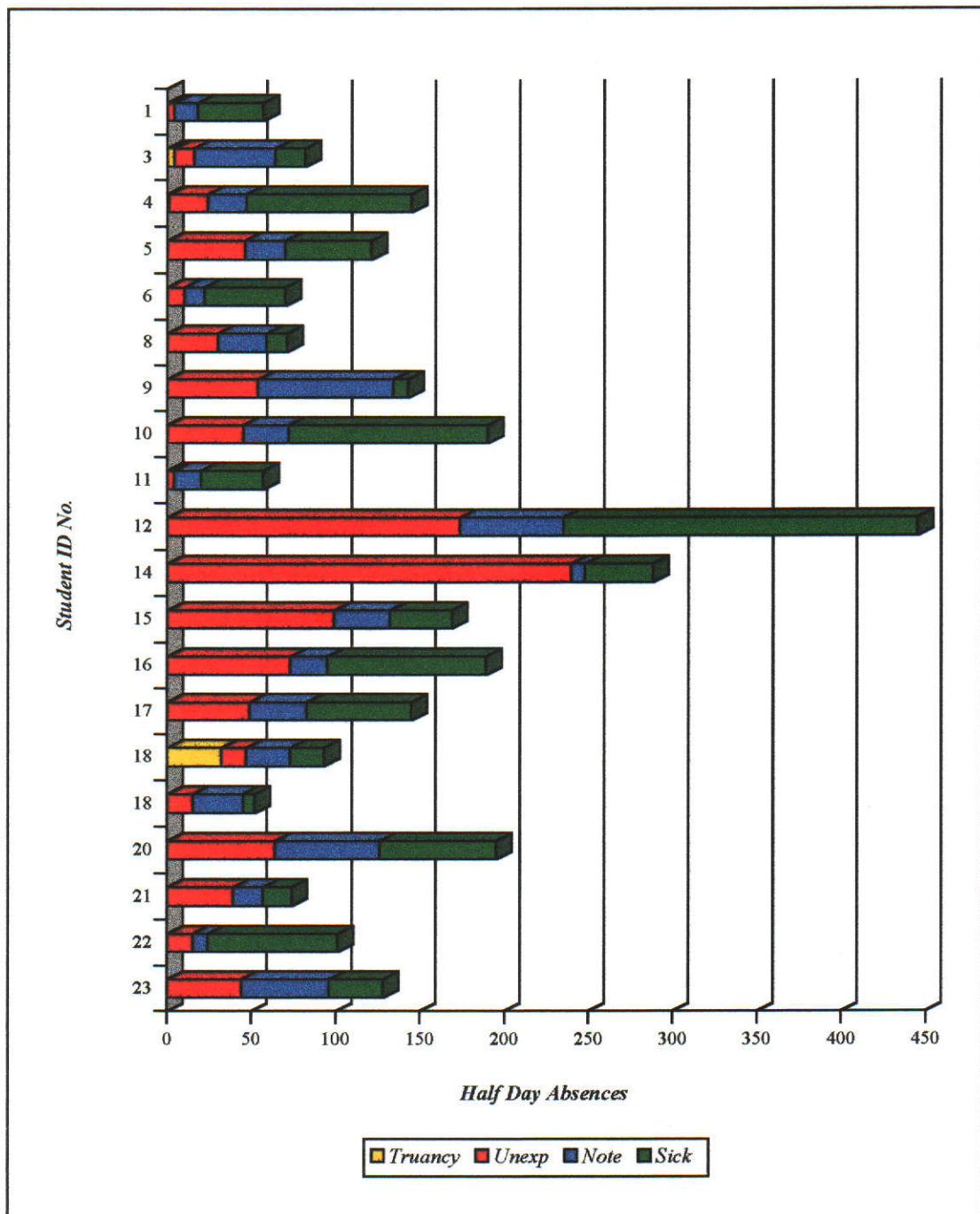
Rank	ID No.	Total	Sick		Note		Unexp		Truant
1	52	544	110	(5)	55	(9)	379	(1)	0
2	12	445	210	(1)	61	(5)	174	(4)	0
3	57	301	59	(21)	16	(42)	226	(3)	0
4	14	288	40	(26)	8	(55)	240	(2)	0
5	58	267	149	(2)	61	(6)	57	(20)	0
6	24	236	90	(8)	57	(8)	89	(12)	0
7	65	233	27	(38)	41	(15)	149	(5)	16
8	59	227	146	(3)	60	(7)	21	(43)	0
9	64	225	65	(16)	101	(1)	57	(21)	2
10	66	198	73	(12)	18	(39)	107	(8)	0
11	20	195	69	(13)	62	(4)	64	(17)	0
12	10	190	118	(4)	27	(26)	45	(28)	0
13	16	189	94	(7)	22	(33)	73	(15)	0
14	36	181	67	(15)	68	(3)	46	(26)	0
15	28	177	75	(11)	21	(35)	81	(14)	0
16	39	176	59	(20)	32	(21)	85	(13)	0
17	15	169	37	(32)	33	(20)	99	(10)	0
18	54	165	27	(37)	36	(18)	102	(9)	0
19	68	164	15	(49)	4	(57)	145	(6)	0
20	40	158	48	(25)	46	(13)	64	(18)	0
21	4	145	98	(6)	23	(32)	23	(40)	1
22	17	145	62	(17)	34	(19)	49	(24)	0
23	9	143	9	(52)	80	(2)	54	(23)	0
24	45	143	20	(42)	25	(30)	98	(11)	0
25	70	143	61	(19)	12	(50)	70	(16)	0
26	27	133	69	(14)	39	(16)	25	(39)	0
27	67	131	56	(22)	38	(17)	37	(32)	0
28	48	129	76	(10)	31	(23)	22	(42)	0
29	23	128	32	(34)	52	(10)	44	(29)	0
30	5	121	51	(23)	24	(31)	46	(25)	0
31	60	118	7	(57)	1	(59)	110	(7)	0
32	32	111	40	(27)	15	(44)	56	(22)	0
33	31	102	61	(18)	26	(28)	15	(48)	0
34	22	101	77	(9)	9	(52)	15	(47)	0
35	18	93	20	(40)	26	(27)	15	(45)	32
36	53	86	5	(60)	19	(36)	62	(19)	0
37	50	83	39	(30)	12	(49)	32	(34)	0
38	3	82	18	(47)	48	(12)	12	(51)	4
39	29	78	19	(44)	15	(43)	44	(30)	0
40	56	76	9	(53)	41	(14)	26	(38)	0
41	21	74	17	(48)	18	(37)	39	(31)	0
42	8	71	12	(50)	29	(25)	30	(35)	0
43	42	71	26	(39)	22	(34)	23	(41)	0
44	43	71	6	(58)	51	(11)	14	(49)	0
45	6	70	48	(24)	12	(47)	10	(53)	0
46	69	69	8	(54)	32	(22)	29	(37)	0
47	47	67	6	(59)	13	(46)	46	(27)	2
48	35	65	20	(41)	9	(54)	36	(33)	0
49	62	61	12	(51)	17	(40)	30	(36)	2
50	34	60	40	(28)	12	(48)	8	(56)	0
51	46	59	32	(35)	18	(38)	9	(55)	0
52	33	58	34	(33)	8	(56)	16	(44)	0
53	1	57	39	(29)	14	(45)	4	(59)	0
54	11	57	37	(31)	16	(41)	4	(60)	0
55	19	52	7	(55)	30	(24)	15	(46)	0
56	49	42	28	(36)	11	(51)	3	(61)	0
57	26	39	7	(56)	25	(29)	7	(57)	0
58	30	38	19	(45)	9	(53)	10	(54)	0
59	44	34	19	(46)	1	(58)	14	(50)	0
60	63	31	20	(43)	0	(61)	11	(52)	0
61	37	7	0	(61)	0	(60)	7	(58)	0

As confirmed with the data display in Table 36, truancy barely features in the overall attendance patterns of this cohort. Seven students only, have absences in terms of

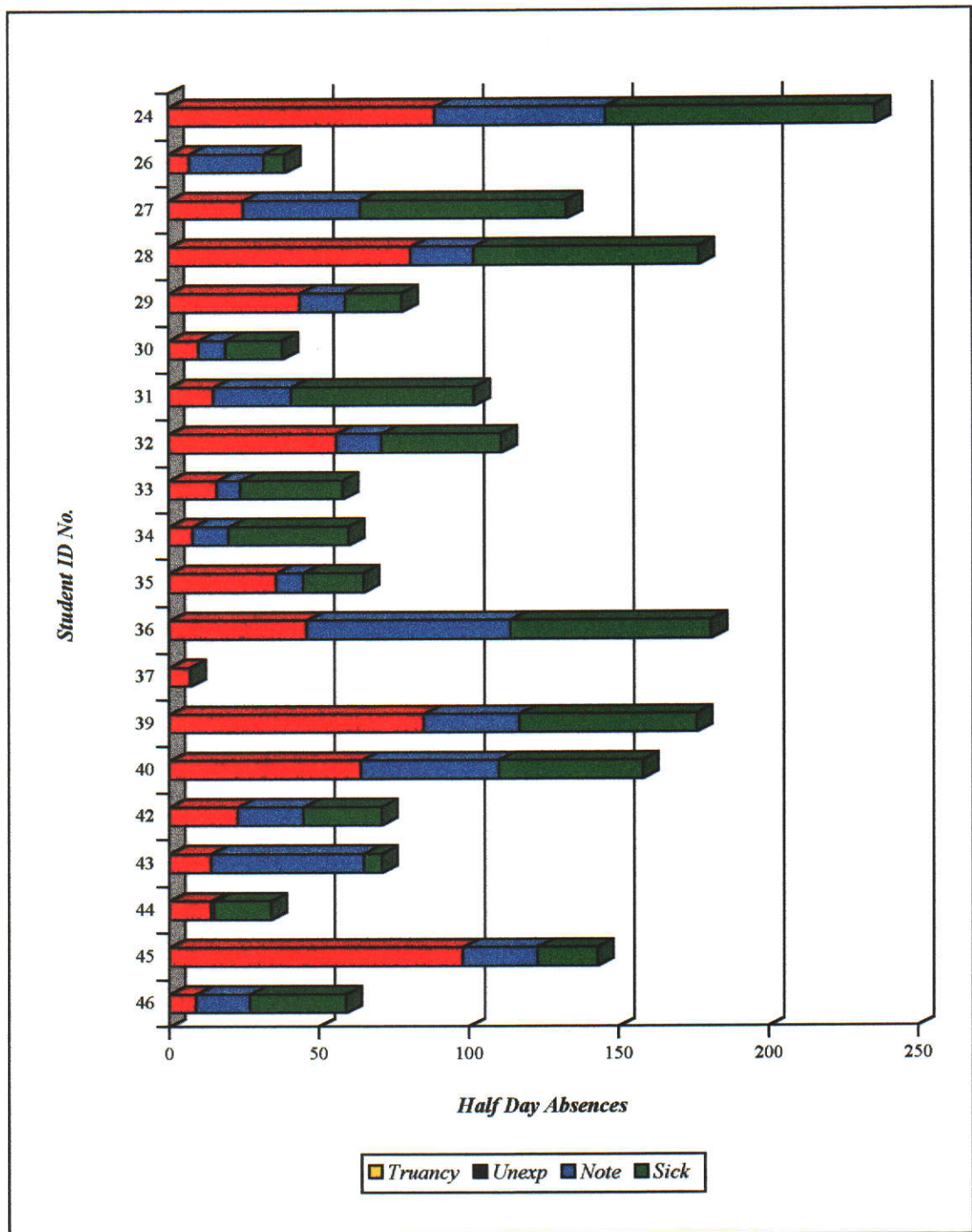


truancy recorded against their names and in terms of their overall total absences, these figures are insignificant. For example, student #65 had a total of 233 half day absences with 16 of these due to truancy, student #64 had a total of 225 half day absences with two of these due to truancy, student #4 had a total of 145 half day absences with one of these listed as truancy, student #18 had 93 half day absences with 32 attributed to truancy, student #three had 82 half-day absences with four attributed to truancy, student # 47 had 67 half-day absences with two attributed to truancy, and student # 62 had 61 half-day absences with only two attributed to truancy.

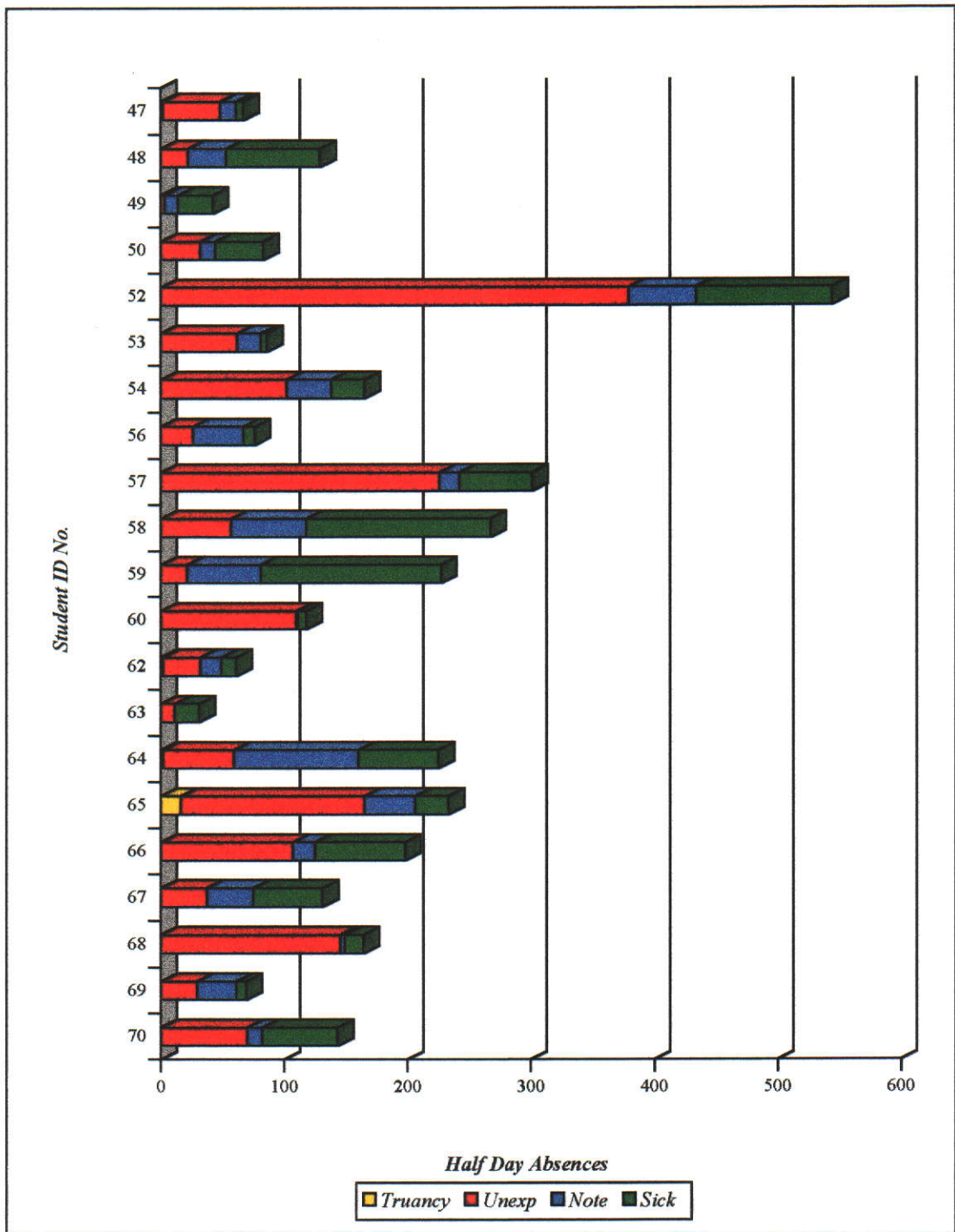
The figures continue to highlight the number of ‘unexplained’ day’s absence that students have accumulated during the course of the seven years. Figures 15, 16, and 17 give a graphical representation of the number of days attributed to the four main categories of absence used in the Western Australian secondary school system. As stated in earlier chapters, the category ‘truancy’ is not used in the primary school system. However, due to the extremely high figures that are evident in the ‘unexplained’ category, the ‘truancy’ category is almost redundant.

**Figure 15.** Students #1-23, absences over years 4-10 by type.

Students # 12 and 14 feature significantly with student # 12 displaying a total of 174 half days and student # 14 displaying 240 half days in the unexplained category.

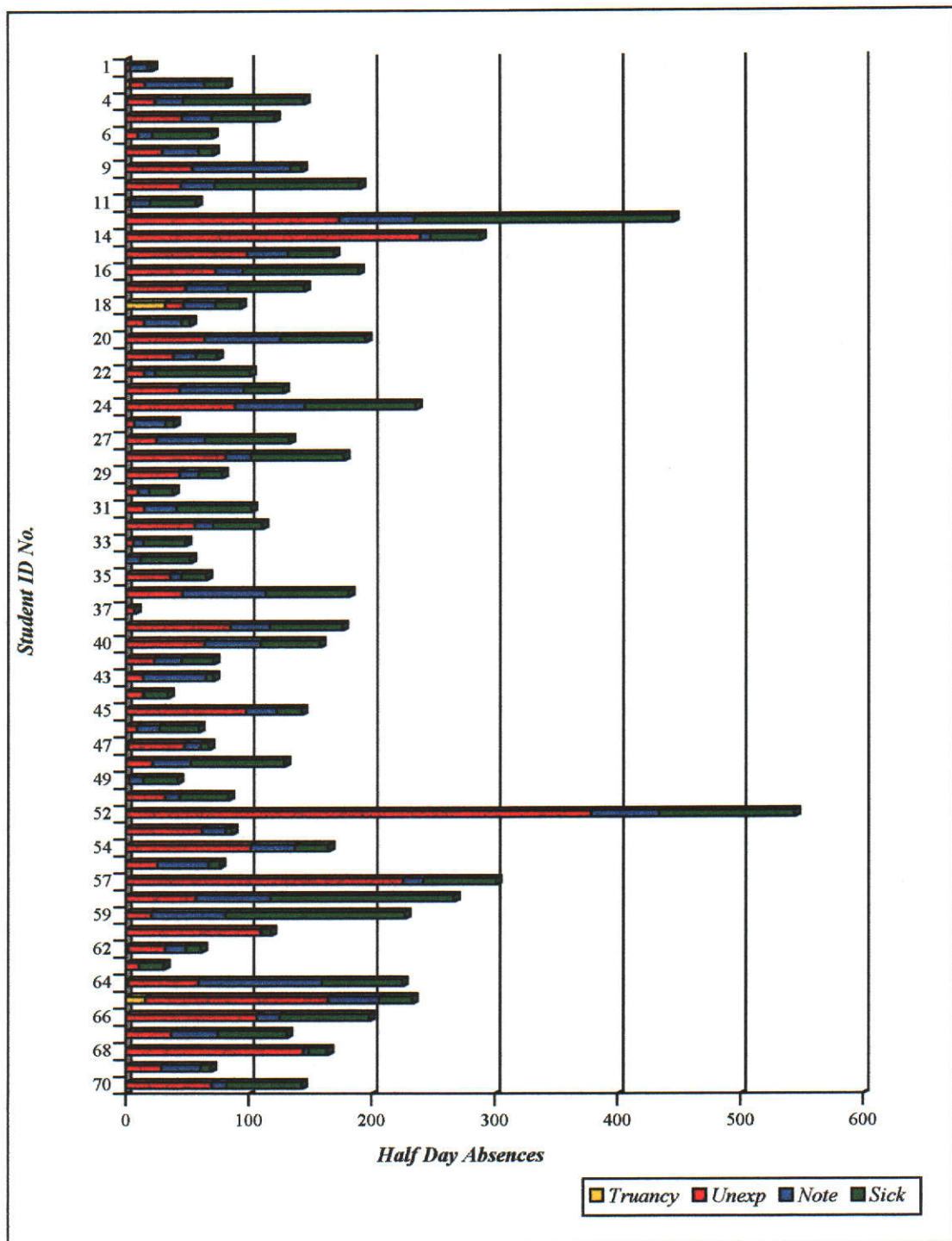
**Figure 16.** Students #24-46, absences over years 4-10 by type.

In this figure, students # 24, 28, 39 and 45 feature with regard to the ‘unexplained’ absences.

**Figure 17.** Students #47-70, absences over years 4-10 by type.

In this figure, students # 52, 57, 60, 65, 66 and 68 feature with regard to the 'unexplained' absences.



**Figure 18.** All students, absences over years 4-10 by type.

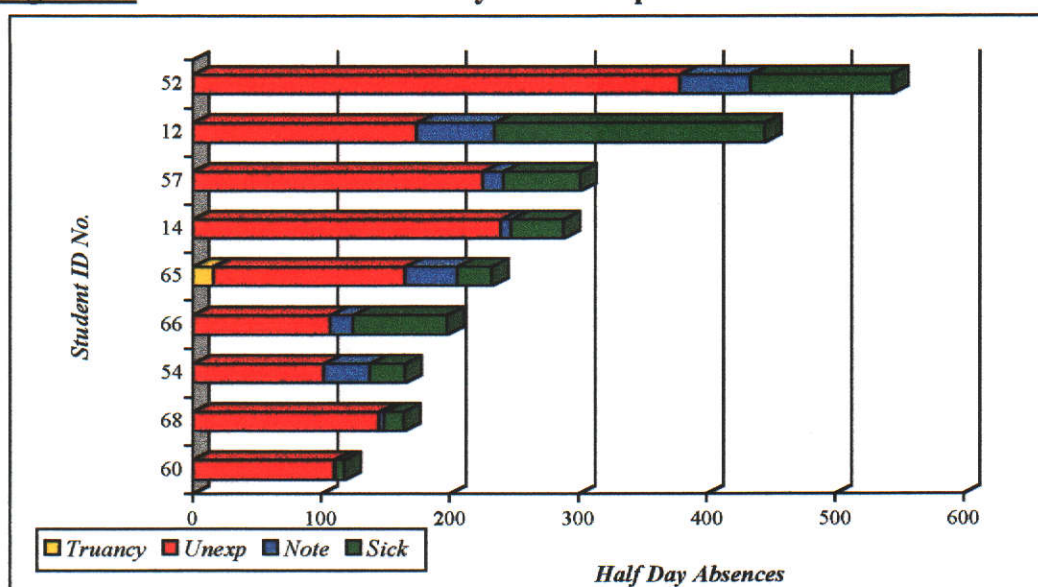
This figure highlights the problem of non-attendance, in particular the ‘unexplained’ component. It also gives an overall comparison of the 61 students with a number of the students standing out as “chronic non-attenders”.

## 6.2 IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS

The top nine ranked students in terms of the total unexplained absences were selected as the sample to be interviewed face-to-face. These “chronic non-attenders” were chosen purely on their non-attendance patterns in relation to the unexplained category. In this instance, 100 or more half-day absences was chosen as the criteria to limit the discussion to the chronic non-attenders. The literature discussed and reviewed in chapter two supported a range of attendance rates. As all of the students displayed poor attendance patterns, the figure of 100 or more half days absence was the figure chosen in an attempt to utilise the interviews to gather further information on the profile, or likely profile, of students engaged in prolonged absence from school.

Figure 19 displays these top nine students ranked according to total number of unexplained half day absences across the seven years of school attendance from year four through to year 10.

**Figure 19.** Students ranked 1 – 9 by total unexplained absences.



The 100 half days absent (or 50 full school days) used as the selection criteria for these students in the seven year period translates to an average of 0.2 days absent per week based on a 40-week academic year, that is, one day per week over seven years.

### 6.3 CASE PROFILES

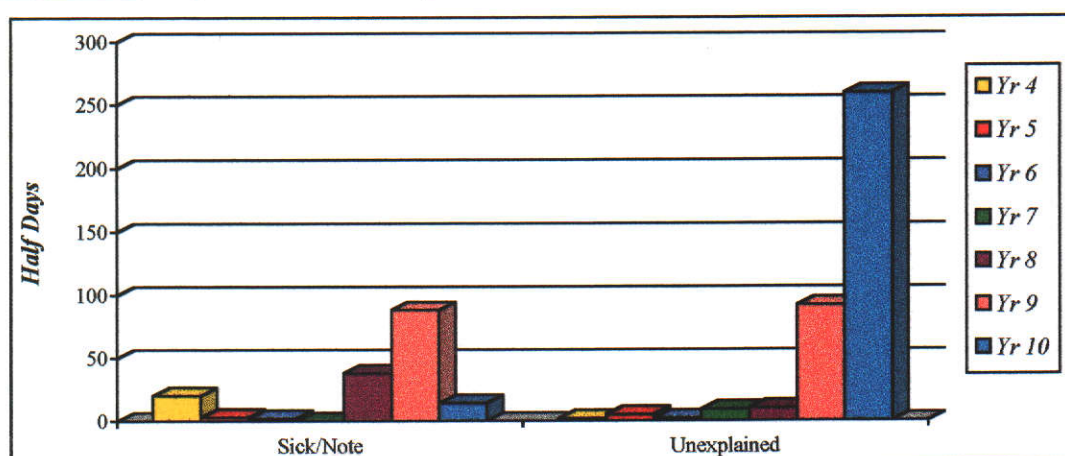
This section will feature the nine students selected based on their total unexplained absence figures. The profiles are a composite view of each individual from the information extracted from the empirical data, questionnaires and interviews. A full transcript of the interviews of each student is included in appendix six.

Each of the following student profiles elaborates on the key features for each of the individuals including gender, health, IQ, feeder primary school, parents' occupation, and academic achievement. The vertical scale on the series of graphs differ as they were drawn for the individual represented in each graph not for comparative purposes.

#### Case Profile One – Student ID 52

Student #52 was ranked number one in terms of total number of half days absent over a seven year period with a total of 544 half days and quite significantly, was also ranked number one in terms of the number of half days absent that have remained 'unexplained'. This student was also ranked number five in terms of the 'sick' category and number nine with regard to the 'note' category. Figure 20 delineates the unexplained and explained absences and compares the totals over the seven year period

**Figure 20. Explained and unexplained absences for student #52.**





The significant feature in the figure is the dramatic increase in the unexplained absences in years nine and 10, and the sick/note absences in years eight and nine.

This female student is Australian and was born in Australia. Both parents are also Australian and were born in Australia. She had no reported health problems that may have compounded the number of days absent. Her primary school years were all spent at feeder school five. The father is employed as a tradesperson and the mother's occupation unknown.

This student's perception of 'wagging' and the amount of time she missed from school are clear indicators of a misconception, or misunderstanding, on the part of the student with regard to the compulsory nature of schooling. The following statement reflects how the student is convinced that she has only missed a very minimal amount of time.

*Well ... I don't like wag every day ... I only wagged once in six months something and not even for the whole day so it doesn't really ... and it's normally not during classes which um are of great importance to my marks*

When asked to elaborate on this statement in light of the 379 half days of unexplained absences, the student stated:

*So what is it called when you tell people at school you've already planned it? ... So what if your mum gives you permission to go with your friends?*

Regardless of who this student notified that she was not attending school, her mother or her friends, the fact remains that this student was absent from school for almost one year out of seven. This cumulative year of absences still remains unexplained.

Academically, student #52 appears quite strong in English and Social Studies with a significant amount of "A" grades for the units completed in these subject areas. Also, she received a significant number of "B" grades in Science. A comparison of the total grades for the four core subject areas (ie. English, Mathematics, Science



and Social Studies) for the three years of secondary education is presented in Figure 21.

**Figure 21.** Secondary school academic profile for student #52.

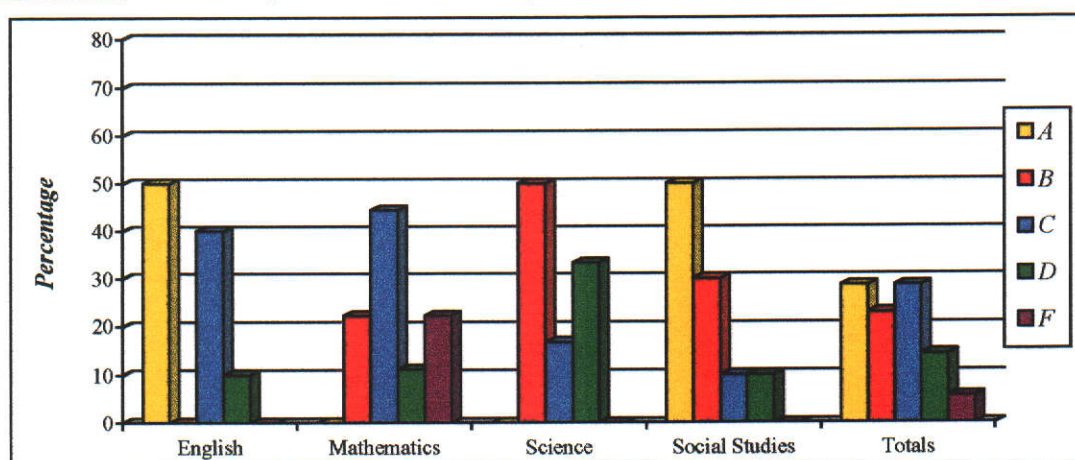


Table 37 takes a closer look at the number of units completed in each stage and reveals that student #52 has only completed 35 units in total in comparison with the range of 36 to 48 units recommended by schools. This figure is based on the completion of three to four units from each core subject area each year.

**Table 37**  
**Comparison of Student #52 with Stages of Other Students**

Student IDNo.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

This student completed less than the recommended number of units in each stage with very few units in stage six which contains the pre-requisite units for studies in years 11 and 12.

The student's non-attendance history and subsequent at risk status, may have contributed to the relatively low number of units completed in lower school, and in particular, the units at the stage six level. In turn, non-attendance and the possible difficulty in coping with school work may have impacted on the student's grades. Table 38 compares the grades received by Student #52 to the grades received by the other case study students.

**Table 38**  
**Comparison of Student #52 with Grades of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
<b>52</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>35</b>
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
	56	39	91	98	29	313

While the grades appear reasonable on the surface, this student has not completed enough units at the various stages to make the most of post-compulsory opportunities.

When this student was asked if she thought that wagging school would affect her results she replied:

*Yes because you miss out on special information that you really need for exams and that kind of thing.*

Asked a further question about the amount of wagging in light of the statement above, the student made the following comment:

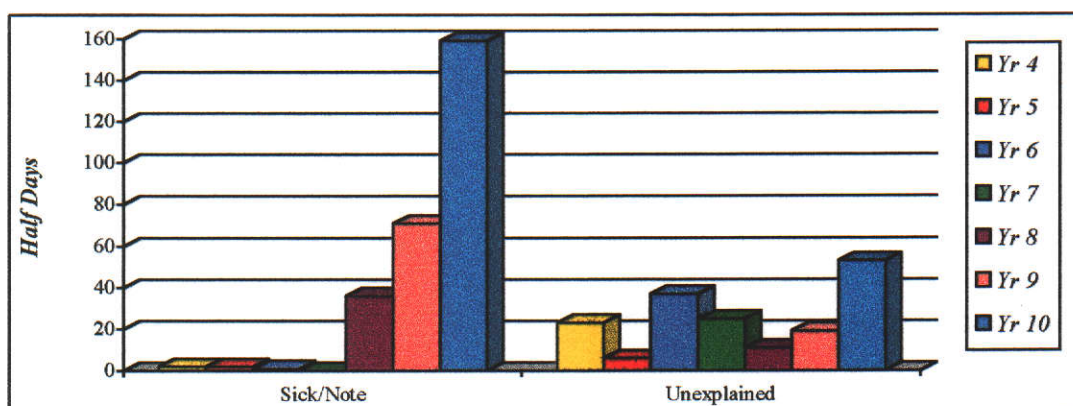
*Well ... I don't wag every day ... I only wagged once in six months something and not even for the whole day so it doesn't really ... and its normally not during classes which um are of great importance to my marks.*

This student appears to value education and is conscious that wagging school will affect the end results. However, this is an unwillingness to admit to the amount of school time missed due to wagging. The perception remains that the time has been minimal, in subject areas that are not as important as others. However, the fact remains that this student has not completed enough units in the time that she has been at school to succeed in the post compulsory pathways in years 11 and 12.

### Case Profile Two – Student ID 12

Student #12 was ranked number two in terms of the number of half day unexplained absences over the seven year period with a total of 445 half days. This student was ranked number one in terms of the 'sick' category and number five with regard to the 'note' category. Figure 22 compares the 'sick/note' category with the 'unexplained' category and highlights the number of half-day absences for the seven academic years four to 10 inclusive.

**Figure 22.** Explained and unexplained absences for student #12.





This female student is Australian and was born in Australia. Both parents were born in India. She had no reported health problems that may have compounded the number of days absent. Her primary school years were all spent at feeder school three. English was the main language spoken at home with the father employed as a semi-skilled labourer and the mother's occupation listed as home duties.

In the first part of the interview this student was adamant that she had not wagged school. Her comments reflect the inability to acknowledge her actions:

*I don't 'wag' school ...Its not because mum would bust me if she caught me but I just don't want to get back in my grades. I've got pretty bad grades and I have to pick them up as it is.*

Academically, student #12 has achieved a number of "A", "B" and "C" grades in English, Mathematics and Science. A comparison of the total grades for the four core subject areas is presented in Figure 23.

**Figure 23.** Secondary school academic profile for student #12.

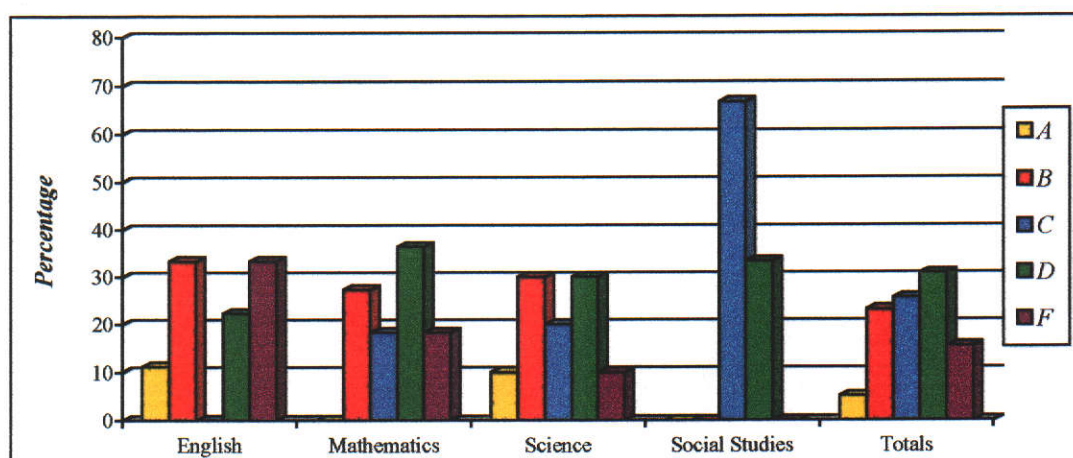


Table 39 takes a closer look at the number of units completed in each stage and reveals that student #12 has completed 39 units in the three years of compulsory secondary education which is within the acceptable range of 36-48 units. However, the number of units complete in stages five and six is below the recommended total of 12-16 units that may impact on the ability of this student to pursue a tertiary career path.

**Table 39**  
**Comparison of Student #12 with Stages of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

The student's non-attendance patterns may have contributed to her inability to complete more units within the upper levels. Table 40 compares the grades received by Student #12 to the grades received by the other case study students.

**Table 40**  
**Comparison of Student #12 with Grades of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
	56	39	91	98	29	313

The student was right about her grades being “pretty bad” with approximately 72% of the grades in the “C” to “F” range. However, when the student was asked in the latter stages of the interview if she thought that wagging would affect her results, she stated:

*I have got very good grades.*

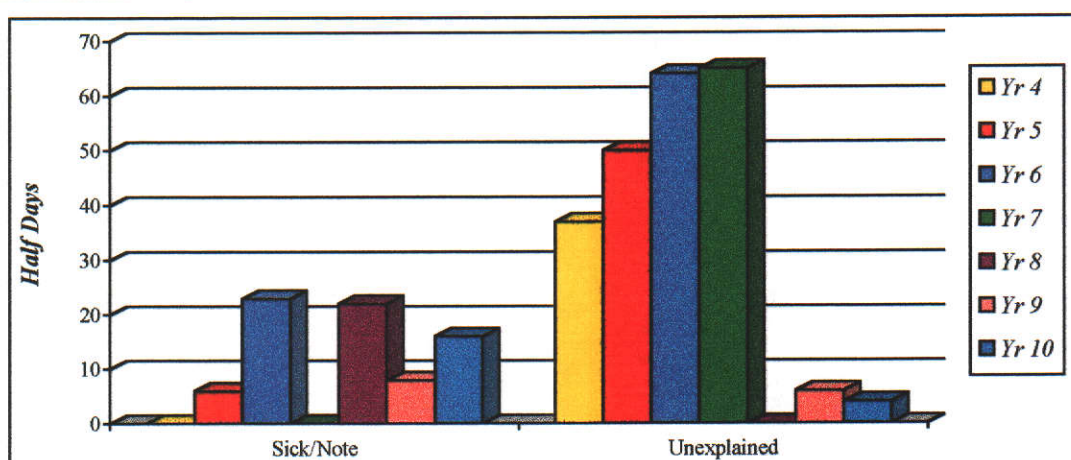


The grades combined with the number of units completed in the compulsory years of schooling indicate that this student may also have missed the opportunity to successfully undertake tertiary studies in years 11 and 12.

### Case Profile Three – Student ID 57

Student #57 was ranked number three in terms of the number of half days unexplained absences over the seven year period with a total of 301 half days. This student was ranked number 21 in terms of the ‘sick’ category and number 42 with regard to the ‘note’ category. Figure 24 delineates the unexplained and explained absences and compares the totals over the seven-year period.

**Figure 24. Explained and unexplained absences for student #57.**



The significant feature in this figure is the dramatic increase in unexplained absences in the primary school years and the decrease in the unexplained absences in high school. When asked why his pattern of attendance had changed in the last three years this student stated:

*The classes are more important ... like if you miss on things it's hard to catch up ... the work is harder ... if you miss some it catches up on you ... like you get behind and sometimes you may not even learn the work.*

This male student is Australian and was born in Australia. Both parents are also Australian with his father born in the United Kingdom and his mother born in

Australia. He had no reported health problems that may have compounded the number of days absent. His primary school years were all spent at feeder school three. English is the main language spoken at home with the father employed in a professional field and the mother's occupation listed as semi-skilled.

As highlighted in Figure 25, academically, this student was very strong across all four the core subjects, i.e. English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, with only "A" grades awarded throughout years eight to 10.

**Figure 25.** Secondary school academic profile for student #57.

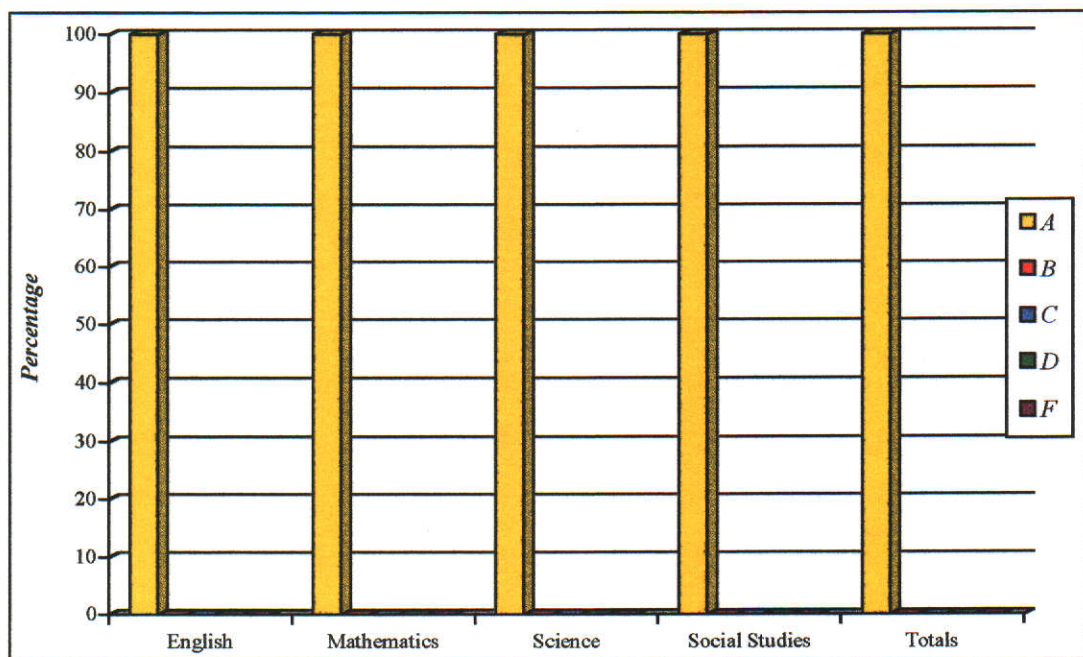


Table 41 displays the number of units completed in each stage and reveals that this student completed 44 units which is within the recommended range of 36-48 units.



**Table 41**  
**Comparison of Student #57 with Stages of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

Within the total of 44 units, this student also completed the recommended number of units at each stage. Table 42 compares the grades received by student #57 to the grades received by the other case study students and confirms that student #57 received 44 “A” grades which accounted for most of the total of “A” grades for the group of case study students. In fact, approximately 79% of the total “A” grades received by the group were attributed to student #57.

**Table 42**  
**Comparison of Student #57 with Grades of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
	56	39	91	98	29	313

It appears that student #57 is more than likely to succeed in years 11 and 12 and achieve his ultimate future goal:

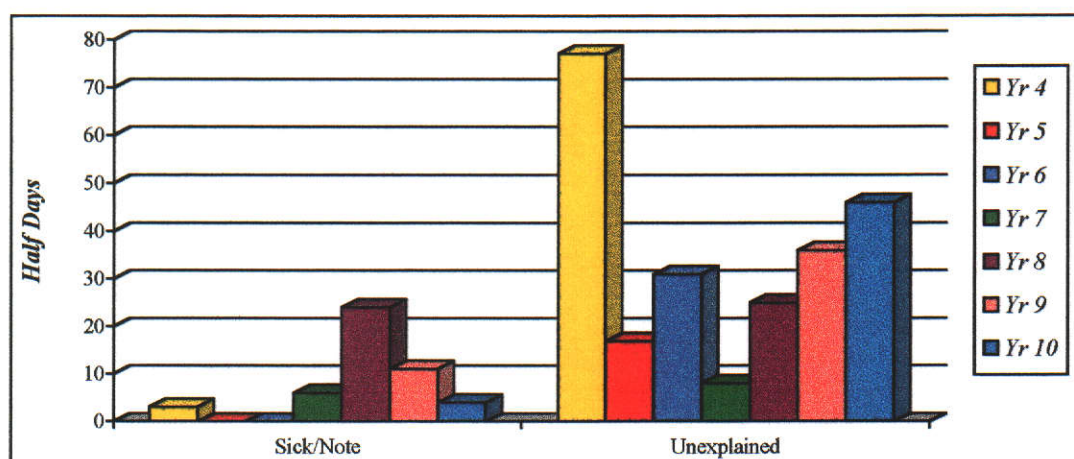
*Go to Uni ... study Engineering.*



### Case Profile Four – Student ID 14

Student #14 was ranked number four in terms of the number of half-day unexplained absences over the seven year period with a total of 288 half days. Figure 26 delineates the unexplained and explained absences and compares the totals over the seven-year period.

**Figure 26. Explained and unexplained absences for student #14.**



This male student is Aboriginal and was born in Australia. Both Aboriginal parents were born in Australia. Student #14 had no reported health problems that may have compounded the number of days absent. His primary school years were all spent at feeder school three. English is the main language spoken at home with the father not employed or unemployable and mother's occupation listed as home duties.

This student was very honest about his non-attendance behaviour, namely wagging, and stated the reason for wagging as:

*Cause I don't like the teachers ... they pick on me all the time.*

When asked to elaborate on why the teachers picked on him, the student stated:

*Cause I keep disrupting the classes ... cause it's fun.*

Academically, this student appeared weak with a significant number of "C", "D", and "F" grades awarded throughout the three years of secondary education. A

comparison of the total grades for the four core subject areas for the three years of compulsory secondary schooling is presented in Figure 27.

**Figure 27. Secondary school academic profile for student #14.**

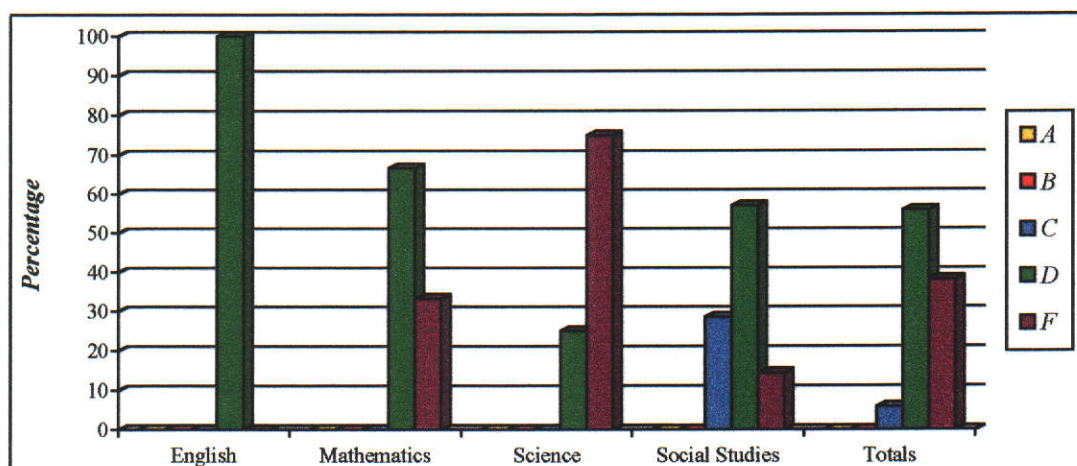


Table 43 takes a closer look at the number of units completed in each stage and reveals that student #14 completed only 34 units which is not within the recommended range of 36-48 units in the three year period.

**Table 43**  
**Comparison of Student #14 with Stages of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

This student's non-attendance history may have contributed to the relatively low number of units completed in lower school, and in particular, at stages five and six. Table 44 compares the grades received by student #14 to the grades received by the other case study students.

**Table 44**  
**Comparison of Student #14 with Grades of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
	56	39	91	98	29	313

The key feature of the grades listed above is the fact that all of the grades for student #14 were in the “C” to “F” range. The number of units completed coupled with the low grades would make it almost impossible for this student to successfully embark on a post compulsory career. This is not an issue for the student as he states:

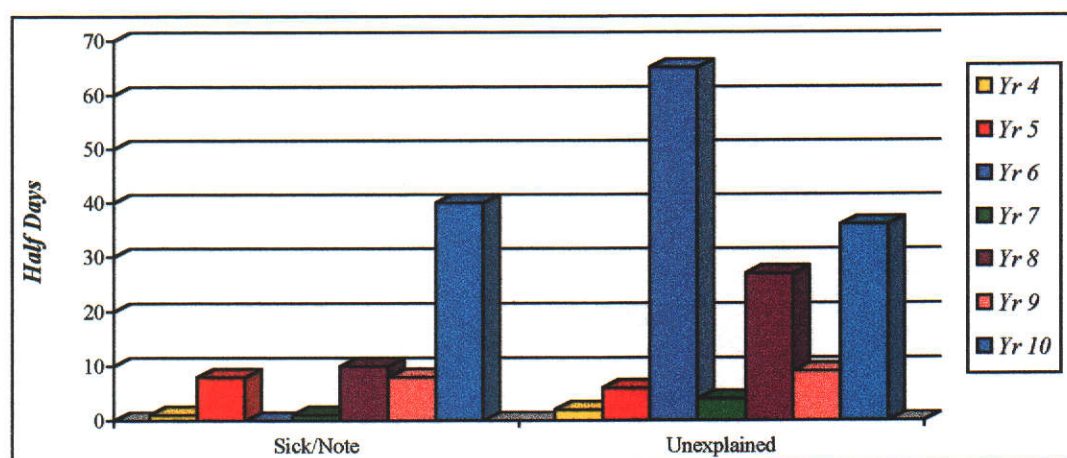
*... cause I'm not coming to school next years ... I don't know if I'm coming back to school next year.*



### Case Profile Five – Student ID 65

Student #65 was ranked number five in terms of the number of half day unexplained absences over the seven year period with a total of 217 half days. Figure 28 delineates the unexplained and explained absences and compares the totals over the seven-year period.

**Figure 28. Explained and unexplained absences for student #65.**



The significant features of the figure include the very high proportion of unexplained absences in year six, the dramatic decrease in year seven and then the fluctuating totals from year eight to year 10.

This male student is Australian and was born in Australia. Both parents are also Australian and were born in Australia. He had no health problems that may have compounded the number of days absent. His primary school years were all spent at feeder school two. English was the main language spoken at home with the father employed as an unskilled labourer and the mother's occupation listed as home duties.

When asked about 'wagging' this student stated:

*I only 'wagged' in year eight.*

Another question was posed to ascertain the student's perception of his absences in years nine and 10 – that is, "Why did you stop wagging in years nine and 10?"

*I realised that I had to come to school because I wasn't going to learn much ... and that I needed the grades.*

The student's comments were in direct contrast to his actual non-attendance patterns, namely unexplained absences.

Academically, this student had been awarded a significant number of "C" and "D" grades for the units completed in years eight to 10. A comparison of the total grades for the four core subject areas for the three years of secondary education is presented in Figure 29.

**Figure 29. Secondary school academic profile for student #65.**

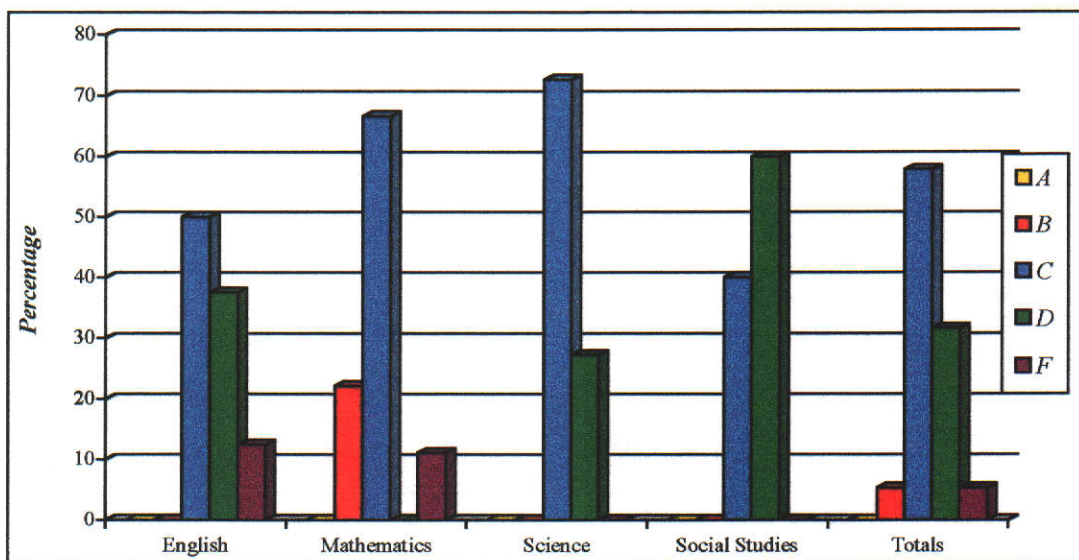


Table 45 highlights the number of units completed in each stage with a total of 38 units which is within the recommended range of 36-48 units.

**Table 45**  
**Comparison of Student #65 with Stages of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

The number of units completed at each stage is also within the recommended range. Table 46 compares the grades received by student #65 to the grades received by the other case study students.

**Table 46**  
**Comparison of Student #65 with Grades of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
	56	39	91	98	29	313

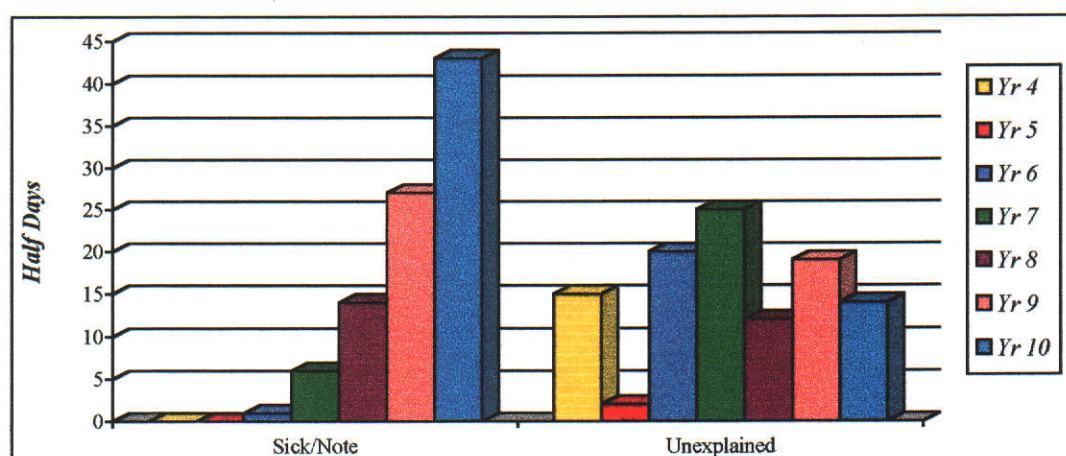
While this student completed the recommended number of units, the grades were predominantly “C” or lower. The range of grades received at the end of year 10 may limit this student’s options for further education.



### Case Profile Six – Student ID 66

Student #66 was ranked number six in terms of the number of half day unexplained absences over the seven year period with a total of 198 half days. Figure 30 delineates the unexplained and explained absences and compares the totals over the seven year period.

**Figure 30. Explained and unexplained absences for student #66**



The significant features in the figure is the fluctuating totals of unexplained absences for each year while the explained absences increased significantly from year seven through to year 10.

This female student is Australian and was born in Australia. Both parents are Vietnamese and were born in Vietnam. She had no health problem that may have compounded the number of days absent. Her primary school years were all spent at feeder school two. English is the main language spoken at home with the father's and mother's occupations listed as unknown.

Academically, student #66 achieved a number of "B", "C", and "D" grades for the units completed in years eight to 10. A comparison of the total grades for the four core subject areas for the three years of compulsory secondary education is presented in Figure 31.

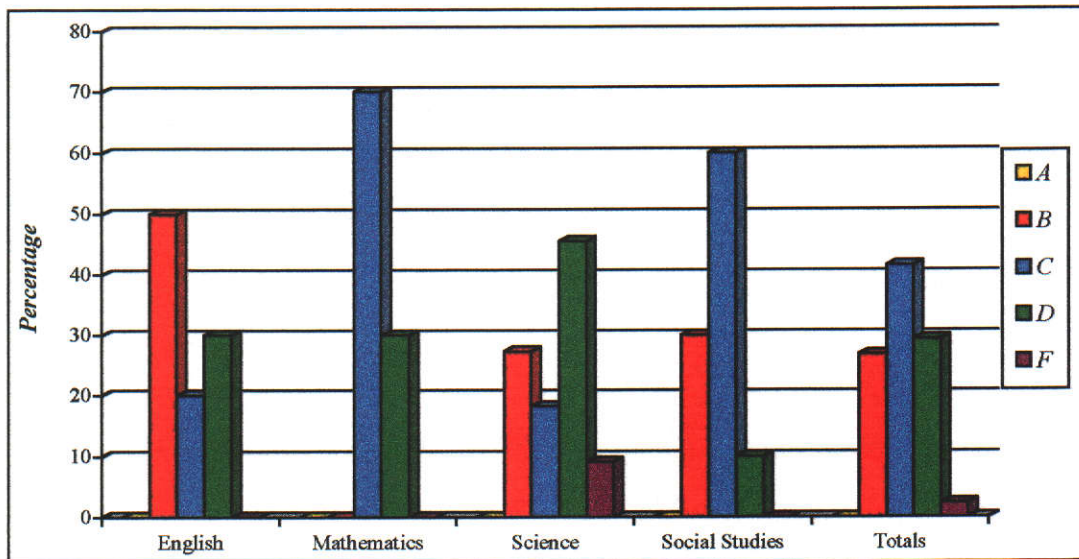
**Figure 31. Secondary school academic profile for student #66.**

Table 47 takes a closer look at the number of units completed in each stage and reveals that student #66 completed a total of 41 units which is within the recommended range of 36-48 units.

**Table 47**  
**Comparison of Student #66 with Stages of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
<b>66</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

While the total number of units is within the recommended range, the number of units completed in stages five and six was lower than the number recommended and may impact on the student's ability to pursue a tertiary pathway. Table 48 compares the grades received by student #66 to the grades received by the other case study students.



**Table 48**  
**Comparison of Student #66 with Grades of Other Students**

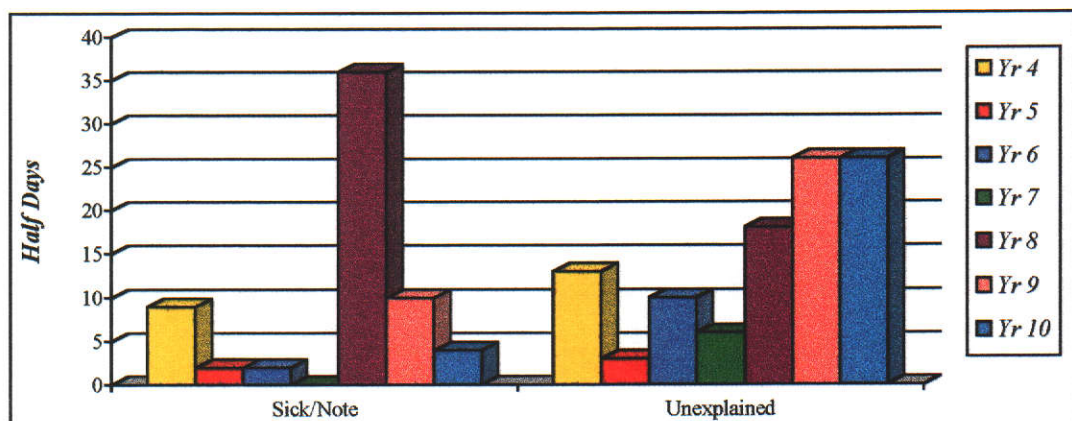
Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
<b>66</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
	56	39	91	98	29	313

Approximately 27% of the grades were “Bs” with approximately 71% “Cs” and “Ds”. The overall grades for this student may not be sufficient for enrolment and subsequent success in years 11 and 12.

#### Case Profile Seven – Student ID 54

Student #54 was ranked number seven in terms of the number of half day unexplained absences over the seven year period with a total of 165 half days. Figure 32 delineates the unexplained and explained absences and compares the totals over the seven year period.

**Figure 32. Explained and unexplained absences for student #54.**



The significant feature in this figure is the decrease in the explained absences and increase in the unexplained absences in years eight to 10.

This female student is Australian and was born in Australia. Both parents are also Australian and were born in Australia. She had no recorded health problem that may have compounded the number of days absent. Her primary school years were all spent at feeder school three. English is the main language spoken at home with the father employed as a tradesperson and the mother's occupation listed as unknown.

When this student was asked about her non-attendance patterns, in particular wagging, she stated:

I don't wag school ... I was sick.

When asked a further question about her non-attendance behaviour and what she would call the time away from school she stated:

I guess it's wagging ... but ... I only had a few days ....

Academically, student #54 appeared weak with most of the units completed awarded a "D" grade. A comparison of the total grades for the four core subject areas for the three years of secondary education is presented in Figure 33.

**Figure 33.** Secondary school academic profile for student #54.

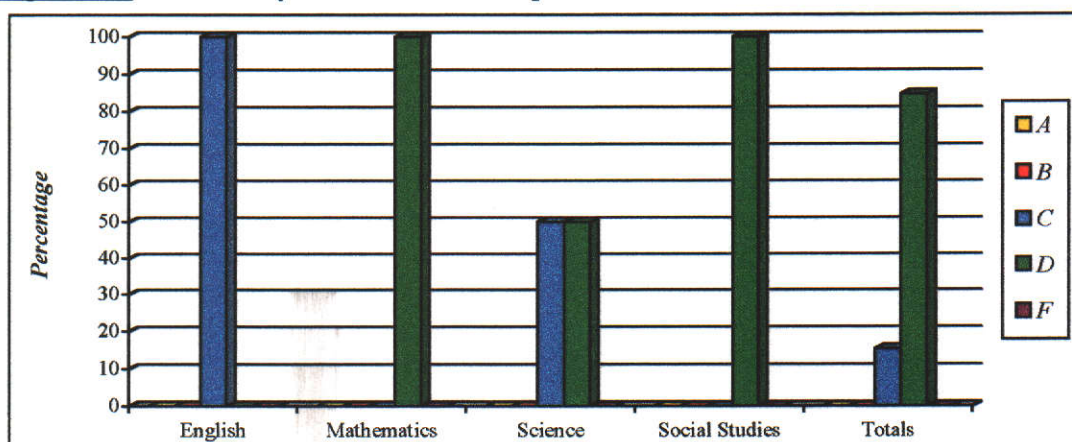




Table 49 takes a closer look at the number of units completed in each stage and reveals that student #54 completed a very small number of units in comparison to the recommended number of 36-48 units. In total, only 13 units were completed in the years eight to 10. With the striking feature that the units were all completed in stages one and two only. The student's non-attendance history may have contributed to the relatively low number of units completed in lower school. In turn, non-attendance and the possible difficulty in coping with school work may have impacted on the student's grades.

**Table 49**  
**Comparison of Student #54 with Stages of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

Table 50 compares the grades received by student #54 to the grades received by the other case study students.

**Table 50**  
**Student #54 – Comparison of Grades Based on All Core Subjects**

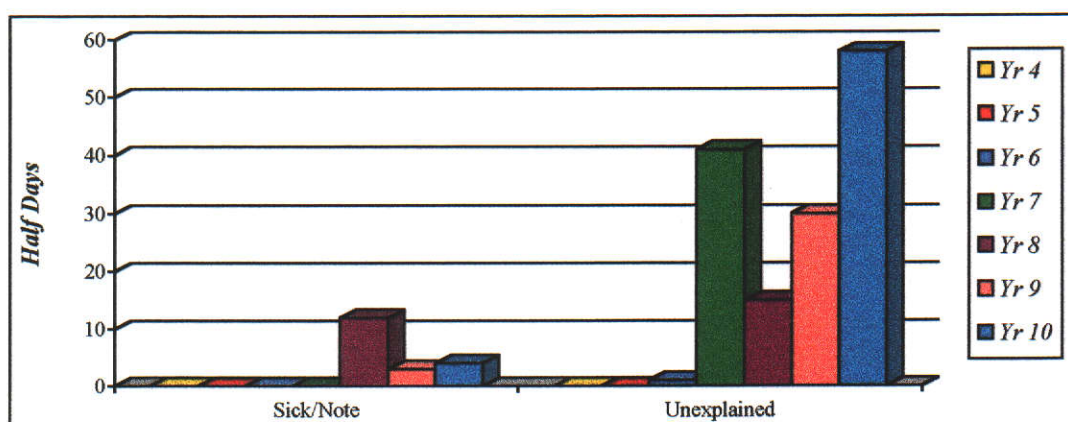
Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
	56	39	91	98	29	313

All of the grades were in the “C” and “D” range. The school would not recommend this student for enrolment in any tertiary subjects in years 11 and 12 due to the fact that there were no stage five or six units completed which include prerequisites for enrolment into year 11.

### Case Profile Eight – Student ID 68

Student #68 was ranked number eight in terms of the number of half day unexplained absences over the seven year period with a total of 164 half days. Figure 34 delineates the unexplained and explained absences and compares the totals over the seven-year period.

**Figure 34 . Explained and unexplained absences for student #68.**



The significant feature in this figure is the dramatic increase in unexplained absences in year seven, the drop in year eight and then the steady increase in years nine and 10.

This male student is Australian and was born in Australia. Both parents are also Australian and were born in Australia. He had no reported health problems that may have compounded the number of days absent. His primary school years were all spent at feeder school three. English is the main language spoken at home with the parents' occupations listed as unskilled.



Academically, student #68 had a significant proportion of “C”, “D” and “F” grades for the units completed throughout the three years of secondary school. A comparison of the total grades for the four core subject areas for the three years of compulsory secondary education is presented in Figure 35.

**Figure 35. Secondary school academic profile for student #68.**

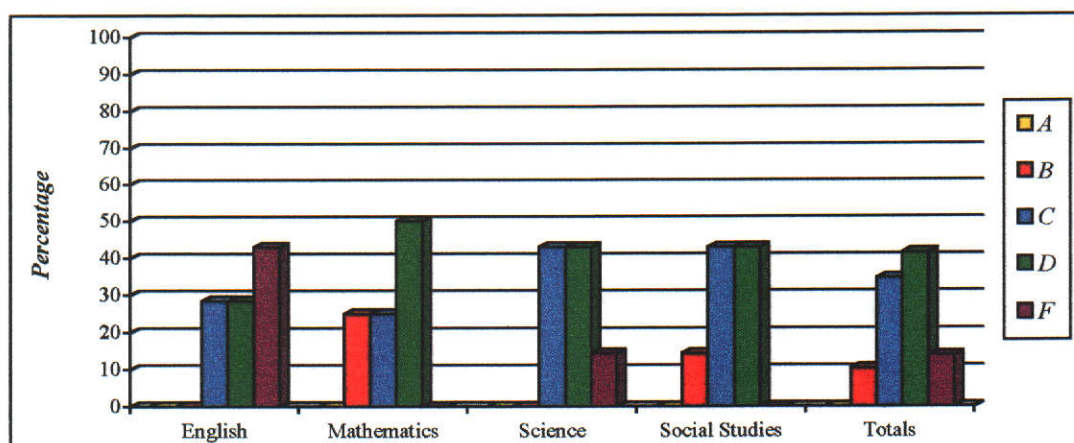


Table 51 takes a closer look at the number of units completed in each stage and reveals that student #68 had completed only 29 units which is less than the recommended range of 36-48 units.

**Table 51**  
**Comparison of Student #68 with Stages of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
60	5	9	11	7	7	1	40
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

Both the total number of units completed and the number of units completed in stages five and six were lower than the recommended amount. Table 52 compares the grades received by student #68 to the grades received by the other case study students.

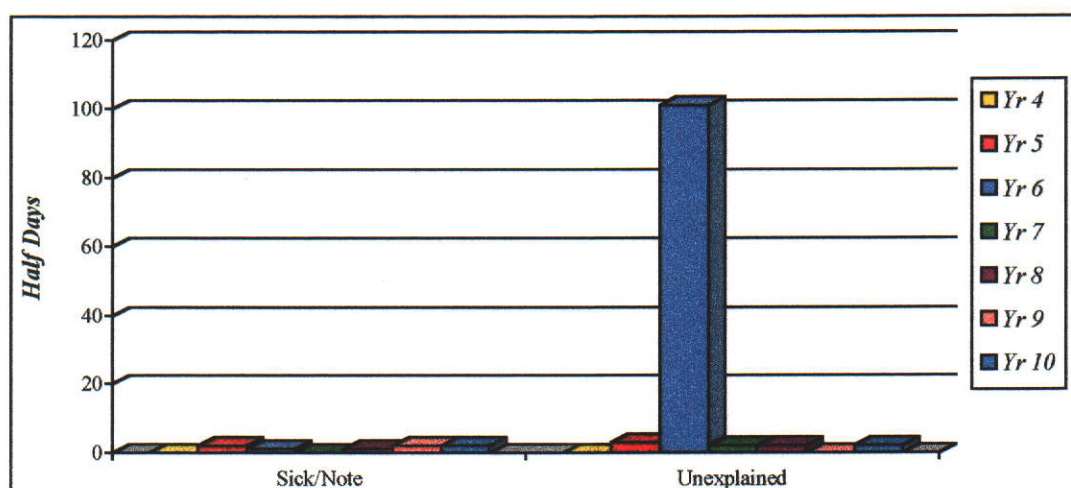
**Table 52**  
**Comparison of Student #68 with Grades of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
60	0	6	18	15	1	40
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
<b>68</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>29</b>
	56	39	91	98	29	313

Most of the grades were in the “C” to “F” range that may pose a problem for this student if he wants to enrol in years 11 and 12.

### Case Profile Nine – Student ID 60

Student #60 was ranked number nine in terms of the number of half day unexplained absences over the seven year period with a total of 118 half days. Figure 36 delineates the unexplained and explained absences and compares the total over the seven year period.

**Figure 36.** Explained and unexplained absences for student #60.

The significant feature in this figure is the substantial number of unexplained absences in year six.

This male student is Australian and was born in Australia. Both parents are also Australian and were born in Australia. He had no reported health problems that may have compounded the number of days absent. His primary school years were all spent at feeder school two. English is the main language spoken at home with the parents' occupations listed as semi-skilled.

This student's perception on 'wagging' and the amount of time he missed school was in direct contrast to the actual figures. When asked about wagging school this student stated:

*I don't 'wag' school ... I just don't want to get back on my work cause I want to have a good job ... or sort of thing ....*

Academically, student #60 appeared to be an average student with a greater proportion of "C" grades followed by "D" and "B" grades. A comparison of the total grades for the four core subject areas for the three years of compulsory secondary education is presented in Figure 37.



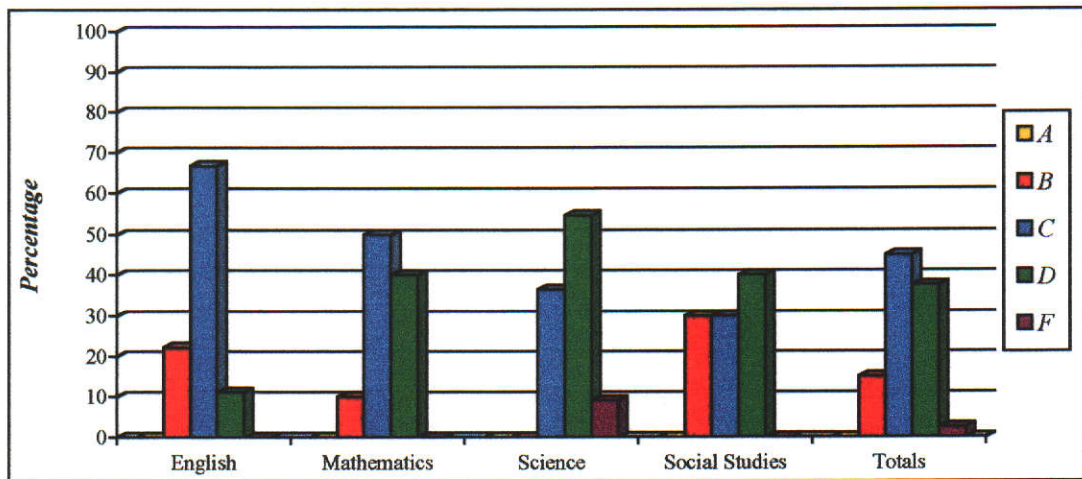
**Figure 37. Secondary school academic profile for student #60.**

Table 53 takes a closer look at the number of units completed in each stage. Student #60 completed a total of 40 units which was within the recommended range of 36-48 units.

**Table 53**  
**Comparison of Student #60 with Stages of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Stages – Core Subjects						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12	5	8	9	8	8	1	39
14	7	8	9	5	4	1	34
52	5	8	7	4	8	3	35
54	7	6	0	0	0	0	13
57	5	8	8	6	9	8	44
<b>60</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>40</b>
65	5	8	7	8	7	3	38
66	5	8	10	10	7	1	41
68	2	3	10	7	7	1	29
	46	65	71	55	57	19	313

While the overall total is within the recommended range, the number of units completed in stages five and six was less than the recommended amount. Table 54 compares the grades received by student #60 to the grades received by the other case study students.



**Table 54**  
**Comparison of Student # 60 with Grades of Other Students**

Student ID No.	Grades – Unit Curriculum Subjects					Total
	A	B	C	D	F	
12	2	9	10	12	6	39
14	0	0	2	19	13	34
52	10	8	10	5	2	35
54	0	0	2	11	0	13
57	44	0	0	0	0	44
<b>60</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>40</b>
65	0	2	22	12	2	38
66	0	11	17	12	1	41
68	0	3	10	12	4	29
	56	39	91	98	29	313

Most of the grades were in “C” to “D” range that would indicate that this student might experience some difficulty in the tertiary subjects in years 11 and 12.

#### 6.4 CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

Having isolated the nine students based on the total number of absences, a cross case analysis was undertaken to elucidate emerging issues, patterns and interrelationships. Table 55 summarises the key features of each of the case study students in terms of gender, culture/ethnicity, feeder school, and IQ.

**Table 55**  
**Characteristics of Case Study Students**

ID No	Rank for Unexplained Absences	Gender	Culture / Ethnicity	Feeder School	IQ
52	1	Female	Australian	5	Not available
14	2	Male	Aboriginal	3	4
57	3	Male	Australian	3	21
12	4	Female	Australian	3	15
65	5	Male	Vietnamese	2	Not available
68	6	Male	Australian	3	12
60	7	Male	Australian	1	5
66	8	Female	Australian	2	3
54	9	Female	Australian	3	Not available

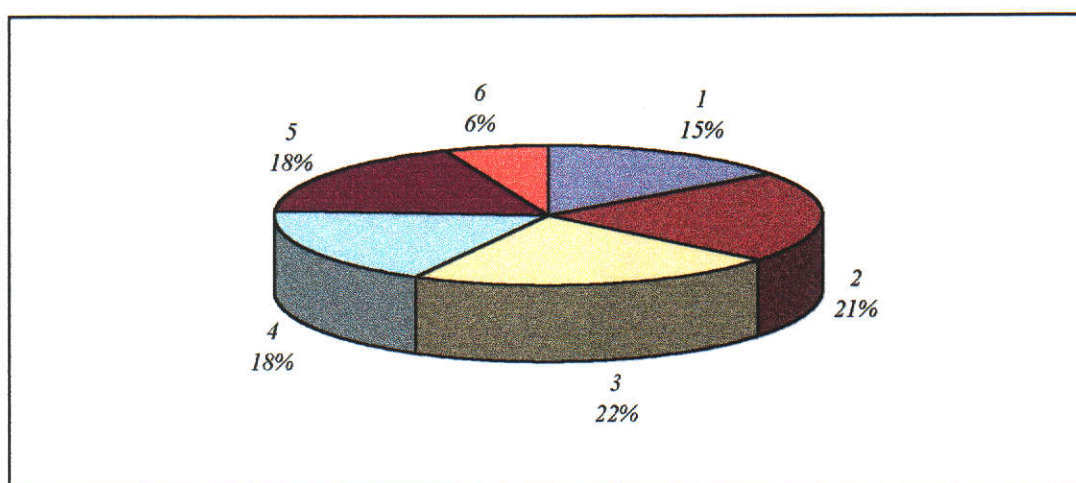
In terms of gender, the top student was a female closely followed by two males. Four females featured in total in the case study analysis with five males represented. There was an insufficient number of subjects, both female and male, from which to draw any conclusions.

In terms of the feeder primary schools, over half ( $n=5$ ) of the case study students completed their primary school years at feeder school three. Feeder schools one, two and five were represented by the remaining four students, with feeder school four not represented.

The IQ range was three to 21 with data for three of the students not available.

In terms of the students' academic ability, a number of combinations of units in stages one through six were identified. Figure 38 gives a composite view of the total number of units undertaken at each stage. The case-study students collectively completed approximately the recommend number of units for each of the stages one through five but completed less than the recommended number of units in stage six.

**Figure 38.** Stages completed by case study students.



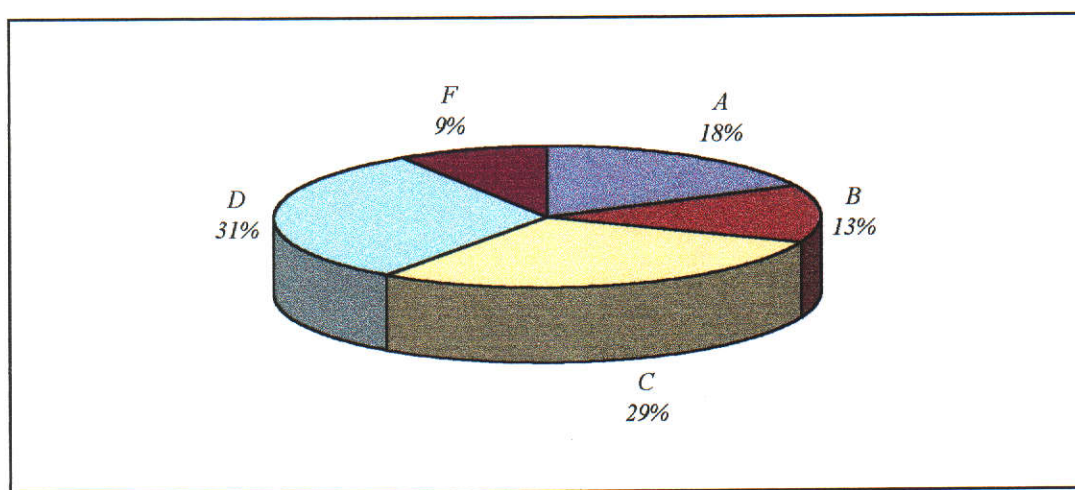
Of the total number of units completed, 6% were at the stage six level. As stages five and six are comprised of pre-requisite units for years 11 and 12, the case study students may experience difficulty in enrolling for tertiary subjects in years 11 and



12, and subsequently experience difficulty in successfully completing the subjects if enrolled.

Similarly, the case-study students collectively received a greater proportion of “C”, “D”, and “F” grades than “A” and “B” grades. Figure 39 highlights the percentages for each of the grades.

**Figure 39.** Grades for case study students.



A total of 40% of the grades were either a “D” or “F”. This does not signify a strong academic background from which to build in years 11 and 12.

A further analysis of the empirical data collected on the case-study students revealed that two of these students were suspended while at the secondary school: Student #14 was suspended in Year 8 for three days and Student #65 suspended in Year 10 for three days. The two students were suspended for different reasons.

These same two students and two other students from within the group were issued negative behaviour records in years eight, nine and 10 comprising 37 records for Student #14, six records for Student #65, one record for Student #60 and one record for Student #66. Two other students in the group of nine each received one positive record.

In viewing the cohort of 61 students, there were 39 different students who recorded a total of 197 behaviour records. Of these, only eight were positive. Of the 189

negative records for the cohort, the two students mentioned in the preceding paragraph, accounted for 43 of the total records.

## **6.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter highlighted a number of individual case studies in an attempt to develop a typical profile of a student ‘at risk’ of not completing the compulsory years of schooling.

All 61 students accumulated considerable absences in the seven year period of schooling utilised for this research with unexplained absences featuring not truancy.

The top nine ranked students based on 100 or more half-day unexplained absences were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview. Profiles were developed on each of the individual students. The nine profiles indicated that some of the students were academically strong across the four core subjects, there were no health problems evident to account for the absences, languages other than English spoken in the home and parents country of origin didn’t appear to influence the students’ attendance patterns.

Similarly, some of the students did not appear academically strong and hadn’t completed the required number of units in the appropriate stages to enrol in year 11.

A final cross analysis did not identify emerging issues, patterns or interrelationships. While numerous factors were identified and analysed, the individual students exhibited different combinations of factors except for one – they were all absent for a significant amount of time that still remains ‘unexplained’.

The task of establishing relationships between non-attendance and interrelated factors proved both difficult and almost impossible. The difficulty was embedded in the complexity of the phenomena non-attendance and the concept of the existence of a single cause-effect relationship. Any relationships must be viewed in terms of several interrelated variables that form a complex pictures of a number of profiles of

school non-attenders. No single profile emerged based on age, gender, culture, ethnicity, IQ, or parents background.

This complex issue will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 7 that discusses the findings of the research in the context of the case study school and its five feeder primary schools.

## **CHAPTER 7 - DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Research was conducted in detail to examine the scope of absenteeism and the possible factors contributing to this 'at risk' behaviour. Given the complexity of the research focus, a case study of a single school site was proposed and implemented. As stated by Miles and Huberman (1984b, p. 28), a case study is

... a bounded context in which one is studying events, process and outcomes. Note that a "case" could include a wide range of settings: a school, a program, a specific project, a network, a family, a community, and even behaviour of an individual over time in a specified environment.

Simply defined, the case study mode promotes an in-depth investigation of a single case to identify factors, and the relationship among the factors, that influence the situation. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) and Gay (1990) add to this definition by highlighting the importance of isolating factors within the case for further discussion.

The main findings of the research indicated that there were several categories of non-attendance with 'truancy' representing fewer students than traditionally assumed. The greater proportion of absences were identified either as 'parent condoned' or absences that were neither explained nor verified. Nine standard categories are used by the Education Department secondary schools and three standard categories by the primary schools to identify and record absences, that is, 'note', 'sick', or a blank which means unexplained. Six of the categories used in the secondary school, that is, 'note', 'late', 'sick', 'explained', 'withdrawn', and 'period absence' are employed to justify absences and the other categories, that is, 'unexplained', 'truant', and, 'investigating' are reserved for unjustified absences.

The unjustified absences, in particular the ‘unexplained’ category accounted for most of the absences.

## **7.2 SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE AND THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

As discussed in Chapter 4, the entire seven years of attendance data for the cohort of 61 students were analysed. Key factors associated with school attendances were accessed and analysed utilising reports written specifically for this research.

Analysis of the entire data revealed that students were absent from school for the equivalent of 8,172 half days which translates to 4,086 full days over the seven year period. This was approximately 584 days each year for the total cohort or approximately 10 days absent for each student in each of the seven years.

Based on these statistics, 10 days absent in the course of any given academic year would be acceptable according to the definitions posed in Chapter 2. However, the student ranked number one with reference to the total absences, on average, was absent from school 39 days in each of the seven years. With approximately 197 actual school days in any given school year (see Appendix 10), the 39 days represents approximately 20% of the school year that this student was absent from school.

The absences for the first 20 students ranked according to total number of days absent ranged from 39 days to 11 days each year. These figures contribute considerably to the statistics applied to the data.



### 7.2.1 Main Research Question

*What patterns of absence are evident in the analysis of attendance data of compulsory age students?*

The discussion of the findings reflects the emergent trends relating to gender, culture, ethnicity, types of absence, feeder primary schools, IQ, and the individual case studies.

#### **Gender**

The analysis of the school non-attendance data in relation to gender was undertaken and revealed no statistically significant differences between the male and female students. The male population accounted for 51% of the total absences. As the male population constituted approximately 47.5% of the total population, the absences in comparison to the population did not signify a relationship based on gender.

This was confirmed by the analysis of variance that indicated no significant difference between male and female absenteeism.

#### **Culture**

Two cultures are evident in schools throughout Australia – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. This separation is purely an administrative delineation to easily account for a variety of programs that are funded throughout the year. Australia is multi-cultural nation but the other cultures are not utilised when recording absences.

Although the non-Aboriginal population in this research comprised 97% of the total population and accounted for 90% of the total absences, a problem with reference to attendance within the Aboriginal culture was highlighted. The non-Aboriginal students were absent approximately nine days each in each of the seven years, or a total of 63 days across the seven year period while the two Aboriginal students were absent approximately 31 days each in each of the seven years, or a total of 217 days across the seven year period.

This was confirmed by the one-way analysis of variance undertaken to compare the two cultures. Hence, a cultural problem was evident with regard to absenteeism and must be kept in the context of this research and the sample population.

### **Ethnicity**

A further delineation of the cultures into ethnic groups revealed that approximately 11.5% of the cohort were Vietnamese. This information was ascertained from the enrolment details provided to the school and was included as part of the students demographic profile. The six Vietnamese students accounted for approximately 19% of the total absences for the seven-year period. On an individual basis, these students were absent approximately 10 days in each year or 63 days across the seven-year period.

The remaining 88.5% of the cohort indicated that they were Australian however, this may represent an over-estimation as some of the students who indicated ‘Australian’ on the enrolment form may come from homes where English is spoken as a second language and where one or more of the family members may have been born overseas.

Hence, the analysis of absenteeism by culture was not adequate and a further synthesis according to ethnicity is warranted and justified.

### **Types of Absence**

Four of the standard categories used by the Education Department secondary schools to identify and record absences were utilised in this research – ‘sick’, ‘note’, ‘unexplained’, and ‘truant’. The first two categories signify justified or acceptable absence while the latter two categories signify unjustified or unacceptable absences.

The unjustified or unacceptable absences accounted for approximately 43% of the total absences across the seven year period with 43% attributed to the ‘unexplained’ category and 0.01% attributed to the ‘truant’ category. The category ‘truant’ attracts most of the discussion centred on school non-attendance but, as represented by this

research, accounted for a very minor proportion of the overall absences. Time, energy and resources are allocated to monitor truants and the low absence figure may be the result of this effort. The same effort could be re-focused to reduce the overall unjustified absences.

A significant issue is the fact that the equivalent of 1,761.5 days absence was accumulated over the seven years and remains ‘unexplained’ as the absences are archived at the end of each school year and never cited in subsequent years. While this is the current procedure, it is not a particularly practical one from the point of monitoring students and utilising existing data for intervention purposes.

On the other hand, the justified absences should not be dismissed simply because they fell into the categories that signify a level of acceptance. An analysis of these categories indicated that the ‘sick’ category accounted for 35% and ‘note’ accounted for 21% of the total absences. The issue of acceptable and justified reasons in relationship to rates of absence was highlighted. The combined ‘sick’ and ‘note’ categories accounted for approximately 56% of the total absences that translates to 5.5 days absence, on average, for each student across the seven year period. Most of the absences were covered by a note explaining the reason for the absence and thus the question of the parent condoned, or sanctioned, absences emerged. Schools do not actively seek further clarification on justified absences. In light of this research, these absences should not be seen as a normal trend or pattern and allowed to continue and perpetuate themselves. However, acceptable reasons and a tolerable number of days absence are not currently denied by the school.

Overall, each category of absence must be thoroughly investigated. The categories have their own peculiarities and features that must be taken into consideration. An analysis of the reasons offered within each category, as well as the number of days absence recorded in each category, should continue to be the focal point in addressing school non-attendance.

### **Feeder Schools**

Five feeder schools featured in this study. Feeder school four stands out in the analysis of non-attendance records with no absences recorded for years four, five and six, and only one student absent for 36 half days in year seven. It appears that this feeder school implemented policies and procedures that encouraged students to attend school during the primary school years. This trend was significantly reversed in years eight to 10 where these same individuals displayed patterns of absence ranging from four to 78 half days absence in any given year. The absences include both justified and unjustified absences across the three years of compulsory secondary education.

The students within the other four feeder schools maintained or increased the number of half-day absences recorded in the primary school throughout years eight, nine and 10. A significant number of absences in the ‘unexplained’ category were recorded throughout the primary school years for these remaining feeder schools. There does not appear to have been as rigorous an attempt by these feeder schools as feeder school four to contain non-attendance behaviours in the primary school years.

### **Patterns of Non-Attendance Against IQ**

The study identified a correlation between IQ and year five unexplained absences, year five total absences and year seven unexplained absences. The overall patterns were largely due to two individual students. If these two students are removed from the sample, there is no correlation in any of the years against any of the absence types.

#### **7.2.2 Minor Research Questions**

*What are the characteristics of persistent absentees?*

The identification of the characteristics of the students defined as ‘at risk’ or ‘persistent absentees’ was a key factor in this research. The analysis of data for the cohort of 61 students, coupled with questionnaires completed by 51 of these students, and the development of nine individual case studies did not produce a

‘typical’ example. After intense analysis of non-attendance data against a number of variables including gender, feeder primary school, culture, ethnicity, health, birth place of the student, mother and father’s place of birth, mother and father’s occupation and the main language spoken in the home, we are no closer to the profile of students ‘at risk’ or who are ‘persistent non-attenders’.

The profiles of the 61 students included every demographic characteristic in a variety of individual combinations. In other words, the persistent absentee was represented by both males and females, featured in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures, had an ethnic bias towards the Vietnamese, may have been enrolled at any one of the feeder primary schools, with or without a medical history, and achieved grades ranging from “A” to “F” for units of study completed.

*What is the impact of non-attendance on the achievement of students?*

### **Academic Ability**

The impact of non-attendance on the achievement of students was a significant issue in this research.

Generally, students enrolled in Years 8 to 10 would be expected to complete between 36 and 48 units in the core subjects of English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. While the units are not directly aligned to the academic years, units in stages one and two are completed in year eight, units in stages three and four in year nine, and units in stages five and six in year 10. The flexibility of the unit curriculum in theory allows students to select pathways based on their ability and interest level and not be disadvantaged at the end of the compulsory years of schooling. In reality, however, if students do not complete the pre-requisite units in stages five and six, they will experience difficulty if they wish to pursue a tertiary pathway.

In this research, of the 2252 units completed by the cohort in years eight to 10, 13% were at the stage one level, 19% at stage two, 21 % at stage three, 18% at stage four,

20% at stage five and the remaining 9% at stage six. While the number of units completed in stage five is slightly higher than the recommended amount, the number of units completed at stage six was lower than the recommended amount.

Similarly, if we look at the grade distribution for the units in the core subjects we note that 17% of the units were awarded an “A”, and 22%, 34%, 21%, and 6% of the units respectively were awarded grades of “B”, “C”, “D”, and “F”. Of these grades, 73% are representative of “C” grade or better. This leaves a total of 27% of “D” and “F” grades that would not be considered as satisfactory to enrol into further post-compulsory education in the tertiary subject areas.

The figures for the cohort of the study were similar to the trends exhibited by the case study students. The nine case study students completed a total of 313 units in stages one through six with 46 (14.5%) units at stage one, 65 (21%) units at stage two, 71 (22.5%) units at stage three, 55 (17.5%) units at stage four, 57 (18%) units at stage five and only 19 (6%) units at stage six.

Similarly, if we look at the grade distribution for the case study students, 18% of the grades were an “A”, 13% a “B”, 29% a “C”, 31% a “D”, and 9% an “F”. With the proportion of C, D and F grades it highly probable that these students would experience some difficulty in the tertiary subject areas in the post-compulsory years.

The amount of time that the students were absent from school may have contributed to them not progressing to stage six units or completing the recommended amount of units in the three years of compulsory secondary schooling. Also, instead of the unit curriculum promoting pathways that directly correlate to pathways in the post-compulsory years of schooling, pathways appear fragmented with students undertaking more units in stage four or less than in stages five and six. In theory, unit curriculum was to allow students to progress at their own pace commensurate with their ability. However, the lack of self-paced materials and the difficulty of establishing timetable with different time allocations for different class groups, for example, academic extension versus low achievers, meant that the theory was rarely

put into practice. Also, it was difficult to make time for students to complete units without “holding them back” or “failing them”.

A combination of factors, namely time absent from school and an inflexible curriculum, meant that many of the students in the cohort were not likely to pursue many, if any, tertiary subjects.

<i>What factors contribute to student's patterns of absence?</i>
--

A number of factors associated with the individual student, the family and the school contributed to the student's patterns of absence. The factors were highlighted in the student questionnaires and interviews.

The findings in relation to the questionnaire highlighted students' requests for greater relevance in the subjects taught, a greater understanding/empathy from their teachers and the school, and the offering of more activities that are perceived to be fun and interesting which generally translated to the students experiencing success or mastery.

Students choosing to absent themselves from school for considerable periods of time are ‘at risk’ of not completing their compulsory years of schooling and not attaining the necessary levels of competency. The lack of academic achievement, and loss of educational opportunities, further manifests itself in the broader community when these young people attempt to access further training, education or employment.

A total of 51 students completed the school attendance questionnaire with a complete analysis of the 27 items included in Appendix 9. The items included broad coverage of many issues related to the students' perceptions of their absences, reasons for the absences, activities while absent, preferred subjects, and future goals and aspirations. The 27 items were further sorted into eight categories with a discussion on each category presented below.



**Category One: Attitude To School**

**Items: 1, 2, 3**

This category highlighted the typical reasons students gave when questioned whether they like school, what makes school enjoyable and what they think is the most important part of school.

While 58% of the students indicated that they like coming to school, the reasons given in response to what made school enjoyable typically revolved around friendships and included statements such as “friends”, “friend, some classes”, “sport”, and “recess and lunch”.

The typical response given with reference to the most important part of school was “to get an education”. Almost 67% of the students offered a response that translated

into education being important within their context of schooling. The atypical response in this instance was the statement “enjoying it”.

Generally, this cohort liked coming to school, placed a high value on their friendships and admitted that education is an important part of their schooling.

**Category Two: Parental Expectations**

**Items: 10, 11**

Typically, most of the students (44 out of 51) indicated that their parents expected them to attend school. Quite surprisingly, 21 of these students also stated their parents know that they “wagged” school.

**Category Three: Wagging – General**

**Items: 4, 5, 6, 7**

Approximately 55% of the students admitted to having “wagged” school during the course of year 10. The typical responses included “once (or twice)” and “once every month” with the atypical responses featuring “every day”, “last days of term”, “quite a bit”, and “about three times”.

The favourite past times in lieu of attending school were cited as “going to the shops”, “being with friend”, or “staying at home” with 80% of the students stating they “wagged”. The response “anywhere but school” was synonymous with this cohort.

Approximately 27% of the students chose not to respond to the question “why do you ‘wag’ school? The typical responses given was “school is boring”.

Approximately 39% also chose not to respond to when they started ‘wagging’ with “Year 8”, “Year 9”, and “Year 10” the typical responses. The atypical responses were “Year 1”, “kindergarten”, and “a long time ago”. Most of the students indicated that they started wagging post primary school.

#### **Category Four: Wagging – Specific (ie. classes)**

**Items: 8, 9, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22**

Approximately 55% of the students indicated that they had not purposely “wagged” a class while 43% admitted to purposely wagging classes.

Approximately 39% declined to nominate the classes they wag with the remainder of the students offering both core and option subjects.

Approximately 58% also declined to give an answer to explain why they wag certain classes. Of the students who did answer, “it’s boring” and “I don’t want to do it” were typical responses while atypical responses included “don’t like the class”, “don’t like school”, and “too hard”.

#### **Category Five: Attitudes to School Subjects**

**Items: 14, 15**

The majority of the students, approximately 82%, thought that some classes were more important than others. The typical responses included “you may need them in the future” and “because they contribute more towards your education”. A variety

of atypical responses were offered including “you need them for knowledge”, “some classes are more important as they could affect your chosen career paths”, and “English is more important because you have to know how to spell.”

**Category Six: Perceptions of Best Subjects****Items: 16, 17**

Students’ perceptions on the best subjects featured both the core and option subjects. The option subjects are typically offered more than the core subjects with some student suggesting a combination of core and option subjects.

Typically, the reasons given to substantiate their claims included “fun”, “teachers make it enjoyable” and “they are practical”.

**Category Seven: Perceptions of Least Preferred Subjects****Items: 18, 19**

Approximately 70% of the students voiced their dislike of the core subjects with the most typical reasons given “it’s boring”, followed by “boring and hard, easy to lose concentration”, and “because of the teacher and it’s boring”.

**Category Eight: Future Goals/Aspirations****Items: 23, 24, 25, 26, 27**

The majority of the students, approximately 69%, agreed that “wagging” school would affect their results and typical statement “miss out on work/information” given as the consequence.

The responses from the students who didn’t think school would affect their results included “you don’t do much anyway”, “I am a fast learner and can catch up”, and “I don’t wag enough to miss out on much work”.

Typically, 75% of the cohort stated their intention to complete Year 12 with the remaining 25% stating they would look for a job or secure an apprenticeship.

Approximately 22% of the students did not respond when asked about their future goals with approximately 14% stating that they wanted to go to university. The remaining students stated future goals that included a variety of vocational course and careers in the defence forces.

The majority of the students (78%) agreed that school could help them achieve their goals with the typical responses on how being “to educate/teach me” and “learn what you need”.

*What is the nature of school policies/interventions to address the issue of absenteeism?*

Procedures are in place to monitor attendance, counsel students and liaise with parents, however, the school non-attendance accounting procedures have exhibited minimal success in reducing the figures. The school at the focus of this research acknowledged the existence of an attendance problem and requested clarification on the magnitude and nature and extent of the phenomena. Although staff and additional resources have in the past been allocated to monitor school non-attendance, the ‘unexplained’ absences signify that a review of the allocation of the resources assigned to this task be undertaken. Procedures and initiatives are constantly activated in the school to address the non-attendance issue but the sheer volume of absences causes difficulties in the distribution of resources. Everyday a student is absent from school may realistically take several days to explain. Generally, resources in the school do not allow for this time factor.

School policies and procedures are guided by the Education Act, Education Regulations and Education Department of Western Australia Policy on the Process for Recording/Tracking Absences dated 1 January 1901 which states:

### **Rationale**

Schools are responsible for developing strategies and processes regarding student absentees.

### **Policy**

The principal must:

- Ensure class rolls are adequately marked.
- Notify parents/guardians of any unexplained absences by sending out absentee notes recording the dates and times of absences.
- Collect notes from parents/guardians and doctors' certificates (where appropriate).
- Notify school welfare officer if concerned about ongoing absences.

### **Reference**

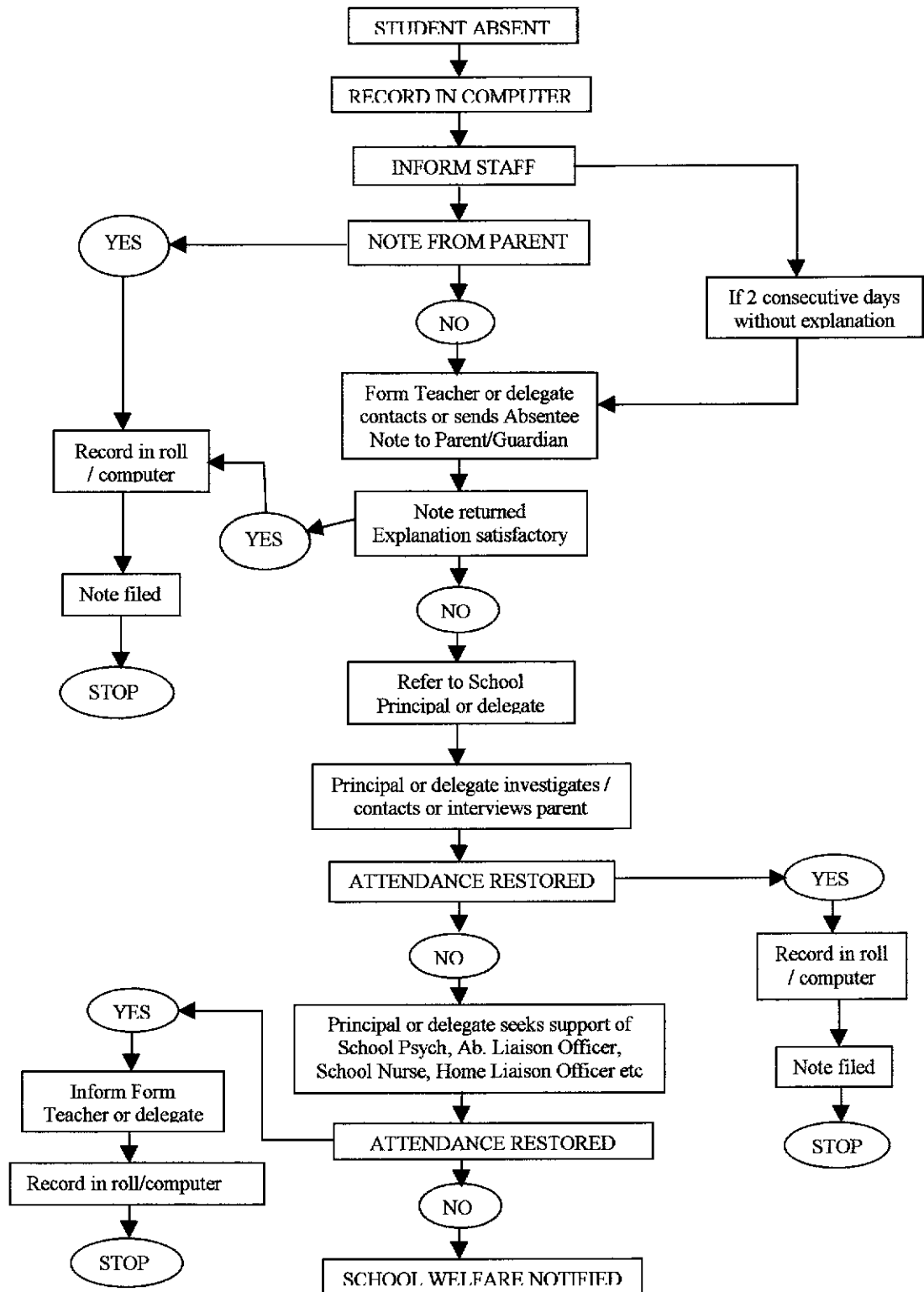
Process for Recording/Tracking Absentees.

(Education Department of Western Australia Policy Guide, 1996, SA015)

The date of this policy should be highlighted, that is, 1 January 1901. Almost a century later, schools are guided by this policy. The rationale of 1901 has not changed significantly. Schools are responsible for developing strategies and processes regarding student absenteeism and the principal must ensure that all procedures are implemented, monitored and reviewed. Figure 40 outlines the attendance procedure used by the secondary school at the centre of this research.

### 7.3 SECONDARY SCHOOL POLICY

**Figure 40. Secondary school attendance procedure.**



The secondary school attendance procedure is very clear and succinct with specific steps to be followed with regard to students who absent themselves from school. Every teacher in the school is given a copy of the procedure and is expected to implement and reinforce the procedure in their day-to-day contact with the students.

To support the teachers, a Staff Information Book is updated and published each year with supporting literature and forms to monitor and account for student absences.

The relevant pages have been extracted from the secondary school 1995 Staff Information Book (pp. 10 – 15) and included as appendix 11. The extracted pages include information on:

- Attendance procedures 1995;
- Students signing in;
- Students signing out;
- Form teacher's role;
- Roll amendment;
- Compulsory attendance
- Special exemption;
- Truancy; and
- Absences.

With such comprehensive procedures and documents, the unexplained student absences are extremely high.

The information provided to teachers regarding their responsibility in monitoring non-attendance and then following up the non-attendance behaviour as outlined in the Staff Information Book clearly states that the Form Teacher is pivotal to the whole attendance issue in this school. With the extreme number of half-day absences in the unexplained category, one would question the effectiveness of the



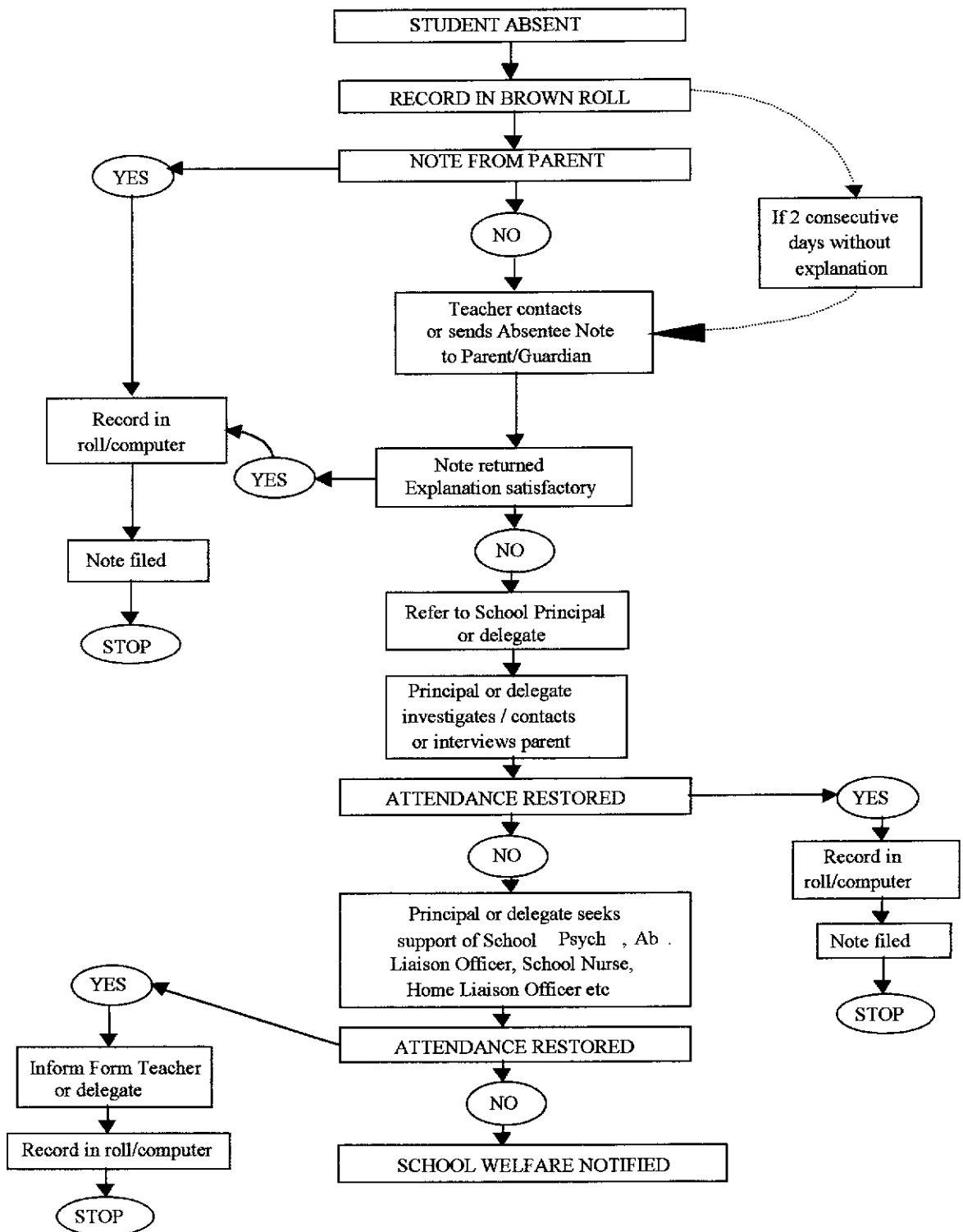
procedures, and the time taken, and importance placed on, secondary school attendance procedures.

The Staff Information Book also cites the Education Act and supplements this with information on special exemption, truancy and absences.

The feeder primary school attendance procedure is very similar to the secondary school attendance procedure. The main significant difference is the person pivotal in the adherence of the attendance procedure. In the secondary school the form teacher or delegate is the pivotal person whereas in the primary school the classroom teacher has the responsibility of monitoring school attendance. Figure 41 outlines the primary school attendance procedure.

#### 7.4 FEEDER PRIMARY SCHOOLS POLICY

**Figure 41. Primary school attendance procedure .**



The monitoring and recording of non-attendance is guided by the information in the standard 'Register of Attendance' used by all Government primary schools in Western Australia. The information details directions on the procedure for

monitoring and recording absences on a daily, weekly and end of term basis. The following information was extracted from the 'Register of Attendance'.

### **DIRECTIONS TO TEACHERS**

#### **Daily**

1. *Students' attendance must be verified at least twice daily - at least once during the morning session and at least once during the afternoon session.*

*Regulation 9 of the Education Act Regulations states that 'a continuous attendance by a child of not less than two full hours secular instruction shall be reckoned as half a day's attendance'.*

2. *Morning and afternoon attendance marks are not required. Record absences by writing the letter 'a' in the appropriate half-day column.*
3. *When an absence has been recorded and the student arrives later during the morning or afternoon session, place the letter 'l' above the letter 'a' in the appropriate half-day column.*
4. *When an absence has been recorded, and it is ascertained that this was due to sickness, place the letter 's' above the letter 'a' in the appropriate half-day column. When an absence has been recorded, and the reason for it is confirmed in writing by the student's parent or guardian, place the letter 'n' above the letter 'a' in the appropriate half-day column.*
5. *Do not record a student participating in a school-approved activity as being absent.*
6. *To indicate the date on which a student enters the class after the start of term, rule a line from the column representing the first week of the term to the column representing the date immediately before the student's entry to the class.*
7. *To indicate the date on which a student ceases to belong to the class, rule a line from the column representing the date immediately after the student's last day of attendance to the end of the column representing the last week of the term. Rule a thin line through the student's name and address.*

#### **Weekly**

1. *Enter the number of students entering and leaving the class during the week.*
2. *Enter the total number of students in the class at the end of the week.*

#### **At the End of Each Term**

1. *Enter the total half-day absences for each student in the appropriate column.*
2. *Sign the appropriate page of the Register.*
3. *Forward the Register to the school principal, who must initial the roll page.*

### **GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

1. *Do not write in this Register of Attendance in pencil.*
2. *Do not use erasers or correcting fluids. If you have to make a correction, draw a line through the incorrect entry and write the correct entry above it or in the margin. You must initial and date all corrections.*
3. *Where appropriate, keep Year levels separate and provide adequate space for new admissions.*
4. *You must complete all appropriate columns in the Register of Attendance. Where necessary, insert dates. Review students' addresses frequently and alter entries if necessary.*
5. *Principals must ensure that Registers of Attendance and school records are prepared neatly, fully and accurately and that cases of unsatisfactory attendance are followed up regularly.*
6. *All completed Registers of Attendance must be retained for six years from the last date to which they refer.*

### **ABSENTEES**

1. *If a student is absent for any reason, the class teacher must be satisfied that the explanation given is genuine.*
2. *If no written explanation for an absence is received from the student's parent or guardian, an absentee note must be given to the student by the class teacher.*
3. *If the absentee note is not completed and returned on the day following its dispatch to the parent or guardian, the matter must be reported to the school principal.*
4. *If a student is absent for two consecutive days without an explanation, an absentee note must be forwarded immediately to the parent or guardian.*
5. *If the absentee note or other adequate written explanation is not received within seven days of its dispatch to the parent or guardian, the matter must be referred to the school principal.*
6. *If, after making thorough enquiries, the school principal either has received no explanation for the student's absence or is not satisfied that the explanation supplied is genuine, the matter must be reported to the School Welfare Section, Education Department of Western Australia.*
7. *Written explanations from parents or guardians must, if not dated, be so marked by the class teacher, specifying the precise date of receipt.*
8. *Written explanations and medical certificates relating to each Register of Attendance must be filed in the order of date of receipt and retained in the school for at least six months after the end of the school year to which the Register refers.*

A considerable amount of absences remain unexplained even though primary school teachers are presented with clear and succinct guidelines.

### **7.5 HOW EFFECTIVE ARE SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON ABSENTEEISM?**

The effectiveness of school policies and practices is guided by the statutory requirements of schools whereby schools are required to monitor attendance at least twice per day, follow through on unexplained absences, contact parents/guardians regarding reasons for absence, report significant, continued or chronic absence to the Student Welfare Officer and if necessary, initiate legal proceedings.

More specifically, when truancy or non-attendance becomes a concern for a school, the principal should implement a school-level response involving the student and the student's family. The parents/guardians are to be advised of their legal obligations (in a manner and language which can be understood by them) to ensure school attendance. The school should develop and implement strategies that ensure the curriculum is relevant, culturally inclusive and focused on students achieving success. The school should implement individual learning programs that support truants, non-attenders and juvenile offenders in their re-entry to normal schooling.

Using this study as a reference group it would appear that no amount of school policies and practices curbed students' school non-attendance behaviour. In fact, the non-attendance behaviour, in particular the unexplained absences, steadily increased from Year 4 through to Year 10. Some of the students in the cohort were absent for

a period one year or more out of the seven years used in this research. This period of time is significant in terms of the educational opportunities missed. The opportunities missed can never be replaced. The system has recorded the absences but apparently has not accounted for them or attempted to rectify the situation. The students have not maximised their time during the compulsory years of schooling and the system has appeared to do little during their seven years to identify, monitor and/or intervene.

## **7.6 SUMMARY**

A case study approach was applied to a single school site to examine absenteeism and possible factors contributing to 'at risk' behaviour.

In relation to the main research question, there were no significant trends in relation to gender while culture, ethnicity, types of absences, feeder schools and IQ indicated significant relationships in a number of combinations.

It has not been possible to develop a single profile of students deemed 'at risk'. They may be male or female, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, come from any one of a number of ethnic backgrounds, be academically strong or weak, and from any one of the five feeder primary schools.

While policies and procedures are in place for the recording, monitoring and management of absences, the effectiveness of such policies and guidelines are questionable. Students were absent a significant period of time with little or no follow up by the schools or the system.

These research findings provide a stimulus for further research in Western Australia to address the nature and extent of school non-attendance across the State, in both the primary and secondary school. Also, the development of early identification and intervention programs, the assessment of current practices, a detailed examination of attendance policies and the provision of appropriate and relevant resources are long over due.

Chapter 8 provides recommendations for addressing the school non-attendance issues at the system and school level.

## **CHAPTER 8 – ACTION STATEMENTS**

### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

Truancy and school non-attendance have been a perennial issue and international problem for school systems throughout history. The terms and associated issues are not new phenomena.

Research outlined in the preceding chapters highlighted the multi-causal nature of the absenteeism issue. The issue and its subsequent problems command early identification and intervention. As stated by Eaton (1979), Estcourt (1986) and Bell, Rosen and Dynlacht (1994) a multi-modal approach is critical to address the multi-causal nature of school non-attendance. This approach must combine the individual, the school and the family. In combining these critical factors, it is imperative to access the cause of the problem, identify individual needs of the student, and then establish programs accordingly.

The striking fact of this research was the sheer volume of student absences, in particular the unexplained absences that remain unexplained from one year to the next. The causes of absenteeism are immensely complex and the high absentee rates may be a response to inadequate or inappropriate curricula. Personal or social factors, or any number of other variables or combination of variables. While schools feature as a critical variable, they are limited in their power to effectively control and/or resource the phenomena of non-attendance.

The literature and subsequent research findings have clearly outlined that some of the policies and practices are both ineffective and outdated.



These policies and practices, set at the system and school levels, continue to allow the students to ‘wag’ a considerable proportion of school time with the major consequence resting with the individual student in that s/he may not complete Year 10 and be deemed not competent at the end of the compulsory years of schooling.

This was confirmed by Watkins (1992) who clearly stated that truancy and non-attendance are amongst the most worrying indicators in the school system.

The reconceptualisation of the function of schools and the school system and what they offer each individual is overdue. Policy and practice only form part of the picture - action is critical and must be implemented and demonstrated immediately. The system, the schools, the parents, the teachers and the students have wandered aimlessly for long enough. Without clear policies and practices that can easily and readily be put into action, the system will continue to fail the students.

## **8.2 ACTION STATEMENTS**

Chronic absenteeism is the combined responsibility of the students, their parents, the administration and the teachers. As stated by deJung and Duckworth in 1986,

Given that the negative consequences of continued irregular attendance can be shown, given that neither students nor parents are prepared to commit themselves to a pattern that inevitably leads to failure and non-graduation, and given that school staff (teachers, counsellors, and administrators) can provide encouragement and personalised concern and strategies, change-improved school attendance-should be an ordinary expectation. (pp. 52-53)

Hence, the following action statements are offered at the system and school levels for immediate consideration, endorsement and implementation.

### **8.2.1 System Level**

The Education Department of Western Australia in this context is the system level and should be proactive in the implementation of strategies to adequately address the issue of school non-attendance.

#### *Action Statement 1:*

Collect baseline data on the magnitude of the issue of school non-attendance and extent of absenteeism on a statewide basis.

#### *Action Statement 2:*

Identify and implement best practice models to enhance school attendance.

#### *Action Statement 3:*

Collect data utilising improved systems in schools and districts to reflect improved practice in relation to the aggregation and analysis of issues surrounding non-attending students.

#### *Action Statement 4:*

Establish and implement a consistent district-wide/state-wide attendance reporting system.

#### *Action Statement 5:*

Identify models of good practice throughout Western Australia which encourage and maintain continuity in education for each student.

### **8.2.2 School Level**

Schools already have access to a state-wide computer-based absentee and suspension program known locally as the MAZE system which can allow for system-wide monitoring of relevant attendance data.

*Action Statement 6:*

Develop and implement consistent format and procedures for recording and reporting on absences in the classroom and entering onto computerised system.

*Action Statement 7:*

Provide counselling and support mechanisms within schools, when necessary, or apply sanctions from the Education Act if necessary, in relation to school non-attendance.

*Action Statement 8:*

Follow up each student currently enrolled but not attending as a means of intervening in the early stages.

*Action Statement 9:*

Revise the teaching-learning process and match appropriate teaching styles with chronic absentees learning needs and design strategies to ensure the curriculum is relevant, culturally inclusive and focussed on student achieving success.

*Action Statement 10:*

Investigate flexible and creative timetabling with respect to encouraging school attendance.

*Action Statement 11:*

Offer broader curriculum in lower school including an introduction to vocational education and training opportunities.

*Action Statement 12:*

Identify and monitor persistent and chronic attenders in both primary and secondary schools.

*Action Statement 13:*

Download and analyse data at the end of each month as part of the monitoring and review process.

*Action Statement 14:*

Employ staff, teachers or welfare officers, to focus entirely on attendance monitoring and the process of follow up.

*Action Statement 15:*

Establish effective on-campus, and where required off-campus, programs as part of the responsibility to every student.

*Action Statement 16:*

Develop structures and materials in schools and the promotion of attendance initiatives within the community.

*Action Statement 17:*

Assign chronic absentees to courses with appropriate difficulty levels.

*Action Statement 18:*

Implement immediate consequences and follow up.

*Action Statement 19:*

Review curriculum, pastoral care, teacher attitudes, teacher-student relationships and home-school relationships.

*Action Statement 20:*

Inform parents of student's unexcused absences on the day of occurrence.

*Action Statement 21:*

Provide incentives to encourage regular attendance/positive feedback to students and parents.

*Action Statement 22:*

Reduce alternatives to regularly attending classes by increasing school activities including extra-curricula activities, clubs, interest groups, and other activities.

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***APPENDIX 1:***

***Student Information Form  
(sides 1 & 2)***

## STUDENT INFORMATION FORM

*(Complete Both Sides)***OFFICE USE ONLY**

NAMES OF BROTHERS OR  
SISTERS ATTENDING THIS  
SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

Student Key \_\_\_\_\_

Family Key \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT DETAILS**

LEGAL SURNAME \_\_\_\_\_

SEA No. \_\_\_\_\_

GIVEN NAME 1 \_\_\_\_\_

TAG \_\_\_\_\_

GIVEN NAME 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Academic Year \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER INITIALS \_\_\_\_\_

Form \_\_\_\_\_

PREFERRED GIVEN NAME \_\_\_\_\_

House \_\_\_\_\_

GENDER *(please tick)*MALE ☐FEMALE ☐**Enrolment Status**  
*(please tick)*

BIRTH DATE

\_\_\_\_\_ day \_\_\_\_\_ month \_\_\_\_\_ year

Full Time ☐Part Time ☐

COUNTRY OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

Birth certificate sighted:

NATIONALITY \_\_\_\_\_

Yes ☐ No ☐

Expected Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_

NON-ENGLISH

Aboriginal:

SPEAKING BACKGROUND \_\_\_\_\_

Yes ☐ No ☐

Start Cohort: \_\_\_\_\_

RELIGION \_\_\_\_\_

Date Left: \_\_\_\_\_

PERMANENT RESIDENT  
IN AUSTRALIA *(please tick)*YES ☐NO ☐

Visa Sighted:

Yes ☐ No ☐

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF ARRIVAL IN  
AUSTRALIA IF BORN  
OVERSEAS \_\_\_\_\_

LAST SCHOOL ATTENDED \_\_\_\_\_

PREVIOUS SCHOOL *(if any)* \_\_\_\_\_

ARE YOU ON

AUSTUDY / ABSTUDY?

YES ☐NO ☐ Registration No. \_\_\_\_\_

Client ID. \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT TERM ADDRESS****COMMENTS:**

NUMBER / STREET \_\_\_\_\_

SUBURB AND POSTCODE \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT MEDICAL PROBLEMS**

CONDITION 1 \_\_\_\_\_

CONDITION 2 \_\_\_\_\_

CONDITION 3 \_\_\_\_\_

DOCTOR'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_



**FAMILY DETAILS**

FAMILY SURNAME \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER / STREET \_\_\_\_\_

SUBURB AND POSTCODE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE FOR MAILING

*(eg. Mr & Mrs K Smith)* \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER / STREET \_\_\_\_\_

SUBURB AND POSTCODE \_\_\_\_\_

MOTHER'S SURNAME \_\_\_\_\_

GIVEN NAME \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTRY OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION \_\_\_\_\_

WORK PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

FATHER'S SURNAME \_\_\_\_\_

GIVEN NAME \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTRY OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION \_\_\_\_\_

WORK PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

MAIN LANGUAGE

SPOKEN AT HOME \_\_\_\_\_

LANGUAGE OTHER THAN  
ENGLISH SPOKEN AT HOME \_\_\_\_\_

EMERGENCY CONTACT

OTHER THAN PARENT

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

RELATIONSHIP: \_\_\_\_\_

HEALTH BENEFIT CARD *(please tick)*Yes ☐No ☐

I CERTIFY THE INFORMATION IS CORRECT AND AUTHORISE THE  
SCHOOL TO CALL AN AMBULANCE IN THE CASE OF AN EMERGENCY.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

*Parent / Guardian*

***APPENDIX 2:***

***Class Roll***

TERM 1 SEMESTER 1										Class Roll for Term ending																			
No.	Name (Surname first)	Date of Birth	Year Group	Relig. Den.	Week ending Friday			Week ending Friday			Week ending Friday			No. of ½ Days Absent	No.	Address	Phone Number												
					M	T	W	T	F	S	M	T	W					T	F	S									
1															1														
2															2														
3															3														
4															4														
5															5														
6															6														
7															7														
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28															28														
29															29														
30															30														
					Admitted																								
					Left																								
					Class Total																								
										Principal										Class Teacher									

***APPENDIX 3:***

***Policy on Research in Government Schools***

**Note: For copyright reasons Appendix 3 has not been reproduced.**

**(Co-ordinator, ADT Project (Retrospective), Curtin University of Technology,  
8.1.03)**

***APPENDIX 4:***

***Yearly Total of Absences Sheet***

100

[illegible]

## ***APPENDIX 5:***

### ***Questionnaire***

Dear Staff

**Re: School Attendance Research**

The student questionnaires are a vital part of the research I am undertaking toward a PhD at Curtin University of Technology. I would appreciate your assistance in the administration of the questionnaires to the sample of students identified from the current Year 10 cohort.

The students were selected based on two criteria:

1. they completed years 4 to 7 at one of the contributory feeder primary schools; and
2. complete attendance records were available for their school attendance from years 4 to 7.

As the questionnaire is anonymous please encourage the students to be totally open in their responses. A covering letter is enclosed with the questionnaire that explains to the students the purpose of this study.

The students are to complete the questionnaires today and seal them in the enclosed envelopes that are addressed to me. Please send the envelopes to [insert teacher's name] office at the end of form. I will be available during form if you or the students require any assistance or clarification.

Students not present in form today should complete the questionnaire at the next most convenient time. These questionnaires should be forwarded to [insert teacher's name].

Thank you for your time.

**IRENE IOANNAKIS**

**PhD Student – Curtin University of Technology**

30 November 1995

Dear Student

The following questions are designed to help us understand why some students choose to 'wag' school and not attend certain classes, or the whole day.

There are no right or wrong answers. Your honesty is what is important.

The reason you have been selected is that you attended one of the feeder primary schools and we have all of your attendance records for the past seven years.

The questionnaire is confidential - please do not place your name on any of the pages. The information will be used for my research only.

Some of the questions are simply a 'yes' or 'no' answer while the others ask for a written answer. Please write all your answers on the questionnaire.

I look forward to your help in this worthwhile project.

Yours faithfully,

**IRENE IOANNAKIS**  
**PhD Student - Curtin University of Technology**

30 November 1995



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**STUDENT ATTENDANCE QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Do you like coming to school? yes no

2. What makes school enjoyable for you?

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3. What do you think is the most important part of school?

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4. Have you 'wagged' school at any stage this year? yes no

If so, how often?

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5. When you 'wag' school, what do you do? Where do you go?

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6. Do you 'wag' school with your friends? yes no

7. Why do you 'wag' school?

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8. When did you start 'wagging' school?

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9. Do you parents know you 'wag' school? yes no

10. Do your parents expect you to attend school? yes no

11. Do you think 'wagging' school will affect your school results? yes no

Why?

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12. Do you think some classes are more important than others? yes no

If so, what makes them more important?

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13. What subjects do you enjoy the most?

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Why?

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14. What subjects do you enjoy the least?

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Why?

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15. Have you ever purposely 'wagged' a class? yes    no

16. Which classes do you 'wag'?

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Why?

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17. Do you intend to complete Year 12? yes    no

If not, what will you do?

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18. What are your future goals?

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19. Do you think school can help you achieve your goals? yes    no

If so, how?

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Thank you for your participation.

## APPENDIX 6:

### *Student Interviews*

#### Case Profile One

#### Student ID52

Researcher's Question / Statement	Student Response
If you wag school what do you do? Where do you go?	<i>Um . . . I just go to my friends house. I just do normal things.</i>
Such as . . . can you give me an example?	<i>Go to the shops to see my friends.</i>
Do you go into town?	<i>Yes - sometimes.</i>
Do you wag school with your friends or do you go off and do things on your own?	<i>I go with my friends - never by myself.</i>
Never by yourself?	<i>No.</i>
Friends from this school or other schools?	<i>This school.</i>
Why do you wag school?	<i>I don't know . . . class is boring.</i>
What makes it boring? Tell me about boring - I don't understand boring.	<i>The work . . .</i>
Keep going.	<i>Um . . . like not boring but when the opportunity to go somewhere better that's happening at that time then I go there . . . better than to do Science . . . to go to town that's better than to do Science.</i>
OK. What makes it better? What makes you think when you head off for school in the morning - I've got Science I'll go to town instead?	<i>Because you don't have to sit there and you're not allowed to do anything you want to do and have your freedom if you're not at school.</i>
OK. So freedom is what - talk when you want?	<i>Yeah. Do exactly what you want in your personal time.</i>
Thank you.	
Next question - do you think wagging school will affect your results and why?	<i>Yes because you miss out on special information that you really need for exams and that kind of thing.</i>
And that doesn't stop you from wagging or do you think you only wag enough that won't affect your results?	<i>Well . . . I don't like wag every day . . . I only wagged once in six months something and not even for the whole day so it doesn't really . . . and it's normally not during classes which um are of great importance to my marks.</i>

Researcher's Question / Statement	Student Response
Which classes do you wag that are not of importance?	<i>Mm . . . the classes like art or cooking, or something like that. Classes like that don't go towards my future.</i>
Do you enjoy all of the other subjects or do you need the other subjects so you just go to them.	<i>I don't enjoy every subject. I don't really like maths or science so most of the time sometimes I don't go to them but if I need to go I go to them regardless.</i>
What does the school do when you wag?	<i>Mmm . . . I don't know . . . mark you absent. Just mark you absent . . . they . . . some if your parents don't know you are wagging then aren't aware of that then you get school suspension . . . or something like that . . . or I'm not sure.</i>
Does the school always find out when you wag?	<i>No. They never know.</i>
They never know?	<i>My mum knows sometimes.</i>
Does your mum write a note?	<i>No - but she knows.</i>
So how does the school not find out that you wag?	<i>I don't know. I'm not sure. They just don't but I don't think it's called wagging. I think it's just called skipping or absent. I just don't like wag the whole day so I don't really think it is relevant to it.</i>
So if you only wag part of the day you're only absent - you're not wagging is that right?	<i>What do you mean?</i>
What I mean by wagging is you just decide to go so you don't tell anybody at school, nobody at home knows that you're missing - you just take time off school.	<i>So what is it called when you tell people at school and you've already planned it?</i>
If you tell your friends, it's still wagging. You're not going to get out or it that easy. It is still wagging. If the school knows you're not coming in and your mum and dad know - for whatever reason - then you're absent from school. There is a difference - wagging really means that nobody knows and you don't go to school.	<i>So what if your mum gives you permission to go with your friends?</i>
Then, that's not wagging because your mum knows.	<i>OK.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
Does your mum let you stay away from school?	<i>No, not really.</i>
Your mum knows you stay away from school?	<i>Sometimes.</i>
How does your mum find out?	<i>I tell her.</i>
Why do you tell her?	<i>So she doesn't get angry if someone else tells her.</i>
What does your mum do when she finds out you haven't been to school?	<i>She gets angry.</i>
Is that all that happens?	<i>Yes.</i>
Is there anything else you would like to tell me about why you don't come to school?	<i>No.</i>
Thank you for answering my questions and being so honest.	<i>Thanks.</i>

**Case Profile Two**  
**Student ID14**

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
What do you do and where do you go?	<i>Go the basketball court.</i>
Just basketball - nothing else?	<i>Play pool.</i>
Do you wag school by yourself or with your friends?	<i>Friends.</i>
From this school?	<i>And other schools.</i>
Why do you wag school?	<i>Cause I don't like the teachers.</i>
You're talking to a teacher but that's alright. I really want to find out what it is that you don't like about the teachers. What is it about the teachers you don't like?	<i>They pick on me all the time.</i>
Any idea why they pick on you?	<i>Cause I keep disrupting the classes.</i>
Why do you disrupt classes?	<i>Cause it's fun.</i>
So class isn't fun unless it's disrupted?	<i>Yep.</i>
Are there any classes that are fun that you don't disrupt?	<i>Phys.Ed.</i>
OK. Why don't you disrupt Phys.Ed.?	<i>Cause you get to play sport.</i>
Is sport all you want to do?	<i>Football</i>
Football . . . and none of the other subjects you enjoy?	<i>No.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
Next question. Do you think wagging will affect your results and why?	<i>Yeah.</i>
But you still wag.	<i>Yeah.</i>
So if wagging affects your results and you still wag, what will happen at the end of the day?	<i>I'll fail.</i>
And then what happens when you fail?	<i>Nothing.</i>
Nothing? Is there anything you want to do at the end of school? What sort of things do you want to do as a career?	<i>Don't know.</i>
No idea.	<i>No.</i>
What does the school do when you wag?	<i>Don't know.</i>
Does the school find out when you wag?	<i>Yeah.</i>
Do they expel you or suspend you?	<i>They suspend me.</i>
OK - for how many days.	<i>Five.</i>
Did that stop you from wagging?	<i>No.</i>
Why not?	<i>Cause the cops have to catch you before they bring you back to the school.</i>
So you will continue to wag?	<i>No cause I'm not coming to school next year. I don't know if I'm coming back to school next year.</i>
What will you do?	<i>Work.</i>
Any idea where?	<i>No. I don't have a clue.</i>
Thank you for answering the questions. Good luck next year.	

### Case Profile Three

#### Student ID54

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
If you 'wag' school what do you do? Where do you go.	<i>I don't wag school.</i>
You have had quite a number of days away from school, what do you call this time away?	<i>I was sick.</i>
Yes, I can see that in Year 8 you were away a number of days due to sickness. What about all the days that you were away that you didn't bring a note.	<i>I don't know.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
Have you been away from school a lot – not including the days you were sick.	<i>Well .... kind of ...</i>
What does 'kind of' mean?	<i>I went to the shops a few times.</i>
What do you call this time away from school?	<i>I guess it's wagging .... but ...</i>
Keep going ....	<i>I only had a few days ....</i>
Do you 'wag' school with your friends?	<i>Sometimes.</i>
Why do you 'wag' school?	<i>I don't like it.</i>
Can you tell me what you don't like about school.	<i>It's boring.</i>
Explain boring to me.	<i>It's not fun ... you have to do the same thing over and over all the time.</i>
Is there anything about school that you like?	<i>Yeah ... my friends.</i>
Do you think 'wagging' school will affect your results? Why?	<i>No. I'm not coming back to school next year.</i>
Have you decided not to come back to school because your grades are not good enough.	<i>No. I just don't want to come back.</i>
Do you think that all the time you have had away from school has affected how well you are doing in your subjects?	<i>Maybe ... If I came to school more I ... well I don't know .... I guess I might have got better grades.</i>
Which classes do you 'wag'?	<i>Any of them.</i>
Are there some more than others?	<i>Depends how I feel .... I just decide ....</i>
What do you decide?	<i>Not to come to school.</i>
What does the school do when you 'wag'?	<i>Nothing.</i>
Does the school know that you 'wag'?	<i>No.</i>
Do your parents know that you 'wag'?	<i>No.</i>
What would your parents do if they found out?	<i>Are you going to tell them?</i>
No. This conversation is between you and me. Any of the information I use will not have your name with it – there will only be a number so that I know who you are.	<i>OK.</i>
So, going back to the last question, what would your parents do if they found out?	<i>Um . . . I don't want to get caught by my parents cause then I'd get busted.</i>
What would your parents do if they catch you?	<i>Um . . . not let me go out.</i>



<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b><i>Student Response</i></b>
Have your parents ever found out that you've 'wagged' school?	<i>No.</i>
Would you tell them?	<i>Get real .... No way.</i>
What are hoping to do next year?	<i>Get a job.</i>
Any idea where?	<i>No.</i>
Is there anything else you would like to tell me about 'wagging' and why you 'wag'?	<i>No.</i>
Thank you very much for your time. Good luck next year.	<i>Thanks.</i>

**Case Profile Four**  
**Student ID60**

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b><i>Student Response</i></b>
If you 'wag' school what do you do? Where do you go?	<i>I don't 'wag' school.</i>
You've said you don't wag school - can you tell me why you don't wag school?	<i>I just don't want to get back on my work cause I want to have a good job ... or sort of thing.</i>
Can you tell me about the days you have been away from school?	<i>I was sick.</i>
If you think back to Year 6 you had almost a whole term away from school without any explanation, and in Years 7 to 10 there have been a number of days also without explanations?	<i>I don't know.</i>
Have you taken time off from school for reasons other than being sick?	<i>Yeah.</i>
What did you do? Where did you go?	<i>Just around ... town .... Timezone ... that kind of stuff.</i>
Do you enjoy school.	<i>Sometimes it's fun ... seeing your friends and that ...</i>
Do you 'wag' school with your friend?	<i>Yes.</i>
Why do you 'wag' school?	<i>I don't know ... it's boring ....</i>
Can you explain boring to me?	<i>No fun ... I don't know .... I just don't like it.</i>
Do you think 'wagging' school will affect your results? Why?	<i>Yes. You miss out on important information.</i>
Anything else?	<i>You won't get the job you want.</i>
Which classes do you 'wag'?	<i>Mm ... Maths ... Science ... mainly ....</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
Why do you 'wag' these subjects?	<i>They're boring .... and ....</i>
Keep going.	<i>The teacher picks on me.</i>
Any idea why the teacher is picking on you?	<i>No ... they just push you to the limit then it doesn't make it enjoyable . . . just like . . . sometimes you just want to get away from it all.</i>
Anything else?	<i>No.</i>
What does the school do when you 'wag'?	<i>You get busted.</i>
What does busted mean?	<i>You get detention.</i>
How many days detention?	<i>May be three.</i>
Does the school always find out?	<i>No way.</i>
Why not?	<i>Don't know.</i>
Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about 'wagging' or your time at school.	<i>No.</i>
Thank you very much for your time. Good luck .	<i>Yeah.</i>

**Case Profile Five****Student ID12**

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
If you 'wag' school what do you do/? Where do you go?	<i>I don't 'wag' school.</i>
Why don't you wag?	<i>It's not because mum would bust me if she caught me but I just don't want to get back in my grades. I've got pretty bad grades and I have to pick them up as it is.</i>
You were away for a number of days in primary school due to illness. You were also away a number of days without explanation. Can you tell me why?	<i>I don't remember.</i>
Not a problem. What about the days you have been away from this school in the last three years?	<i>I was sick.</i>
There are a number of days that you were absent and didn't bring a note to explain them.	<i>I don't know.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
I'm not going to bust you. Can you tell me anything about the days you have been away?	<i>What do you want me to tell you?</i>
Did you 'wag' school?	<i>Yes ... I ...</i>
Was there something else you wanted to say?	<i>No.</i>
What do you do when you 'wag' school? Where do you go?	<i>Friends house .... Shops....</i>
Do you always 'wag' school with your friends?	<i>No.</i>
Why do you 'wag' school?	<i>Don't know. It's not fun and ... well ... the work is hard.</i>
Do you think 'wagging' will affect your results? Why?	<i>I have got very good grades.</i>
Do you think the times you have 'wagged' have affected your results?	<i>Maybe ... I guess so ...</i>
Which classes do you 'wag'?	<i>Depends what classes you've got. I just hate waking up in the morning.</i>
Do you have preferred subjects and teachers? If you do, what makes them better than the others?	<i>Um ... anything ... I like teachers who are understanding and they help you and they don't like ... cause there are some teachers, not to mention any names, some teachers that like push you too much who want you to go over the limit but you can't. .. and just I don't know. I just like any class that I can speak my own mind and not be bossed around too much.</i>
It sounds pretty important to have some say in classes.	<i>Yeah.</i>
Is it such a bad thing that teachers will push you too much?	<i>Yeah because they don't realise sometime when a person can't do it. They always want you to succeed but sometimes they just push it to the limit.</i>
That's a fair comment. Which subjects do you prefer?	<i>I like English and Science but Science sometimes is really hard ... but it's ... you know.. what I want to do.</i>
Terrific.	<i>I hate actual Science though I like the teacher ... so he makes it fun.</i>
What does the school do when you 'wag'?	<i>Nothing.</i>
Does the school know that you 'wag'?	<i>No.</i>
Are you sure?	<i>Yes.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b><i>Student Response</i></b>
The school has never found out that you have 'wagged' school?	<i>No.</i>
Is there anything else that you can think of that will help me with my work?	<i>No.</i>
Thank you very much for your time and all the best for the future.	<i>Thank you.</i>

**Case Profile Six****Student ID65**

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b><i>Student Response</i></b>
If you 'wag' school what do you do? Where do you go?	<i>I only 'wagged' in Year 8.</i>
Go back to Year 8 if you can because that's when you are telling me you wagged school. When you wagged school what did you do and where did you go?	<i>I use to go to my friends place and just do nothing . . . or sit and watch TV.</i>
Why did you stop wagging in Years 9 and 10?	<i>I realised that I had to come to school because I wasn't going to learn much . . . and that I needed the grades.</i>
Did you wag a lot in Year 8?	<i>All the time.</i>
Really.	<i>Yep.</i>
Did you family ever find out that you wagged school?	<i>They don't know.</i>
They don't know that you wagged?	<i>No.</i>
The school never told them?	<i>They didn't know . . . I use to forge notes.</i>
That was going to be my next question - how could the school not know? So to this day your family still don't know that you forged notes in Year 8?	<i>No. They don't know that I forged notes.</i>
Thank you for being so honest. What about the other days you wagged? How did you get around those?	<i>I was like . . . wouldn't give them notes . . . I'd only wag Fridays when we had Phys.Ed. cause I didn't like the teacher.</i>
What didn't you like about the teacher?	<i>I don't know . . . I just didn't like her . . . she was always like . . . really bossy.</i>
Apart from Phys.Ed why else did you wag in Year 8?	<i>I didn't like school.</i>
Why? Was it the subjects, friends, teachers?	<i>I had a lot of trouble with some boys. They were threatening me . . . they were going to bash me . . . I didn't want to come to school.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
How did you get around this problem? Did they stop threatening you?	<i>No. They kept threatening me but I just like stood up to them and they just backed down and then I started coming back to school.</i>
Good on you. That's terrific. So you realised back in Year 8 that you were missing a lot of school and decided to come back. Now that you are back at school are you enjoying it or are you here only because you have to be here?	<i>I'm enjoying it but sometimes I don't want to be here but . . . I have to be here.</i>
Are some subjects better than others?	<i>Um . . . like all the choice subjects.</i>
When you say choice subjects do you mean the options.	<i>Yeah . . . and all of the subjects except English and Social Studies.</i>
What about Maths and Science?	<i>They're alright.</i>
What is it about English and Social Studies you don't like?	<i>The teacher . . . she's like . . . I can't do anything . . . she's always like picking on me . . . if I talk to someone I get into trouble.</i>
What happens if other students talk in class?	<i>Nothing.</i>
Anything else about school, attending or wagging that you think may help me with my work?	<i>No.</i>
Looking at the number of days you have been away from school this year, the total is more than in Year 8. Do you realise that you have a number of days absence this year that are unexplained?	<i>A few ... maybe...</i>
Did you 'wag' ?	<i>Sometimes.....</i>
What does sometimes mean?	<i>I didn't think it was much ... not as much as in Year 8.</i>
You have been recorded absent for more days in Year 10 than Year 8. What did you do in this time?	<i>Go with my friends.</i>
Where do you go?	<i>The shops ... maybe the park ... and ...</i>
Anywhere else?	<i>No.</i>
Why are you still wagging school?	<i>It's boring .... Not fun ...hard....</i>
Do you think 'wagging' school has affected your results?	<i>Yes.</i>
Why?	<i>I don't have good grades.</i>
Anything else?	<i>I find it hard in some classes.</i>
Are you still forging notes.	<i>Sometimes.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
Does the school know?	<i>No. They never know.</i>
Is there anything else you can tell me to help me with my work?	<i>No.</i>
Thank you very much for your time and honesty. All the very best in the future.	<i>Yeah.</i>

**Case Profile Seven**  
**Student ID57**

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
Have you ever wagged school?	<i>Yes</i>
This year?	<i>No.</i>
Last year?	<i>Yes.</i>
So up until Year 9 you were still wagging?	<i>A little bit.</i>
What do you call a little bit?	<i>Just cutting school purposely . . . you know on the last day of school you always wag.</i>
What made you stop wagging school this year?	<i>The classes are more important . . . like if you miss on things it's hard to catch up . . . the works harder . . . if you miss some it catches up on you.</i>
What do you mean by catches up on you?	<i>Like you get behind and sometimes you may not even learn the work.</i>
When you were wagging last year did you take time off with friends or were you by yourself?	<i>By myself . . . I just slept in or whatever . . . sometimes I was late.</i>
Did you have half a day or a full day off any time that you purposely wagged?	<i>On the last day of school.</i>
What did you do?	<i>Went into town.</i>
Did your mum or dad ever find out that you didn't come to school?	<i>Um . . . yeah they did.</i>
Did they do anything about it?	<i>No it was the last day of school.</i>
What were some of the reasons you were wagging last year?	<i>I didn't like going to school . . . getting bored.</i>
Tell me about boring. What does boring mean?	<i>It means like you just don't want to do it . . . sometimes class work is tedious . . . repetitive.</i>
Did you ever think wagging would affect your school work?	<i>No.</i>
Have you changed your mind this year?	<i>Yeah.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
Which classes did you wag?	<i>Maths.</i>
Anything else?	<i>No. I can't remember.</i>
Why Maths?	<i>It was really boring and repetitive.</i>
Do you do well in Maths?	<i>Yeah.</i>
Did you ever ask about trying some harder work in class?	<i>No.</i>
What does this school do when students wag?	<i>Nothing.</i>
The time you had off last year did the school ever find out you were wagging?	<i>No.</i>
How did you get around the days you weren't here? Did mum or dad write a note? How come the school never found out?	<i>It's just when you sign in late you don't get into much trouble . . . you just say you slept in or something like that . . .</i>
How late can you be and still sign in late?	<i>Only about an hour.</i>
Has the school found out about any of your friends who wag school?	<i>Um . . . yeah.</i>
What does the school do?	<i>I don't know.</i>
If you could change things about this school to make it the best school what would you change?	<i>Nothing.</i>
What are your favourite subjects?	<i>Drama and Art and Science.</i>
Why these subjects? You have an interesting mix of subjects.	<i>I like Drama because it's a relaxed subject and I like Science because it is interesting.</i>
Which subjects don't you like?	<i>Um . . . Maths and Social Studies is boring sometimes.</i>
Are you doing well in your classes?	<i>Yeah.</i>
Give me an idea.	<i>In Maths we've just finished 6.3 and 6.4.</i>
How well did you do in these units?	<i>Um . . . As.</i>
Very good. Are you getting A's across all of the units?	<i>Yeah.</i>
I've just had another look at your attendance. It's improved dramatically from primary school to high school. Did you think you'd miss out if you wagged school.	<i>Yeah.</i>
Any influence from mum and dad.	<i>Yeah.</i>
What are you going to do when you finish high school?	<i>Go to Uni . . . study Engineering.</i>

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b><i>Student Response</i></b>
Excellent. Would you like to make any other comments about school, the subjects, teachers or wagging that might help me with my work?	<i>No.</i>
Thank you very much for talking to me. All the best next year.	

**Case Profile Eight**  
**Student ID66**

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b><i>Student Response</i></b>
If you 'wag' school what do you do? Where do you go?	<i>Sometimes I help my family ... sometimes I stay home.</i>
What do you mean you help your family?	<i>I help them at work ... in the shop.</i>
Tell me about the times you stay home.	<i>I don't go to school, I just stay home.</i>
Why do you stay home?	<i>Some girls in my class call me names.</i>
Is that the only reason.	<i>Yes. I don't like it.</i>
Do you think 'wagging' school will affect your results?	<i>Maybe .... my results are OK.</i>
Do you think your grades could be better if you didn't 'wag' school?	<i>Yes ... maybe ....</i>
Which classes do you 'wag'?	<i>Mainly Maths and Science.</i>
Why do you choose to 'wag' these subjects?	<i>They are hard ... and ...</i>
Is there another reason?	<i>The girls who call me names are in the classes.</i>
Do the teachers do anything when they call you names?	<i>They never hear.</i>
Is it a real problem for you?	<i>I try not to worry ... but it's difficult sometimes.</i>
What does the school do when you 'wag'?	<i>Nothing much ... they send a letter home ... something like that.</i>
Have your parents received a letter?	<i>Yes. I think so.</i>
What did they say or do?	<i>They were angry with me. They just talked to me.</i>
Does the school always find out that you have 'wagged'?	<i>No.</i>
Is there anything else that you can tell me that might help me with my work?	<i>No ... not really ...</i>
Thank you very much for your time.	<i>That's OK.</i>



**Case Profile Nine**  
**Student ID68**

<b>Researcher's Question / Statement</b>	<b>Student Response</b>
If you 'wag' school what do you do? Where do you go?	<i>I go to my friend's house.</i>
Anything else?	<i>The shops.</i>
Do you 'wag' school with your friends?	<i>Yes.</i>
Are your friends with you every time you 'wag' school?	<i>Yes.</i>
Why do you 'wag' school?	<i>It's boring.</i>
Why is it boring?	<i>Can't be bothered going.</i>
Is there any other reason or reasons why you 'wag' school?	<i>No.</i>
Do you think 'wagging' school will affect your results?	<i>Yes.</i>
Why?	<i>Miss out on work ... trouble catching up ... and ... that's it.</i>
Which classes do you 'wag'?	<i>All of them.</i>
Do you 'wag' some more than others?	<i>No ... they're all boring.</i>
What does the school do when you 'wag'?	<i>Nothing.</i>
You have 'wagged' quite a few days right through from year 7 to this year. Are you telling me that the school has done nothing about it?	<i>I got detention once .... And I think they phone your parents.</i>
What do you parents think about you 'wagging' school?	<i>They don't care.</i>
Do they know?	<i>Yeah.</i>
Your parents know you 'wag' school and they don't mind?	<i>They yell at me .... but .... that's it.</i>
Is there anything else you can tell me about the school and why you 'wag' school?	<i>No.</i>
Thank you very much for your time.	

## APPENDIX 7:

### *Additional Research Findings*

#### **GENDER**

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in absence rates based on gender in year nine against the combined categories of 'sick' and 'note'. The results as represented in Table 56 indicated a significant statistical difference at the 0.05 level between male and female absence rates. The female students average more days absence attributed to the categories 'sick' or 'note' than the male students. On average, the female population recorded approximately 26 half day absences in the 'legitimate' or 'acceptable' absence category. On the other hand, the male population recorded approximately 15 half days of absence in the same category.

**Table 56**  
**Comparison of Year 9 Combined Sick and Note Absences and Gender**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
GENDER	1	1494	1494	3.74	0.058
Error	59	23594	400		
Total	60	25089			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev		
1	29	15.74	14.89	(-----*-----)		
2	32	25.71	23.24	(-----*-----)		

Pooled StDev = 20.00				14.0	21.0	28.0
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A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in absence rates based on gender in year 10 against the combined categories of 'sick' and 'note'. The results as represented in Table 57 indicated a significant statistical difference at the 0.05 level between male and female absence rates.

The female students average significantly more days absence attributed to the categories 'sick' and 'note' than the male students. The female population, on average, was absent approximately 31 days and presented an acceptable reason for the absence which was defined as 'sick' or 'note'. The male population recorded 18 half day absences in this category.

**Table 57**  
**Comparison of Year 10 Combined Sick and Note Absences and Gender**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
GENDER	1	2418	2418	0.21	045
Error	59	33861	574		
Total	60	36280			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	29	18.00	16.22	(-----*-----)
2	32	30.68	28.62	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 23.96

## FEEDER PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The results of the one-way analysis of variance undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school rates in year four against the variable of 'sick' and 'note' combined are represented in Table 58 and indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 58**  
**Comparison of Year 4 Combined Sick and Note Absences and Feeder Schools**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	587.8	146.9	2.60	0.046
Error	56	3168.4	56.6		
Total	60	3756.2			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	9.250	12.892	(-----*-----)
2	18	2.278	3.392	(-----*-----)
3	17	4.647	7.407	(-----*-----)
4	11	0.000	0.000	(-----*-----)
5	3	6.667	11.547	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 7.522

Students in feeder school one on average are absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school one was absent nine half days in year four with the reason recorded as either 'sick' or 'note'. Each student in feeder school three accounted for four half days absence, in feeder school two students on average had two half days absence, in feeder school five students had approximately seven half days absence and in direct contrast students in feeder school four did not have any absences.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year four against the total absences. The results as represented in Table 59 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

Table 59

**Comparison of Year 4 Unexplained Absences and Feeder Schools**

Analysis of Variance on FOURA					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	3128	782	3.71	0.009
Error	56	11793	211		
Total	60	14921			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	14.50	13.38	(-----*-----)
2	18	6.83	7.16	(-----*-----)
3	17	19.82	23.29	(-----*-----)
4	11	0.00	0.00	(-----*-----)
5	3	8.67	11.72	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 14.51

0 10 20

Students in feeder school three on average are absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school three was absent 17 half days in year four due to unexplained reasons. Each student in feeder school one accounted for 14 half days absence, in feeder school two students on average had seven half days absence, in feeder school five students had three half days absence and in direct contrast students in feeder school four did not have any absences recorded in the unexplained category.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year five against the variable of 'total absences'. The results as represented in Table 60 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 60**  
**Comparison of Year 5 Total Absences and Feeder**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	1325	331	2.61	0.045
Error	56	7118	127		
Total	60	8443			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	11.50	12.82	(-----*-----)
2	18	9.44	9.59	(-----*-----)
3	17	13.47	15.15	(-----*-----)
4	11	0.00	0.00	(-----*-----)
5	3	6.67	6.11	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 11.27

0.0      8.0      16.0

Students in feeder school three on average are absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school three was absent 13 half days in year five. Each student in feeder school one accounted for 11.5 half days absence, in feeder school two students on average had nine half days absence, in feeder school five students had approximately seven half days absence and in direct contrast students in feeder school four did not have any absences.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year six against the variables of 'sick' and 'note' combined. The results as represented in Table 61 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 61**  
**Comparison of Year 6 Combined Sick and Note Absences and Feeder**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	503.6	125.9	2.23	0.078
Error	56	3166.1	56.5		
Total	60	3669.7			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	9.083	12.003	(-----*-----)
2	18	3.722	7.315	(-----*-----)
3	17	3.941	6.456	(-----*-----)
4	11	0.000	0.000	(-----*-----)
5	3	1.667	1.528	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 7.519

-6.0      0.0      6.0      12.0

Students in feeder school one on average are absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school one was absent nine half days in year six. Each student in feeder schools two and three accounted for approximately four half days absence, in feeder school five students on average had approximately two half days absence and in direct contrast students in feeder school four did not have any absences.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year seven against the variable of 'sick' and 'note' combined. The results as represented in Table 66 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 62**  
**Comparison of Year 7 Combined Sick and Note Absences and Feeder**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	688.1	172.0	5.38	0.001
Error	56	1790.9	32.0		
Total	60	2479.0			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	9.750	9.808	(---*---)
2	18	2.389	2.704	(---*---)
3	17	0.529	1.586	(---*---)
4	11	2.273	7.538	(---*---)
5	3	0.000	0.000	(---*---)

Pooled StDev = 5.655

-6.0      0.0      6.0      12.0

Students in feeder school 1 on average are absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school one was absent 10 half days in year seven. Each student in feeder schools two and four accounted for two half days absence, in feeder school three students on average had 0.5 half days absence and in direct contrast students in feeder school five did not have any absences.

A one-way analysis of variance was undertaken to determine the difference in feeder school absence rates in year nine against the variable of 'total absences'. The results as represented in Table 63 indicate a significant statistical difference between feeder schools at the 0.05 level.

**Table 63**  
**Comparison of Year 9 Total Absences and Feeder**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
FEEDER	4	6417	1604	2.14	0.088
Error	56	42071	751		
Total	60	48488			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	12	24.08	20.06	(-----*-----)
2	18	24.17	18.73	(-----*-----)
3	17	38.47	24.93	(-----*-----)
4	11	28.09	16.40	(-----*-----)
5	3	67.33	97.59	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 27.41	25	50	75
----------------------	----	----	----

Students in feeder school five on average are absent more than students in the other four feeder schools. On average, each student in feeder school five was absent 67 half days in year nine. Each student in feeder school three accounted for 38 half days absence, in feeder school four students on average had 28 half days absence, in feeder schools one and two students recorded 24 half days absence.



## INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT (IQ)

A one-way analysis of the total absences in year four indicated a significant difference at the 0.05 level as indicated in Table 64.

**Table 64**  
**Comparison of Year 4 Total Absences and IQ**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
IQ	17	6654	391	1.84	0.062
Error	35	7443	213		
Total	52	14097			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	1	21.00	0.00	(-----*-----)
3	2	7.50	10.61	(---*---)
4	5	17.00	35.26	(---*---)
5	7	6.71	9.11	(--*--)
6	8	2.00	4.14	(-*--)
7	3	14.67	14.57	(---*---)
8	3	12.67	13.01	(---*---)
9	3	10.33	5.51	(---*---)
10	2	1.00	1.41	(---*---)
11	1	46.00	0.00	(-----*-----)
12	2	0.00	0.00	(---*---)
13	7	12.29	11.67	(--*--)
14	2	0.00	0.00	(---*---)
15	3	18.00	7.00	(---*---)
16	1	24.00	0.00	(-----*-----)
20	1	0.00	0.00	(---*---)
21	1	37.00	0.00	(-----*-----)
25	1	61.00	0.00	(-----*-----)

Pooled StDev = 14.58

0 35 70

A one-way analysis of the total absences in year five indicated a significant difference at the 0.05 level.

**Table 65**  
**Comparison of Year 5 Combined Sick and Note Absences and IQ**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
IQ	17	1550.9	91.2	2.40	0.014
Error	35	1328.0	37.9		
Total	52	2878.8			

Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev				
Level	N	Mean	StDev	
1	1	2.000	0.000	(---*---)
3	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
4	5	3.600	8.050	(--*--)
5	7	2.857	5.872	(-*--)
6	8	2.125	3.314	(-*--)
7	3	5.000	1.000	(---*---)
8	3	4.333	4.041	(---*---)
9	3	7.000	11.269	(---*---)
10	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
11	1	40.000	0.000	(-----*-----)
12	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
13	7	5.571	9.053	(--*--)
14	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
15	3	2.333	1.528	(--*---)
16	1	7.000	0.000	(-----*-----)
20	1	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
21	1	6.000	0.000	(-----*-----)
25	1	4.000	0.000	(---*---)

Pooled StDev = 6.160

0      20      40

A one-way analysis of the total absences in year five indicated a significant difference at the 0.05 level.

**Table 66**  
**Comparison of Year 5 Total Absences and IQ**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
IQ	17	4886.4	287.4	3.17	0.002
Error	35	3172.6	90.6		
Total	52	8059.0			

Level	N	Mean	StDev	Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev
1	1	22.000	0.000	(---*---)
3	2	1.000	1.414	(---*---)
4	5	9.800	14.429	(---*---)
5	7	7.143	7.625	(---*---)
6	8	5.750	10.498	(---*---)
7	3	11.333	11.015	(---*---)
8	3	6.000	6.000	(---*---)
9	3	12.333	11.504	(---*---)
10	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
11	1	44.000	0.000	(---*---)
12	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
13	7	9.714	9.032	(---*---)
14	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
15	3	9.667	8.622	(---*---)
16	1	18.000	0.000	(---*---)
20	1	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
21	1	56.000	0.000	(---*---)
25	1	27.000	0.000	(---*---)

Pooled StDev = 9.521

A one-way analysis of the total absences in Year 6 indicated a significant difference at the 0.05 level.

**Table 67**  
**Comparison of Year 6 Combined Sick and Note Absences and IQ**

Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	p
IQ	17	1823.4	107.3	2.15	0.027
Error	35	1743.8	49.8		
Total	52	3567.2			

Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev				
Level	N	Mean	StDev	
1	1	2.000	0.000	(---*---)
3	2	0.500	0.707	(---*---)
4	5	3.000	6.708	(---*---)
5	7	8.286	10.657	(---*---)
6	8	1.250	1.909	(---*---)
7	3	3.667	0.577	(---*---)
8	3	7.333	11.015	(---*---)
9	3	12.333	17.039	(---*---)
10	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
11	1	33.000	0.000	(-----*-----)
12	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
13	7	2.429	2.299	(---*---)
14	2	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
15	3	0.667	0.577	(---*---)
16	1	2.000	0.000	(---*---)
20	1	0.000	0.000	(---*---)
21	1	23.000	0.000	(-----*-----)
25	1	6.000	0.000	(---*---)

Pooled StDev = 7.059

0      20      40

***APPENDIX 8:***

***Attendance Summary***

## ATTENDANCE SUMMARY

**TEACHER'S NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

						VARIATIONS			
						Student	Form/Yr	Per	A
<b>Y08</b>	08B	NAME	08B	HOST	08B	NAME	08B	NAME	
	08D	Susp25	08D	NAME	08D	SICK	08D	NAME	
	08D	NAME	08B	NAME	08A	NAME	08C	NAME	
	08B	NAME	08B	NAME	08D	LATE	08C	HOLIDA	
	08B	LATE	08D	Susp25	08C	SICK	08C	NAME	
	08A	NAME	08C	LATE	08C	NAME	08C	LATE	
	08C	Susp25	08A	LATE	08B	NAME	08D	NAME	
	08D	SUSPEN	08A	NAME	08A	LATE	08B	NAME	
	08D	NAME	08D	NAME	08D	SICK	08C	LATE	
	08D	SICK	08D	NAME	08C	LATE	08C	LATE	

*Year total not in class = 40      Absent one half day = 0      Absent all day ? = 30      Accounted for = 10*

<b>Y09</b>	09D	NAME	09A	SICK	09C	LATE	09B	NAME	
	09D	Susp24	09A	LATE	09B	NAME	09A	OFF CA	
	09D	NAME	09B	NAME	09A	NAME	09B	OFF CA	
	09A	W/SKIL	09C	NAME	09A	NAME	09B	NAME	
	09B	SICK	09D	LATE	09B	NAME	09B	OFF CA	
	09A	LATE	09C	HOST	09B	NAME	09D	HOLIDA	
	09B	NAME	09D	SICK	09D	LATE	09D	NAME	
	09B	OFF CA	09C	LATE	09D	LATE	09D	LATE	
	09A	NAME	09C	NAME	09C	SICK	09C	NAME	
	09D	NAME	09A	NAME	09B	NAME	09D	LATE	

*Year total not in class = 40      Absent one half day = 0      Absent all day ? = 26      Accounted for = 14*

<b>Y10</b>	10A	W/SKIL	10A	OFF CA	10D	SICK	10D	EXPLAI	
	10B	NAME	10B	LATE	10B	OFF CA	10A	NAME	
	10A	NAME	10B	NAME	10D	LEAVIN	10C	LATE	
	10D	NAME	10D	NAME	10B	NAME	10B	AP1, L2	
	10C	LATE	10D	NAME	10B	NAME	10A	LATE	
	10C	NAME	10B	W/SKIL	10D	NAME	10D	LATE	
	10A	NAME	10B	NAME	10C	NAME	10A	NAME	
	10B	NAME	10D	NAME	10B	NAME	10A	NAME	
	10D	OFF CA	10A	NAME	10D	NAME	10C	NAME	
	10A	NAME	10B	PHEONI					

*Year total not in class = 38      Absent one half day = 1      Absent all day ? = 29      Accounted for = 8*

<b>Y11</b>	11B	IN STE	11D	NAME	11C	NAME	11A	NAME	
	11A	LATE	11C	NAME	11C	NAME	11C	NAME	
	11D	IN STE	11A	LATE	11B	SICK	11B	IN STE	
	11D	NAME	11C	NAME	11A	NAME	11B	NAME	
	11A	NAME	11B	NAME	11D	NAME	11D	SICK	
	11B	NAME	11C	IN STE	11D	IN STE	11B	IN STE	
	11A	IN STE	11B	LATE					

*Year total not in class = 26      Absent one half day = 0      Absent all day ? = 16      Accounted for = 10*

<b>Y12</b>	12A	NAME	12A	LATE	12B	LATE	12B	LATE	
	12A	IN STE	12B	NAME	12C	LATE	12A	LATE	
	12A	LEFT	12A	LATE	12D	LATE			

*Year total not in class = 11      Absent one half day = 0      Absent all day ? = 3      Accounted for = 8*

**Total not in class at 9.00am = 155      Absent half day = 1      Absent all day ? = 104      Accounted for = 50**

## **APPENDIX 9:**

### ***Analysis of Student Attendance Questionnaire***

**Table 1 :**

**Question 1 - *Do you like coming to school?***

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Yes	29
No	21
No response	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

**Table 2 :**

**Question 2 – *What makes school enjoyable for you?***

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Friends	22
Friends, some classes	6
Sport	6
Recess and lunch	3
Options	3
No response	3
Nothing	3
Friends and doing well at school work	2
Leads me to get a job	1
Beautiful girls	1
Depends on classes	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

**Table 3 :**

**Question 3 – *What do you think is the most important part of school?***

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
To get an education (learning)	31
Phys.Ed/ Sport	3
Tests	3
Friends	3
No response	3
Education and making friends	3
Lunch and recess	2
I don't know	2
Enjoying it	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 4 :

**Question 4 – Have you ‘wagged’ school at any stage this year?**

Response	Frequency
Yes	28
No	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 5 :

**Continuation of Question 4 – If so, how often?**

Response	Frequency
Once (or twice)	6
Once every month	4
Occasionally/sometimes	2
Two - three times per week	2
Once a week/every Friday	2
Once every two weeks	2
About 20 days this year	1
Only when I feel like it	1
All the time in Year 8	1
Rarely - once every three months	1
Every day	1
Last days of term	1
About three times	1
Quite a bit	1
A few times a year	1
No response	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

Table 6 :

**Question 5 – When you ‘wag’ school, what do you do? Where do you go?**

Response	Frequency
Shops/friends	15
Stay home	5
Beach/town/movies	4
I don't like what I have	1
Sleep	1
Town	1
Steal cars/rob houses	1
Anywhere but school	1
No response	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>



Table 7 :

**Question 6 – Do you ‘wag’ school with your friends?**

Response	Frequency
Yes	24
No	3
Sometimes	2
No response	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

Table 8 :

**Question 7 – Why do you ‘wag’ school?**

Response	Frequency
No response	14
School is boring	12
I don’t wag school	7
Better than going to school	3
I feel like it	2
Spend time with friends	2
Can’t be bothered going	2
So I can make money	1
I don’t like school	1
Peer pressure	1
When school has almost ended	1
I don’t want people hassling me	1
Sick of it need a break	1
For fun	1
If there’s a test on I haven’t studied for	1
Because of certain teachers	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 9 :

**Question 8 – When did you start ‘wagging’ school?**

Response	Frequency
No response	20
Year 8	11
I don’t wag	6
Year 10	4
Year 9	4
Long time ago	1
Don’t know	1
Year 1	1
Kindergarten	1
I don’t do it often - once/twice a year	1
Year 4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 10 :

Question 9 – *Do your parents know you ‘wag’ school?*

Response	Frequency
Yes	21
No	19
No response	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 11 :

Question 10 – *Do your parents expect you to attend school?*

Response	Frequency
Yes	44
No	4
No response	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 12 :

Question 11 – *Do you think ‘wagging’ school will affect your results?*

Response	Frequency
Yes	35
No	15
No response	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 13 :

Question 11 continued – *Why?*

Response	Frequency
<b>Yes:</b>	
Miss out on work/information	27
No response	3
Depending if I have test and important exam	1
Not easy to catch	1
Well obviously you miss out on work and then when it comes to an exam or whatever you won't know some things in the exam and so your grades could slip or you could fail	1
Don't learn enough	1
I've already seen the report	1
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>No:</b>	
No response	4
You don't do much anyway	2
I am a fast learner and can catch up	2
No because I don't wag	1
Because I don't do it on important days	1

I am smart	1
I hardly 'wag' and my parents know	1
When I take a day off	1
I don't wag enough to miss out on much work	1
I'm not that smart anyway	1
Because you wag if you have no tests	1
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 14 :

Question 12 – *Do you think some classes are more important than others?*

Response	Frequency
Yes	42
No	8
No response	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 15 :

Question 12 continued – *If so, what makes them more important?*

Response	Frequency
You may need them in the future	11
No response	11
Because they contribute more towards your education	4
The subject I have must have a good grade	3
Might be a subject that you need to get into TAFE, University, help with career	2
I learn what I need to learn	2
Maths, English, Social Studies, Science – main subjects	2
I don't know	1
You need them for knowledge	1
They have practical work, eg. metalwork	1
They will help with future subjects/choices	1
About subjects need to have for special requirements	1
Some classes are more important as they could affect your chosen career paths, etc	1
If you want to do something in that area when you leave school then it's more important	1
English is more important because you have to know how to spell	1
English and Mathematics important for me	1
If it's an option or subject	1
Getting fit	1
Teachers and things you do	1
English, Science, Maths	1
If you don't go you won't learn	1
Different from other subjects	1
More hard	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 16 :

Question 13 – *What subjects do you enjoy the most?*

Response	Frequency
No response	4
Phys. Ed and Art	3
Options	3
Sport and computing	2
Metalwork, woodwork, etc	2
PE, Mechanics and Social Studies	2
English, Social Studies, choices	2
English, Science, Social Studies	2
None	2
Art	2
Phys.Ed	2
English, Art, Social Studies	1
English, Dance, Science	1
Dance, Maths, Science, Social Studies, English	1
Social Studies, Maths, Science, Health	1
Sport	1
English, Photography, Cooking	1
Mechanical workshop	1
Cooking, Art, Photography	1
Options, Social Studies, English	1
Social Studies, Dance	1
Photography, Business	1
Vocational Food	1
Dancing	1
Industrial Workshop	1
Social Studies and Computer	1
Social Studies	1
Health	1
Drama	1
Dance, PE, Photography	1
English, Cooking, Social Studies	1
English, Science, Mechanical Workshop, Health	1
Social Studies and Cooking	1
Art, Cooking, Photography	1
English, Science, Sport	1
Dance	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 17 :

Question 13 continued – *Why?*

Response	Frequency
Fun	11
No response	7
Teachers make it enjoyable	5
They are practical	4
I like designing and creating	3

I'm interested in them	3
Because we do things that interest me	2
Not hard	2
I get good grades and it's fun	2
I can rebuild motors	2
Phys. Ed keeps me fit for football and art	1
There is no writing involved	1
Need them for the career I want, have friends in the class to keep me company	1
English, Social Studies easy - always get A's	1
They are all boring	1
Don't like school	1
Less important on grades	1
I love dancing and wish to make a future of it	1
Easy to learn	1
We don't do anything	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 18 :

Question 14 – *What subjects do you enjoy the least?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Maths and Science	7
Maths	7
No response	4
Maths, Science, Sport (sometimes)	3
Maths, Science, English, Social Studies, Form	3
Maths, Social Studies	2
Maths and English	2
English	2
Maths, Science, Social Studies	2
Maths, English, Social Studies	2
All	2
Science	2
Maths and Phys. Ed	2
Math and metalwork	1
Social Studies	1
Electronics	1
Physical Education	1
English, Science, Maths	1
Art	1
None – I like all subjects	1
Form	1
Social Studies	1
Social Studies, Sport	1
Science, Advertising	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

**Table 19 :**  
**Question 14 continued – Why?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
It's boring	20
No response	7
Boring and hard, easy to lose concentration	5
Not enjoyable	2
Teacher bores you to death by just talking about theories	2
Too complicated	2
I find it hard sometimes	2
They are boring. All you do is write	2
Because of the teacher and it's boring	1
They suck	1
They don't interest me	1
Don't like school	1
I like all subjects	1
We have to use our brains	1
Harder than others	1
You can't mess around	1
Because the teachers don't like me	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

**Table 20 :**  
**Question 15 – Have you ever purposely 'wagged' a class?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Yes	22
No	28
No response	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

**Table 21 :**  
**Question 16 – Which classes do you 'wag'?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
No response	20
None of them	6
Science	3
Maths and Science	3
If I wag, I wag all day	3
Boring ones	3
None	2
English	2
Maths and English	1
Ones which aren't important. Hardly any	1
Childcare	1
Form	1
When I have tests and haven't studied	1
Art	1

Physical Education	1
Maths and metalwork	1
Maths, Science, Social Studies	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 22 :

Question 16 continued – *Why?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
No response	30
It's boring	7
I don't want to do it	3
Because I did not like the teachers	2
The teacher is boring	2
Don't like the class	1
Last period of the day most of the time	1
Don't wag just one class, wag whole day	1
I went to the gym to see dancing	1
Don't like school	1
Would fail test	1
Too hard	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 23 :

Question 17 – *Do you intend to complete Year 12?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Yes	38
No	8
No response	4
Maybe	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 24 :

Question 17 continued – *If not, what will you do?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Get a job, go to TAFE	2
Go on the dole	2
Apprenticeship	1
Go to Job Link	1
I will get a job and work	1
Go in airforce, navy	1
Get a job outdoors or something active	1
Get a job outdoors or something active	1
Nothing	1
Join the NBA	1
TAFE and apprenticeship	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

Table 25 :

**Question 18 – What are your future goals?**

Response	Frequency
No response	11
Go to university	7
Be rich and happy	4
Be a Child Care Worker	3
Apprenticeship	1
To work with animals	1
I don't know	1
Go on the dole	1
To be a designer	1
Become doctor's receptionist	1
To get good grades/ forest ranger	1
Become a horse trainer	1
Become an interpreter/work in sales	1
Join the airforce	1
Don't know	1
Do INSTEP for Yr 11 and 12	1
Become a mechanic or butcher	1
Journalism	1
Get a job as a travel consultant	1
Secretary	1
Join the Police Force	1
Get good paid job that I enjoy	1
Become aircraft maintenance engineer in the RAAF	1
Get a job	1
Telephone Operator	1
Go into business	1
Play basketball	1
Make it Sydney 2000/become a photographer	1
Become a chef	1
Become a hairdresser	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 26 :

**Question 19 – Do you think school can help you achieve your goals?**

Response	Frequency
Yes	40
No	7
No response	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>



Table 27 :

Question 19 continued – *If so, how?*

Response	Frequency
No response	13
To educate me/teach me	7
Learn what you need	5
Learn and improve your skills	2
Give me the education I need for that career	2
Because if I stay at school and study I can get into TAFE and do a Child Care Course	2
Education and grades to get into courses I need	2
Get a job	2
If you pass you can have any job	2
Learn, rest and play	1
Put you in the right direction. Helps you	1
Learn how to manage a business	1
In some ways 'yes'. School can get you a little further to something you will like to study at uni	1
They can guide you in the right path to take	1
Need education to get into university	1
TEE score and the preparation and education	1
Get good grades to get in what you want to do	1
With the computing/business course	1
Get to have fun	1
Work	1
I need school to get into university	1
Know how to become photographer	1
Food, hospitality and tourism	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

**APPENDIX 10:**

***Academic Years 1989 – 1995***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Term Dates</b>
1989	1	1 February – 14 April
	2	1 May – 7 July
	3	24 July – 29 September
	4	16 October – 22 December
1990	1	29 January – 13 April
	2	30 April – 6 July
	3	23 July – 28 September
	4	15 October – 19 December
1991	1	4 February – 12 April
	2	29 April – 5 July
	3	22 July – 27 September
	4	14 October – 18 December
1992	1	27 January – 10 April
	2	26 April – 3 July
	3	20 July – 25 September
	4	12 October – 18 December
1993	1	3 February – 8 April
	2	27 April – 9 July
	3	20 July – 1 October
	4	18 October – 22 December
1994	1	2 February – 15 April
	2	2 May – 8 July
	3	26 July – 30 September
	4	17 October – 21 December
1995	1	31 January – 13 April
	2	1 May – 7 July
	3	25 July – 29 September
	4	16 October – 20 December

## **APPENDIX 11:**

### **Secondary School Attendance Procedures**

#### **ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES 1995**

*The first bell will go each morning at 8:40 a.m. Students must be present in your room by 8:45 a.m. At 8:45 a.m. please call your roll, record any absences on the Period One Absence Return Sheet (below) and send with a responsible student immediately to the Student Services Centre.*

*Please also carefully read any relevant Daily Notices to your students at this time.*

**NB** *The Student Services Centre is located in the Administration block.*

*Any student arriving after 8:45 a.m. is late and should be sent to the Student Services Centre to sign in.*

*Students who arrive just after 8:45 a.m. before the Absentee Return is sent down, may be admitted to class at the teachers discretion. Students who are continually late should be subjected to normal classroom MSB [Managing Student Behaviour] procedures.*

<b>SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PERIOD ONE ABSENTEE RETURN</b>		
<b>TEACHER:</b> _____		<b>DATE:</b> ____/____/____
<u>Student Surname</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>Form</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

***Please return to the Student Services Centre by 9.00am***

- *A daily Absentee Sheet will be prepared during Period 2 and will be available each morning recess from the staff room. Please collect every day.*
- *Please call your roll and accurately record absences for each lesson taught during each day.*

- Please reconcile your class attendance with the Daily Absentee Sheet each lesson. If there are any variations (either absent or present) please record these on the Sheet. Send this to the Student Services Centre at the start of Period 5 each day. Please make every effort to be as accurate as possible.
- If students are recorded present for the day and teachers mark them absent for a period this will be recorded in the computer as an unexplained absence.
- Once a week a **VARIATION PRINT OUT** will be given to Form Teachers, summarising the previous week's variations. This will include information on students who sign in/out, or who are absent from certain periods. This information will be used to amend rolls and determine any attendance problems.

### **STUDENTS SIGNING IN:**

- Students arriving late at school (after 8:45 a.m.) must **SIGN IN** at the Student Services Centre before they may be admitted to class. They will be asked to complete a **SIGN IN** form (shown below). Half of this form goes on the student records, the other half becomes their **LATE NOTE**. The Late Note should be shown to the class teachers.
- Students arriving late must **BRING** a note from parent/guardian. If no note is provided a note is expected the following day.
- Students who regularly arrive late can expect detention.
- Medical visits should be covered by an appointment card or certificate.

<b>STUDENTS SIGNING IN</b>	<b>SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL LATE NOTE</b>
PLEASE NEATLY FILL OUT BOTH SIDES	PLEASE ACCEPT THIS STUDENT INTO YOUR CLASS.
Name: _____	Name: _____
Form: _____ Date: _____	Form: _____ Date: _____
Period: _____ Time: _____	Time: _____
Reason: _____	
_____	
Note supplied: Yes / No	Note required: Yes / No
If no, you must bring a note tomorrow.	
_____	
Student Signature	School Stamp / Signature

Please do not accept **LATE** students into your class unless they have signed in.

- *Students arriving after period 1 will be considered to have a half-day absence and be required to produce a note.*

**STUDENTS SIGNING OUT:**

- *Students signing out must report to the Student Services Centre before they leave school.*
- *Students can only sign out if they have parent/guardian permission in the form of a note. In an emergency, permission can be obtained by phoning home.*
- *Students wishing to sign out must report to the Student Services Centre and complete a SIGN OUT ROOM (below). Half of this form goes on the student's record, the other half becomes the students SIGN OUT PASS.*
- *Medical visits should be covered by appointment card or medical certificate.*
- *ALL absences where a students signs OUT are considered explained (N).*

<b>STUDENTS SIGNING OUT</b>	<b>SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL SIGN OUT PASS</b>
PLEASE NEATLY FILL OUT BOTH SIDES	PLEASE ACCEPT THIS STUDENT INTO YOUR CLASS
Name: _____	Name: _____
Form: _____ Date: _____	Form: _____ Date: _____
Period: _____ Time: _____	Time: _____
Reason: _____	
_____	
Parent's Permission: Note Supplied / Phone Call	Note Required: Yes / No
Student Signature	School Stamp / Signature

### FORM TEACHER'S ROLE

*One of the major roles of the Form Teacher is to monitor and be responsible for absences within their form class.*

1. Record student absences morning and afternoon on Form Roll.
- Record morning absences from the Daily Absence Sheet produced each morning. This is available from the staff room by recess.
  - Record afternoon absences by calling the roll in form period.
  - Record and variations from the VARIATION PRINT OUT into your roll.

### NOTES:

1. One period absence is equivalent to half a day (a.m. or p.m.)
2. Students must report to form period prior to participating in any meetings, activities, etc. during form period.
3. When a student returns from an absence, please ask for a note and continue to ask until one is returned.

*When you receive an absentee note from a student, please add the following:*

- Name of student: (The notes are not always legible and you know the name better than us.)
- Form:
- Date of Absence: (DOA)
- Date the absentee note was received:
- Your initials verifying it has been recorded.

eg. **JOHN STUDENT**  
**8C1**  
**DOA: 3/2/93**  
**RECEIVED: 4/2/93**

(Form Teacher)

4. Could you place the letter "N" on your roll when you receive an absentee note to indicate that a note has been received.

Eg.		1	2	3	4	F	5
JACK SPRATT						A	(Full day absence with note)
JILL DILL	A	A				N	(Half day absence – unexplained)
						✓	

5. If you make an amendment to your roll from a previous day, please notify the Attendance Recorder by completing a **ROLL AMENDMENT FORM** available in your Form Roll. It is essential that this information is passed on so that computer records are accurate.

### **ROLL AMENDMENT**

Form teachers *please* complete one of these forms and return to Student Services Centre in your roll every time you make an amendment to your roll.

This is essential so that information can be changed in the computer.

FORM: _____ FROM TEACHER: _____ DATE: _____	
<i>Student Name</i>	<i>Date Adjustment / Comment</i>
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

6. When parents ring the school to explain why a child is away this will be considered an explained absence (N) and no note will be required. A written copy of the telephone message will be placed in your Form File so that you know where the student was and can annotate your Form Roll.

**ALL INFORMATION GIVEN TO THE STUDENT SERVICES CENTRE WILL BE PASSED TO FORM TEACHERS.**

<b>SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL ABSENCE EXPLANATION</b>	
Name of Student: _____	Form: _____
Interview/Phone call to/from: _____	Number: _____
Absence Dates: _____	
Reason: _____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
Further action requested/Noted: _____	
_____	
_____	
Taken by: _____	Date: _____
<b>FORM TEACHERS:</b> This explanation was received by the Student Services today. Please annotate the absence on your Form Roll with an "N". Thankyou.	

7. Any student who signs OUT should have explained (N) recorded against their absence. This is because students can not sign out without providing a note or a phone call from parents.

**IMPORTANT:** If students have not returned a note after two days, on the third day please send Education Department of WA Absentee notes home. Fill these out from the booklet supplied and place in the "Letters home" filing tray in the Front Office.

**NOTE 1:**

Each form folder has a list of student addresses attached. Please make sure these are up to date and accurate. This will enable you to easily find names/addresses when sending these notes home. If students details do change, could you please make sure that the Student Services Centre is notified.

Education Department letters must be returned via Form Teachers as per any other note.

**NOTE 2:**

The Education Department of WA letter is available in Vietnamese if that is the major language spoken at the child's home. Copies are available from the Student Services Centre.

8. It is extremely important that Form Teachers continue to ask students with outstanding notes for these notes every Form Period until notes/explanation received.

If we can get students (and parents) into the habit of sending notes back immediately upon return, it will save a lot of work for everyone.

9. If students are marked absent or present incorrectly (and this happens occasionally,) could Form Teachers please verify these discrepancies with staff/students concerned and then inform the Attendance Recorder of these changes.

Use the Roll Amendment slip so that the change can also be made in the computer.

10. If students are away for more than two days, the Education Department of WA regulations state that we must notify parents. If students do have extended absence, based on your knowledge of the child, use your discretion. You may ask other students in the class, send out an Education Department absence explanation letter, or simply phone the parents (from your records in the back of the form roll).
11. It is the primary duty of the Form Teacher to notify parents about student's absences and have them explained. It is the parents' responsibility to ensure their children attend school.

Should a form teacher have problems with student's lateness, attendance, truancy or not bringing notes, normal classroom MSB procedures apply. This means that serious cases can be referred to the Student Services Centre. (Head



*of Student Services - Years 11 and 12, Lower School Co-ordinator - Years 8,9 and 10). Student Services can either follow further MSB procedures, or refer the case to year Leaders, the SSS team or the School Welfare Officer. Appropriate strategies for each student will be developed. It is the responsibility of the parent to ensure attendance.*

### **COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE**

*The Education Act requires that all students must attend school daily until the end of the year the student turns 15. A record of daily attendance must be kept in the school. Attendance records are legal documents and may be required to be produced in court.*

### **SPECIAL EXEMPTION**

*In special circumstance a student may be permitted to leave school before the end of their fifteenth year. A secure job is required and the mandatory form must be completed by the employer, parent and the Principal.*

### **TRUANCY**

*Truancy is illegal. Students who truant are referred to the School Welfare Officer from the [name cannot be included] District Office. Police patrols often return truanting students to school or to their parents at work. (Extract from the 1995 Staff Information Book pp 10 - 15)*

The following statements are outlined in the Student-Parent Handbook 1995 of the secondary school referred to in this research.

### **ABSENCES**

*Absences for part or all day, or for several days, must be covered by a **written explanation from the parent or guardian**. These notes must be dated and specify the reasons for the absence/s. They should be brought to school by the student returning from a period of absence.*

#### **Prolonged Absence**

*Where a student may be absent for a prolonged period of time the parents should contact the school as soon as possible.*