

St Albans Network of Schools

*An unapproved Absence or an Absence with
Reason*

*Students Reasons for Missing School
Without Explanation*



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St Albans Network of Schools

: an unapproved absence or

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Chapter

1

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gain some insight and understanding into what students who have unexplained/unapproved absences from school provide as the reasons for their non-attendance. It is the second part of another research project '*An Examination of Unapproved Absences*' completed for the Network in November 2000.

The research was conducted in the St. Albans Network of Schools, which is made up of ten schools: three secondary and seven primary. The Network schools are located in the geographical areas of St Albans and Kealba and they are part of the Keilor/Melton cluster of schools. The schools are;

- Brimbank College;
- Kealba College;
- Copperfield College;
- Kings Park Primary School;
- Mackellar Primary School;
- St Albans East Primary School;
- St Albans North Primary School;
- St Albans Primary School and
- Stevensville Primary School.

The schools whose students participated in this research project were Brimbank College and Kealba College.

The St Albans Network of Schools is not immune from attendance problems. The problem of attendance in general, that is approved or unapproved, occurs across all year levels through both primary and secondary schooling. The network experiences on a daily basis the consequences of students having missed a considerable part of their schooling. Missing school affects not just the students but also the teachers and the school administration. In what could be seen as a vicious cycle, students who miss school can become disconnected from their schooling, may have behavioural issues and/or lowered academic results which may then lead to them missing more school. Teachers are subject to stress and pressures through trying to assist students whilst still meeting frameworks for learning and expected educational outcomes. Administration and coordination staff have to dedicate many hours of each day to tracking, recording, following up and reporting on unapproved absences.

Anecdotal evidence from the Network suggests that parent condoned absences (approved and unapproved) are an issue along with the level of engagement of

students in school. Annual statistics have shown that attendance problems have continued to be an issue over some time. One school's annual statistics showed that their average student absence level in 1999 was higher than the statewide mean in all year levels with some levels experiencing absence rates almost double the statewide mean. Both secondary schools involved in this research have made the 'improvement of attendance levels' a school priority. If the Network in general is to improve attendance rates it needs to understand the reasons why students miss school and why unapproved absence levels are so high.

During the compulsory years of schooling, schools have a responsibility to track and follow-up non-attendance. The Kennett government introduced the requirement for schools to report absence figures in their annual reports. Statistics have shown that there has been little improvement in the levels of absence and this coupled with a reduction in year 12 retention rates has made the subject of unapproved absences very topical. It is not however a new issue, but more recent years has seen a resurgence of analysis of the causes, that is the social, institutional, political, economic, family and individual reasons why students miss school.

This problem has been viewed from a number of different theoretical frameworks, with a shift appearing to be made from the individual and the family to structural causes. Debate now includes consideration of such issues as the appropriateness of the institution of schooling, which still has its foundations in traditional educational methods, and its applicability or fit with today's society. And the even greater impact to society of 'education' itself being part of the development of economic and political policies and therefore subject to the consequences of changes in political direction and ideology.

A review of literature indicates that links continue to be made between non-attendance at school, school leaving and broader social issues such as juvenile crime, youth unemployment, poverty and welfare dependence. Whilst this analysis is an important and essential part of the understanding of this problem, students' explanation of their reasons for non-attendance is equally essential if change, which is meaningful to the students, is to be achieved.

In comparison with the vast body of other research, that considers risk factors or the social, family, school and political impediments to learning, this research aims to examine students' own explanations of their reasons for non-attendance. It is only through students reporting their experience of school and their experience of forces that impact on their schooling, can any true holistic picture of absence issues be formed. This report will consider these explanations and how they collate with the factors raised in literature.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, incorporating the social, political and economic relationships to the issue and the theoretical frameworks that inform the research and the question being researched.

Chapter 3 provides details of the research design including; sampling methods, qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and research instruments. This chapter will also discuss any limitations to the study and ethical issues raised by the design used. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research, describes the sample group and presents the collation of quantitative and qualitative data including charts and tables. Chapter 5 discusses the meaning and importance of the findings and the implications of the findings for the Network, along with a brief summary and recommendations.

Chapter

2

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is important as a basis for informing how research is constructed, conducted and analysed. The use of different theoretical frameworks to determine the components of an issue leads not only to different solutions but also to differences in what information is sought and in how an issue is critiqued.

This research is based on the belief that school attendance issues involve more than the dynamics between the student their family and the school, other pressures such as political agendas, government policies and ideologies and economics impact on this issue.

In this research the overarching theory informing the research is Critical Social Theory, however Structural analysis and Systems theory in particular will also provide direction and inform the research process. The diversity of issues relevant to school attendance requires a critique of 'what is', 'why is it that way' and to then place students reasons within this context; critical social theory allows for this. Other theoretical concepts such as a Marxist paradigm or various theories on welfare and capitalism will also be used to inform this research. Whilst these theories will contribute to the critique of the literature they do not independently provide the scope nor the same depth or breadth of analysis believed needed.

Critical Social Theory

Sarantakos (1993, p.37) states 'Critical Science sees in social research the goals of removing false beliefs and ideas about society and social reality, perceives humans as creative and compassionate human beings and is critical of the power systems and inequality structures that dominate and oppress people in societies.' Critical research therefore seeks to explain the current social order so that it can be transformed. (Neuman, 1997).

Through students' explanations of the reasons for their absences this research will seek to provide a critical analysis of the beliefs and the existing policies, ideologies, structures and systems that impact on schools and students and consequently on attendance.

Structural Analysis

Mullaly (1997) indicates that structural analysis is grounded in critical social theory. The term structural is used as a descriptor for problems - that is, problems are seen as inherent or built in to our present social order and function in a way that discriminates

or oppresses people or groups. Mullaly (1997, p.133) states ‘... social problems are seen as arising from a specific social context - liberal/neo-conservative capitalism – rather than from the failings of individuals.’ The focus in structural social work is on the structures in society as well as the individual.

During this research students’ reasons for non-attendance will be analysed from a structural theoretical basis, to avoid a solely individual focus and to consider how structures may contribute to or reinforce an issue.

Systems Theory

Systems theory takes into account the systems surrounding the individual and the ways in which these systems may impact the individual’s behaviour. It allows for an analysis of the different levels of society, for example at an individual, organisational, community and political level. Systems theory therefore allows in practice, for the use of different theories at different levels with different systems. (Payne, 1998).

The issue of unapproved absences impacts not only on the student but also on families, schools and society. This is circular because the reasons why students miss school are also related to families, schools and society. For these reasons Systems Theory needs to be considered and inform the research so that the research is inclusive of all the systems surrounding a student.

Literature Review

Education & Society

Up until the late 19th century education in Victoria was available only to those who could afford it. The family was a unit of production and the transition from childhood to adulthood occurred at an earlier stage, because children were needed from an early age to contribute to the family unit and its subsistence. (Harrison, 1995) With the advent of industrialisation changes occurred to the family unit; the need for an education was seen to be more important if children were to participate successfully in a changing world.

The Education Act (Victoria) 1872 was the first Act to make education secular, compulsory and free (Sweetman, Long & Smyth, 1922), this change was followed in 1910 by further legislation that included Secondary and Technical education within that Act. (Rankin, 1939) There have been several enactments of legislation since then, but the Education Act of 1958 and the Community Welfare Services Act of 1970, put in place laws which made school non-attendance, without reasonable excuse, liable for further official intervention. (Coventry, Cornish, Cooke & Vinall, 1984) In Victoria attendance at school is compulsory between the ages of six and fifteen.

What then is the purpose of compulsory education and whose needs does it fulfil? A Marxist view would be that compulsory education fulfils the needs of capitalism by providing a well trained conforming workforce. This is achieved not through the content of lessons but through the form that teaching and learning take and the way that schools are organised. (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995) As the greatest institution

outside the family, school acts as an agency of socialization therefore assisting in creating social control. Students are expected to learn to be punctual, quiet, obedient, follow rules, conform and respect authority, all of which becomes linked to their job and social experience when they leave school (Giddens, 1993). As Haralambos et al (1995, p.736) state '...if capitalism is to succeed it requires a hard-working, docile, obedient, and highly motivated workforce, which is too divided and fragmented to challenge the authority.'

From a broader societal perspective, being educated is now constructed as a social or public good because educated people are able to participate meaningfully and successfully in society, through their participation in the workforce and their consequential contribution to society. As Graycar and Jamrozik (1993, p.259) state 'Education has now become, more than ever, a prerequisite for obtaining a place in the labour market, for good prospects of a career, and for access to goods and services in the market economy; in short, it is a prerequisite for social mobility and corresponding lifestyle and life chances.'

This focus on the future and on the success of the individual falls within the individualistic ideology of neo-conservatism and the needs of capitalism, but it is questionable if this is something evident to the child and in particular the child who finds that school and its structures is not the place for them.

A critical analysis of the educational system reveals that the education system itself tends to reinforce inequalities that exist in our society. It channels students into different jobs according to their academic ability, and provides rewards for those who engage, conform and perform. From a structural perspective this process serves to oppress people by allocating students to the various strata of the social structure and the workforce. (Giddens, 1993, Graycar & Jamrozik, 1995) This acts to make society appear fair and just as individual effort and potential is rewarded. Bowles and Gintis (cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 1995) provide the argument that education has the indirect benefit for capitalism of legitimising inequality and therefore not threatening the stability of society.

Education & Schools

Education, Politics & Economics

Prior to the progressive shift in the last two decades to neo-conservative politics and laissez-faire economics education had a greater relationship to rights, citizenship and a policy of universality. Governments invested in expanding the education system, with the impetus for educational change and policy direction being driven by educators and experts in the education field. With the advent of various economic crises since the 1970's and a progressive shift to a political ideology of neo-conservatism various governments have seen the social and political advantages of retaining more young people in the education system. (Power, 1984)

Education is now firmly part of the bigger political and economic agenda and therefore subject to the whims of government ideology, their policy direction and the

impact of economic fluctuations; with the impetus for educational change and policy direction now being ideologically, politically and economically driven.

This raises a number of issues for schools and impacts on their ability to teach, engage and provide welfare for students. These issues are;

- retention rates, engagement, participation and youth unemployment;
- global budgets; and
- inclusion in a market economy

Retention, Engagement, Participation & Youth Unemployment

Since the 1980's changes in government policies and changes in public attitudes towards school participation has seen a shift in the proportion of students who continue their education through to year 12 (Dwyer, 1994). Dwyer (1994) points out that there are hidden consequences to this change in attitude and I would also suggest a hidden agenda to the change in policy direction.

Whereas previously only those who wanted to go on to a tertiary level of education stayed to year 12, changes to the youth employment market (such as high levels of youth unemployment) have closed off or minimised opportunities for employment after the completion of the compulsory years of school; forcing retention in the school system to year 12 (Dwyer, 1994, Wyn, 1994). Wyn (1994, p.104) states,

‘The effect of economic restructuring on the youth labour market is to change the significance of both early school leaving and staying. Neither will ensure that a young person will be able to get a job or the place they want in education or training.’

There are other forces acting on retention and these are the changes to the provision of welfare assistance for those who do leave school early and the increasing levels of credentials required to obtain employment. Both act to encourage students to continue their education or training to gain employment whilst at the same time forcing them to. (Graycar & Jamrozik, 1993)

The need for higher levels of credentials has meant a change in skills needed to enter the work force, a more competitive work market and this along with a narrowing of the unskilled labour market has meant greater competition for fewer jobs and a greater need to stay at school for longer periods. Equally changes to the eligibility criteria and the conditions under which welfare assistance is given to young people, means that young people are either forced to remain at school or dependent on their parents. White (1996, p.46) summarises these issues well,

‘Increased retention rates can be explained in terms of a combination of financial, employment and ideological factors. For example, changes in benefit structures, such as Job Search and Austudy, have favoured the stay-at-school option for many young people. High levels of youth unemployment, increasing credentialism, propaganda about the ‘clever country’ and sustained campaigns stressing the

importance of education and training have clearly struck a chord in the wider community.'

The introduction in 1999 of the Youth Allowance, which replaced other benefits such as Austudy, and Youth Training Allowance, has been to force many young people back into schools to meet the requirement of being either engaged in full time education or training. Dwyer, Stokes, Tyler and Holdsworth (1998) stated that 'It was expected that up to 6000 additional young people, with a wide range of educational needs, will be participating in education and training in Victoria.' The impact of this change on schools is as yet unknown.

What is known however is that these changes have been based on an underlying assumption that retention and being at school equates to engagement, participation and attendance. This assumption is not limited to just the post-compulsory years but is evident throughout schooling as little examination is made at a broader policy level of the institution of school and its appropriateness. Clearly for some students the structure of schooling and its content is either alienating or acts as a barrier to learning and these students are neither engaged or participating in learning and possibly have irregular attendance patterns.

Global Budgets

The shift to global budgets and funding on a per capita basis has meant that schools have to make decisions about priorities in spending. Students who are absent from school may have high needs that require support and therefore cost money, resources and a commitment to welfare. Schools are faced with the task of choosing or prioritising the allocation of funds between meeting students' needs or enhancing teaching resources and consequently educational outcomes. (Walker, 1996) Per capita funding shifts the focus on funding from 'need' to 'bums on seats', this only serves to have schools compete for students and potentially marginalise even more those students with higher needs. From a structural analysis the provision of funding on the basis of an assumption of equal need, only reinforces existing inequalities.

This assumption of equal need for funding has also been applied across schools through the introduction of the Schools of the Future Program in Victoria, which saw the abandonment of true resource equity regardless of specific differences in needs in differing geographical areas (Marginson, 1994). Areas with lower socio-economic means are less able to contribute to school fund raising or possibly even pay school fees and are therefore once again as a whole group disadvantaged compared to others of greater means in our society.

Along with the shift to global budgets schools have faced massive reductions to budgets. (Marginson, 1994) Severe cuts have been made to staff who offer support to students with special needs. As low academic achievement has been strongly related to non-attendance and disengagement from school a reduction in support staff only marginalises these students even more. Whilst on one hand a global budget offers a school the chance to make these choices the process of annual funding means that the employment of welfare support staff is contractual and therefore subject to staff turnover and inconsistency in support provided.

It is suggested that the shift to global budgets under the guise of neo-conservative policy and the handing over of control to schools and their communities for decision making, is actually a withdrawal by the government from the responsibility of funding actual need and for educational outcomes.

Inclusion in a Market Economy

The inclusion of 'education' into a market system has meant that schools have to be competitive and must strive to be seen to be academically successful in an attempt to increase enrolments. (Irving & Parker-Jenkins, 1995) As the VCOSS report (2000, p.19) states 'Schools are caught up in attaining certain standards in literacy, numeracy, managing their budgets, promoting fund raising opportunities and operating in an increasingly competitive environment.' A school's reputation for being well resourced and a worthwhile educational institution could be at risk if it is seen to place an overemphasis on welfare and the support of students with attendance problems (Walker, 1996). Parents who want an academic focus on their child's education are likely to send their child elsewhere if they perceive the school as being too welfare focused or containing too many students with problems and high needs.

From a neo-conservative perspective the market is seen as a regulator of the provision of education and the reward is improved services as school compete and offer more to gain enrolments. However an inclusion in the market system assumes the principles of free choice and that we all have an equal ability to exercise that choice. The capacity to exercise free choice is not equally distributed throughout the community and as a result free choice is actually a philosophy of inequality (Graycar & Jamrozik, 1993)

This market is actually a quasi-market as the principles of the free market are not present. Hugman (1998) indicates that in sectors which remain principally funded as well as regulated by the state, a quasi-market and a quasi-consumer exist. This quasi-consumer is defined through their relationship to the school. Parents and students are considered to be consumers rather than as citizens who are members of a broader system of schools with one interest; education (Marginson, 1994).

Bosworth (1994) suggests that the 'New Right' explanations of non-attendance provides the notion of the pupil as a 'consumer' and this has shifted the emphasis of the debate away from social deviance and towards a rational choice by students. Students' non-attendance can then be seen as a formal decision not to be educated and therefore the question could be asked if the young person has given up their right to education through their non-attendance (Irving & Parker-Jenkins, 1995). If this concept of the student as a consumer of a service with a freedom of choice is applied, rather than the notion of society's responsibility to educate, then clearly a minimalist approach to providing resources that address non-attendance would be provided.

Role and Scope of Schools

Whereas the role of schools traditionally was to educate and be a vehicle to either the workforce or university this role has progressively changed and particularly in the last two decades. Reports such as the Burdekin Report into Youth Homelessness (1989) and the Victorian Task Force into Suicide Prevention (1997) have highlighted the

important role schools have in providing support and welfare for students. Young people respond to difficulties in a number of ways and one is by not attending school; this can then have a compounding effect beyond poor academic results to be far reaching and affect future employment prospects and lifestyle. (Beresford, 1993)

These reports recognised the important role schools have in being the first point of identification of a problem and in being part of prevention and early intervention strategies. They also highlighted the need for a holistic approach to welfare and the education of children involving families, communities and schools and to achieve this schools need cooperation from other health and welfare agencies. (Beresford, 1993)

Schools are however now expected to be more and more the agency through which social problems are to be identified and then resolved. The implication to schools from these various reports and issues raised earlier in this literature is that the role of schools in welfare and the scope of what schools are meant to deal with or resolve has expanded. This has been to such a degree that either a larger welfare sub-structure within schools is needed, or the training of teachers and school staff to include this focus is required.

In recent years through the Framework for Student Support Services (1999) the government has placed in policy, a practice for student welfare. The introduction of the CASES software (1996) and School Attendance Guidelines (1997) has placed a means of data collection and a policy around addressing attendance issues. Nevertheless under a neo-conservative paradigm there has been a devolution of the government's responsibility for social issues and a subsequent reduction in funding, support agencies and structures. The introduction of any policy or practice will simply be rhetorical unless sufficient funding and resources are provided to genuinely or adequately address attendance or welfare issues.

Schools also have a statutory role in regards to attendance as they are required to keep records of all absences; approved or unapproved. In more recent years this monitoring role has been extended into the VCE years requiring the monitoring of attendance for the eligibility of Youth Allowance payments. Schools are required to report unapproved absences of more than five days. In which case students payments can be stopped. This linking of attendance and financial support can place schools in the difficult position of assisting Centrelink in defaulting students, yet knowing that for the student and the family, Youth Allowance payments may very well be an essential part of the family's income and the students ability to remain at school.

There has been widespread acceptance however that the statistics on non-attendance are inadequate and unreliable. Problems can exist with school recording systems, with students finding loopholes which can skew statistics and make their absences either less visible or appear greater than they actually are. (Kilpatrick, 1998) Students do not always miss a full day, in some cases they miss a class or a half day or may change schools and consequently not be registered anywhere. Data collection methods do not always allow for these differences in non-attendance and therefore do not provide schools with accurate statistics on unapproved absences.(DEET, 1999)

Kilpatrick (1998) suggests that this variation in how students can miss school creates issues for schools in regards to their 'duty of care'. This is particularly evident in what Kilpatrick describes as 'post registration truancy', that is where students have been marked as at school and then do not attend. The duty of care in this instance would reside with the school compared to the instance where the child misses a full day and the duty of care would still be with the parents. Legally a school acts '*in loco parentis*' and therefore acts in place of the parent. (Fitzoy Legal Service, 1999) The issue of missing school after having been recorded as present is a serious issue of duty of care that schools cannot ignore.

Appendix 2.2 demonstrates the political, economic and policy issues raised here in a diagram.

Truancy or Non attendance

Language & Terminology

The use of critical social theory and structural theory is of particular importance in the consideration of the language and terminology used in describing or addressing non-attendance issues. The type of language or terminology used to describe non-attenders can lead to the seeking of different reasons for an analysis of non-attendance.

The common term still used today for a student who misses school without explanation is 'truant'. This term clearly places the reasons for missing school with the student and the process of dealing with the issues is then based in dealing with and controlling the individual. The word itself has over time become attached to a number of stereotypical behaviours and circumstances that make up the truant and their family. Truancy becomes classified as a social problem where individuals need to be controlled and the requirement for compulsory attendance reinforces this view. Coventry (1988, p.84) states,

'...social problems come to be seen in terms of deficiencies of individuals and logically, therefore, lead to a form of social action designed to change victims (e.g. the poor, the unemployed, the uneducated) and not the social forces that led to an individual's 'victim status'.'

The use of the word truant or truancy becomes victim blaming, ignores all other structures or forces impacting on attendance and whilst fitting comfortably with neo-conservative ideology will not be used in this research unless as a quotation or in the context of supporting literature.

The term used by schools (within the CASES software) for an absence without explanation is an 'unapproved absence'. The Community Services Act (1970) requires parents to provide a written explanation for their child's non-attendance and indicates that in the absence of the provision of a reasonable explanation the student is considered to be absent without reasonable excuse. The Student Attendance Guidelines (1997) in the section detailing the requirements for monitoring student attendance discusses unsatisfactorily explained student absences and states,

‘The judgement of what is a satisfactorily explained absence is one for the school to make in terms of the particular case. A written excuse offered by a parent or guardian is not necessarily a satisfactorily explained absence if the school does not accept the validity of that excuse.’

The term ‘unapproved absence’ reflects the school’s perspective of absences but it also reflects the power imbalance which is inherent in schools, with students being the group who are usually powerless. Using the term unapproved also provides a focus on the individual and its inherent problems whereas using the term unexplained allows for the incorporation of other influences on attendance and the possibility of legitimate reason.

Another issue for schools is the ability to police and fulfil the requirements stated in the Student Attendance Guidelines. Without sufficient resources and staff time the guidelines become meaningless and nothing but rhetoric.

From the theoretical perspectives informing this research the use of the term ‘unexplained absence’ is the most appropriate terminology. However to encompass the school’s perspective, the use of both unexplained and unapproved absence will be used.

Defining Unexplained/Unapproved Absences

Truancy (unexplained/unapproved absences) was described by the House of Representatives report into truancy (1996, p.8) as ‘the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age, although it can occur with parental knowledge and sometimes consent.’ This definition is fairly limited as it tends to look only at unexplained absences from the perspective of frequency and the relationship of parental knowledge or consent. There are however several forms of unexplained absences. Reid (1999) provides an analysis of this and suggests that there is;

- specific lesson absence, which is the missing of a particular lesson often due to the attitudes and abilities of teachers;
- post registration absence, which occurs when students registered as being present at school (usually during formal roll marking) and then skip school;
- parental condoned absences, where one or more of the parents agree to the child missing school;
- blanket absence, occurs when a child fails to attend school and lacks any authorization to do so;
- psychological absence, occurs when a child physically attends school yet fails to participate in any meaningful way;
- school refusal or school phobia, which is closely linked to anxiety, considered to be comparatively rare and a psychological and medical condition.

This list provides a broad spectrum of the ways in which school can be missed and demonstrates that unexplained absences can not only take different forms but can occur due to many different reasons.

Engagement and Attendance

Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez (1990) suggest that engagement in education is the result of the interaction between students, teachers and curriculum. They state, 'Promoting engagement requires attention to student characteristics, the tasks students are asked to perform, the school environment in which the work takes place, and the external environment that influences the student and the school itself.' For some students the school environment and processes are alienating and become barriers to engagement and subsequently to attendance. For these students non-attendance could easily be seen as resistance to or a rejection of school.

White (1996) identified five forms of what he called resistance to education;

- resistance to content, where the curriculum content of the school is considered boring, irrelevant or unlikely to help the young person once they have left school;
- resistance to authority, which is a result of the denial of routine justice where students are denied the due process rights of the wider society when accused of doing something wrong. Teachers tend to rule arbitrarily and without question;
- resistance to teachers, due to teachers paternalistic and authoritarian attitudes and their lack of respect for students as people, for their class background, ethnic and national cultures and family history;
- resistance to school process, which imply that education is about sharing of knowledge but the school system is structured around competition and notions of failure and success and the sharing of knowledge can be considered cheating;
- resistance to disruptive change, where the lack of resources, large class sizes and feelings of being cheated out of promises for quality teaching and infrastructure act as a source of frustration and anger for students.

All these factors can act to cause students to disengage from school. Wehlage et al (1990) suggest that students with little or nothing to gain from their engagement in education can develop a shared peer culture which actively discourages effort at academic achievement. Disengagement can become 'cool'. This can however have consequences for schools through students' behaviours, commitment to school requirements and attendance. Wehlage et al (1990, p.176) state,

'The lack of engagement is apparent in student absences, the interruption and distractions of non-academic activities and student inattention due to boredom with uninspired curriculum. ... While at-risk students make their lack of engagement obvious, observers generally agree that it is a problem among a majority of high school students.'

School can however be a contradictory experience for many young people. Whilst it can be an alienating and difficult experience it can also be a significant source of social connection and an integral part of the youth community (White, 1996). Students who miss school can often remain near or in the school grounds due to their peer connections and the social connection that school offers. Research has shown that school connectedness is the most salient protective factor for both boys and girls against acting out behaviours (Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993). This contradiction

and the knowledge that school connectedness is a positive factor does however offer a starting point for the development of change.

Reasons for Non-attendance

One of the underlying assumptions of this research is that most of what the literature identifies as risk factors to school leaving are actually the same factors that cause students to miss school. Stainsby and Webster (2000) support the same assumption and also determined that many of the factors associated with early school leaving were also associated with non-attendance. This research takes the perspective that whilst non-attendance itself is considered a risk factor to early school leaving it exists on a continuum with many other factors operating in a causal chain before it. For example factors that may cause a child to disengage from school may also lead to non-attendance which then acts in a cumulative manner and may subsequently lead to leaving school.

Just as there are varied forms of absences there are many reasons why students decide to miss school. Student's needs, interests, abilities and future hopes vary and sometimes significantly. Therefore as Dwyer (1996b) suggests there '... is unlikely to be such a person as the *typical* 'non-attender'.' Students may dislike, disengage from and possibly leave school for a variety of reasons and this may occur at different stages of their schooling (Dwyer, 1996b).

Yet schooling is structured predominantly as if the people they teach are homogenous, but young people clearly are not. The House of Representatives report into truancy (1996, p.34) found that 'Schools which fail to provide a supportive environment which recognises that young people are not an homogeneous group, fail some of their students.' It follows then that any response to non-attendance has to be equally as diverse as the reasons.

This report (p.25) also indicated that non-attendance is '... the result of multiple negative and cumulative influences originating from the individual, the family, the school and the community...'. Appendix 2.1 is a summary of risk factors identified by Batten and Russell (1995) in their review of literature from 1980 to 1994 on students at risk. They determined that the literature contained reference to a multiplicity of factors, which were seen to relate to educational under achievement and then to early school leaving. Batten and Russell (1995) do however indicate that it is very difficult to define the relationship between risk factors and educational outcomes as these relationships are highly complex and the concept of a single cause-effect relationship in this area is unrealistic. They state, 'Relationships need to be viewed as forming a dense and complex web of interrelated, interacting, multi-dimensional forces.'

As the focus of this research is students' reasons for non-attendance the main areas being considered are those with a direct affect on them; family, personal and school based reasons. Drawing from the work of Batten and Russell (1995), Stainsby and Webster (2000), and Walker, (1996) a brief summary of the key aspects in each area follows:

- Family reasons: Young people can experience problems within their family, which affect their ability to go to school and complete school requirements. Issues such as blended family structures; violence or conflict in the home; lack of parental support for education, study requirements or study commitments; transitory parental work patterns; living away from the family and the family's socio-economic context, can all inhibit a student's ability to attend school.
- Personal reasons: A student's behaviour, motivation and beliefs about self, their schooling and the world impact on the type of experience school is, that is negative or positive. Issues such as low academic achievement; lack of interest or motivation; poor self image and low self-esteem; level of health; behavioural issues such as anger, aggression and being disruptive; drug and alcohol use; culture; religion; and peer issues, can act in complex ways with other factors to impact on attendance.
- School reasons: School factors can affect students' attitudes, engagement and motivation to school and hence impact on their attendance. Factors such as teacher/student relationships; discipline policy and processes; inflexible and alienating institutional structures; content and relevance of curriculum and its relationship to future employment; school responsiveness to student needs (particularly during adolescence); school/teacher support for low achievers; and teaching practices, can affect some students level of engagement, motivation and/or attitude to school.

The issue of unexplained/unapproved absences is very complex and multi-dimensional with many factors contributing to its existence. These factors can exist on a broader political level where policy decisions and economic circumstances can indirectly impact on students, filtering down systems and eventually having an affect on their attendance. More direct factors which also impact on their attendance are issues which are personal, family and school based. Having an understanding of what students reasons are for missing school, provides the added dimension of their perspective and makes them part on the overall understanding rather than just being the subject of analysis. Placing this understanding within the context of recognised factors that affect school attendance is an holistic approach that can lead to the development of better ways of dealing with non-attendance

Chapter

3

Research Design

Type of Research

The nature of this research is descriptive. Descriptive research attempts to describe or provide information about such things as a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or program or attitudes towards an issue. (Kumar, 1996) Therefore descriptive research will often measure incidences using quantitative data gathering methods or provide descriptive information through the use of qualitative data collection methods. Descriptive research focuses on the how and who questions, tends to not use hypotheses but rather ask questions. (Neuman, 1997)

This research seeks to provide information about the problem of unapproved/unexplained absences; it does not make any hypothesis and seeks only to gain an understanding of the reasons students choose to miss school. Through an interview process and the completion of an interview schedule information will be obtained to enable a description of the main issues.

Sampling

Sampling is a process of systematically selecting cases for inclusion in a research project. Sampling begins with a population and this is defined more precisely to a target population, which is narrowed to the sample group or cohort. (Neuman, 1997) Purposive sampling enables the researcher to select those people who are most likely to have the required information to achieve the objectives of the research and who are also willing to share that knowledge (Kumar, 1996).

In this research a purposive sampling process was used to ensure that the sample group met the criteria of a minimum of eleven days of unapproved absences during 1999. It also meant that the sample group would be able to respond to the interview questions as they were considered to be part of an overall group with attendance problems. A minimum of eleven days of unapproved absences was used as the key selection criterion, as it was considered that unapproved absences below this might be accounted for by data input or recording mistakes.

The final sample group for this research consisted of 13 students and was made up of seven students from Kealba College and six students from Brimbank College. The population for this study was the year 9 students who attended Brimbank College and Kealba Secondary College in 1999. The target population was students who had eleven or more unapproved absences in that year. The target population consisted of

93 students, however 21 were no longer at school and the final target population was 72. This was then narrowed to a sample group of 20 by using a table of random numbers.

This method was preferred because the random selection of students ensured that each member of the population was given an equal and independent chance of selection. It also ensured that the researcher did not otherwise select a sample group with similar levels of absences and therefore possibly result in a homogenous sample group. This was completed independently for each school so that the sample group was made up of ten students from each school.

Each student in the sample was verbally asked by the student welfare coordinator whether they were prepared to be part of the project and whether, considering the topic of the research, writing to their parents for consent to participate was an issue or not. If a negative answer was received another case was selected using the previous system in an attempt to maintain twenty cases in the sample group.

This process took a number of weeks and due to time constraints a decision was made to no longer pursue replacement students. The 20 cases were then reduced to 16 because in two cases the students did not want to be part of the project and were not replaced, and in another two cases it became evident that data collection problems had placed two students within the criteria and they had not actually had sufficient unapproved absences to be part of the project.

Letters explaining the research and seeking parental consent for participation were sent to parents. (Refer appendix 3.1.) This was initially done through the students, but due to the very low return rate letters were posted to parents with a stamped self-addressed envelope and then followed up by phone. In some cases letters were sent on three separate occasions and a number of phone calls were made before a reply was received.

The final sample group was reduced from 16 to 13 because in one case the parents did not allow their child to participate and in the two other cases at a very late stage, after many failed attempts to have the consent forms returned, the students withdrew from the project.

Data Collection

Research Instrument

Kumar (1996) indicates that the choice of which method is most appropriate for data collection depends on the purpose of the study, the resources available and the skills of the researcher. It is also important to consider the characteristics of the population such as their socio-economic status, educational level, age structure, interest in and attitude to participation in research and ethnic background when choosing a data collection method (Kumar, 1996).

The choice of research instrument was made by considering such things as age, education level, and familiarity of the respondents with research methods, the skills of

the researcher and time constraints. For these reasons a structured interview with an interview schedule was considered the best method of data collection. A structured interview was preferred for a number of reasons;

- diversity of issues raised in the literature;
- the limited skills of the researcher and the need for assistance through an interview schedule which could act as a guide and provide some reliability in the data collection process;
- to enable comparison of data across the sample group;
- and for the collection of uniform information.

Development of Interview Schedule

The development of the interview schedule was informed by the main themes regarding non-attendance raised in the literature. Four main areas were identified as important in understanding reasons for non-attendance; socio-demographics; feelings/beliefs about self and things that occur at school; attitudes to education; and reasons for non-attendance. Some questions required a single response and other questions sought as many responses as applicable. (Refer to Appendix 3.2 for copy of interview schedule).

Part 1

Socio-demographic Features

This section aimed to provide a socio-demographic profile of the group for a comparison to the literature and to see if the group was demographically homogenous.

Part 2

Section 1 – Feelings/Beliefs about self and school

This section sought to understand how students' viewed themselves and how they believed they fitted into or related to school.

Section 2 – Beliefs about education

Students' beliefs about education and their perceptions of their school and the effects of their non-attendance were sought.

Part 1 and section 1 and 2 of part 2 were designed to enable a comparison of the sample with the typical characteristics, issues and factors raised in the literature and considered as contributing to students' unexplained/unapproved absences.

Section 3 – Reasons for missing school

This section was divided into three areas of reasons for non-attendance; family, personal and school. It also looked at parents' relationship to absences, the frequency and type of absence and what students did when absent.

Built into the schedule was the ability to cross reference questions between sections to enable a check for any inconsistencies between students reasons for non-attendance and their attitudes, family dynamics, beliefs about themselves and their non-attendance. For example a student may indicate that gaining an education is important yet elsewhere indicate that school is a waste of time, revealing an inconsistency.

Forms of Data Collection

To enable the collection of in-depth information as well as number of incidences, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used in this research.

Neuman (1997) argues that the best research often combines the features of both methods and an understanding of both styles provides a broader range in which research can be conducted. Charles Ragin (cited in Neuman, 1997, p.14) states

‘The key features common to all qualitative methods can be seen when they are contrasted with quantitative methods. Most quantitative data techniques are data condensers. They condense data in order to see the big picture.... Qualitative methods, by contrast, are best understood as data enhancers. When data are enhanced, it is possible to see key concepts of cases more clearly.’

In this research both methods of data collection were used to enable a good understanding of the issues and to provide the depth of information required to understand the students’ reasons for non-attendance.

Quantitative Methods

Kumar (1996, p10) states that ‘the main function of statistics is to act as a test to confirm or contradict the conclusions that you have drawn on the basis of your understanding of analysed data.’ The use of quantitative data was chosen to enable an understanding of the level of incidence in the sample group of a particular reason, demographic, belief, attitude or issue. This understanding would enable a comparison of the sample group to the representations made in the literature.

Questions were structured using a number of predetermined tick the box answers with an allowance for an ‘other’ response if needed. Some questions required a single response and others required the ticking of as many responses as applicable to each student.

Qualitative Methods

Sarantakos (1993) suggests that one of the reasons for using qualitative methods is to be able to produce descriptive data that represents in the respondents own words their views and experiences. As the basis of this research was students’ reasons for non-attendance it was important that the interview schedule allowed for their own words. For this reason the interview schedule included questions of a qualitative nature.

Some questions provided a category of 'other' to allow for qualitative responses to questions. Whilst the researcher is aware that this category could be solely used quantitatively, the intent was to be able to expand on the options provided and possibly reveal any other reasons not raised in the literature. Some questions were open ended and allowed for qualitative responses in the students' own words.

Scales

Kumar (1996, p.128) states that 'Attitudinal scales measure the intensity of respondents' attitudes towards the various aspects of a situation or issue and provide techniques to combine the attitudes towards different aspects into one overall indicator.' As one aspect of the research was to provide some link between students' reported reasons for non-attendance and any underlying issues that may impact on their attendance, their attitude to certain matters was considered important.

For this reason some of the data was collected using a Likert scale, so as to reveal students' degree of attitude, firstly in relation to each other and secondly as an overall indicator of the group. Likert scales were also used to measure students' beliefs about themselves and issues that may impact on their on attendance.

Due to the age and inexperience of the sample group all scales were developed using categories and a five point scale. This number of points was considered sufficient to enable a measure of the intensity of the attitude and to also be within the capabilities of the group. Categories were three directional providing the possibility of a positive, neutral or negative response.

For some questions the categories were designed specifically so that students' could respond in a way that was contextual to their peers, that is as a comparison to other students.

Student Interviews

Appointments were made with students through the student welfare coordinators and were scheduled for the start of a normal school period. The student welfare coordinator arranged a room for the interviews and the researcher and student met at the agreed time. Interviews took between 30 and 45 minutes therefore only requiring students to miss one school period.

Interviews were conducted in as much as possible a relaxed manner with the research paying special attention to the environment and in particular seating arrangements. Interviews commenced with the researcher going through the list of information regarding consent, confidentiality, purpose of the interviews and the use of data collected (Refer to appendix 3.3). In particular a verification of students' willingness to be part of the project was made due to the power imbalance inherent in a school environment and between the student and the researcher.

Students had a copy of the interview schedule and progressed through it with the researcher, with the researcher acting as the scribe and completing the interview

schedule. Consultations with the students about how they would like to complete the interview schedule showed that the students preferred this method. The researcher also preferred this method as it allowed for qualitative data to be completed in detail and involved a more relaxed and friendly interaction between the students and the researcher. This process was also thought to be more appropriate considering the characteristics of the sample group, the nature of the information required and the experience of the researcher. During the interviews referral was made back to the students frequently to ensure that responses had been recorded correctly and reflected what they had intended.

Data were then collated for frequencies of quantitative data and thematic analysis of qualitative data was made. The characteristics of the sample group were compared to the literature.

Limitations

A number of factors impacted on this research:

- The small sample size meant that results can only be considered reflective of the sample and cannot be generalised.
- Conducting the research within a single network may have reduced the scope of the research as the sample group may be fairly homogenous, or vary less than if the research had been conducted across a number of school networks or clusters.
- The process of seeking students permission to contact their parents may have indirectly excluded those students whose parents were unaware of their absences from participating, as the student may have refused to participate in the project to prevent their parents finding out. It is worth noting however that the schools' systems do normally ensure that parents are advised in some way of unexplained/unapproved absences.
- The fact that the research is part of an academic requirement places limits on the possible size of the research and the timeframe that it can be conducted in. Time was one of the greatest constraints on the research.
- Difficulties in contacting and obtaining consent from parents required repeating procedures many times and impacted on the scheduled timeframe, sometimes eliminating the opportunity or possibility of taking any alternative procedures.
- The requirement for parental consent before students could be interviewed and the limited timeframe of the research project meant that a pilot could not be conducted.

Issues Arising from the Research Design

Other issues arose as a result of the research design used. These issues were;

- Some absence records were on computer printouts and other absence records were on original roll sheets. The original absence sheets were often difficult to understand for a number of reasons; they were roughly completed, there were inconsistencies in recording methods from one teacher to another and changes in processes had occurred over the years. For example the roll being marked once a

day and then twice a day. This meant that a number of assumptions had to be made about an unapproved absence being either a day or half day, and whether notes covered one particular day's absence or were supposed to cover a consecutive number of days absence.

- Some absences were due to what appeared to be school culture; that is in one school very few students attended on the last day of each term. These absences were marked as unapproved on the roll, but due to the consistency of this action and it being clearly a part of the school's culture, it was decided to not include these days in the data.
- In 1997 and 1998 rolls in one school were with a few exceptions marked only once a day. As these rolls were the only means of obtaining data it was assumed that if a symbol for an unapproved absence appeared it was a full days absence.
- Records were often archived or in storage and at times very difficult but not impossible to access.
- The absence of a pilot inhibited the chance to weed out any problems with the structure of the interview schedule. During the first interview it was obvious that some modifications needed to be made to the interview schedule.

The issues were;

- ❖ the provision for the collection of qualitative data for a number of questions so as to enable an expansion of the answer and greater depth to the response;
- ❖ allowance for the fact that some questions were not applicable if a particular response was made to a previous questions. On occasions it interrupted the succinct progression through the interview but did not inhibit data collection.
- ❖ questions were written in the present tense whereas the students were required to recall their reasons for the previous years. It was necessary to frequently remind students that their response was regarding their absences in year 9 and not in year 10. Whilst this did not inhibit data collection it may have affected reliability.
- ❖ the timing of the interviews which were almost one year after the actual absence this appeared to make it difficult at times for some individuals to recall information and therefore may have been too high an expectation of the sample group.
- ❖ some questions were focused on the more extreme end of the problem of non-attendance and may have therefore missed other information equally important.
- The use of the same sample group for two research projects meant that one question regarding number of schools attended became obsolete. The first project looked at trends over the middle years and it was therefore necessary to ensure consistency in schools attended, this did however impact on this one question in the second project.

For all interviews attempts were made to address all of these issues to ensure that there was consistency in the interview process across the whole sample group.

Ethical Issues

Kumar (1997) indicates that consent that is given willingly and with full knowledge, is essential to ethical research. Unfortunately children are not considered competent to give consent and for this project the interviewing of a student is only allowed through the consent of their parents. This does create a dilemma in that it makes this research separate to rather than with the students. This issue was overcome by obtaining informal consent from the students through the student welfare coordinators prior to seeking parental consent.

Having students' informed consent was essential because parts of the interview schedule involved questions regarding such things as parents' employment status, family structure and drug taking. Kumar (1997, p.192) states

'Informed consent implies that subjects are made adequately aware of the type of information you want from them, why the information is being sought, what purpose it will be put to, how they are expected to participate in the study, and of how it will directly or indirectly affect them.'

By going through each of the topics listed in appendix 3.3 it was felt that students would be adequately informed about the research and therefore able to give informed consent.

As schools have an inherent power imbalance and students are generally the powerless people in the relationship, minimising any power imbalance that may exist was not only important but also essential if the researcher was to gain the confidence of the students and answer the research question. Students were therefore given many opportunities to either not participate or withdraw. Also the issue of power was part of the considerations in the development of the methodology of the research.

Research Question

This research design was developed to answer the following question:

'What do students with a history of unapproved absences identify as the reasons for their absences?'

Chapter

4

Findings

The research findings are based on the interviews of 13 students, seven from Kealba College and six from Brimbank College.

Socio-demographic findings

Refer to appendix 4.1 for findings in the format of the interview schedule.

1. Age.

Table 1: Age of Students.

Age	15	16	17
No. of Responses	4	8	1

Table 1 shows that the majority of students were either 15 or 16 years old which is within the normal age range for year 10, which was their year level at the time of the interviews.

2. Gender.

The sample group was made up of nine males and four females.

3. Siblings.

Table 2: Number of Siblings.

No. of Siblings	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No. of Responses	1	4	2	1	1	3	0	1

Seven of the students had two or less siblings with the remainder having three or more siblings and one student having seven siblings. Siblings ranged from two years to twenty eight years, with most siblings falling in the age range of 5 – 15. Five students were the oldest in their family, two were the youngest and five were located between oldest and youngest. Six students had older siblings who had left school between the ages of 16 and 20. (Two students were uncertain of the exact age their sibling left school)

4. Place of Birth and Language.

Ten of the thirteen students were born in Australia. The majority of students had parents born overseas; for eight students both parents were born overseas and for three students one parent was Australian born and one was born overseas. Two students had both parents born in Australia.

English was a first language for seven of the thirteen students. For those whom English was a second language the languages spoken at home were Lebanese, Turkish, Croatian and a Bosnian language.

5. Housing.

Table 3: Suburb of Residence

<i>Suburb</i>	<i>No.</i>
St. Albans	7
Delahay	2
Deer Park	2
Keilor Downs	1
Kealba	1

All students lived within the collector districts of the two schools. One student had however only recently moved to Deer Park having travelled previously from an outer western suburb to school in Deer Park. All thirteen students lived with their parents with eleven living in their own home, one renting and one uncertain if their parents were renting or buying. The student whose family was renting was in between houses as they were building.

Table 4: Number of Houses Lived in, in the Past 5 Years.

<i>No. of Places</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>No. of Responses</i>	8	3	1

There was a high level of stability in housing for the majority of the sample group, with eight students having lived in the same house for the past five years.

6. Relationships.

Table 5: Adults in the Household.

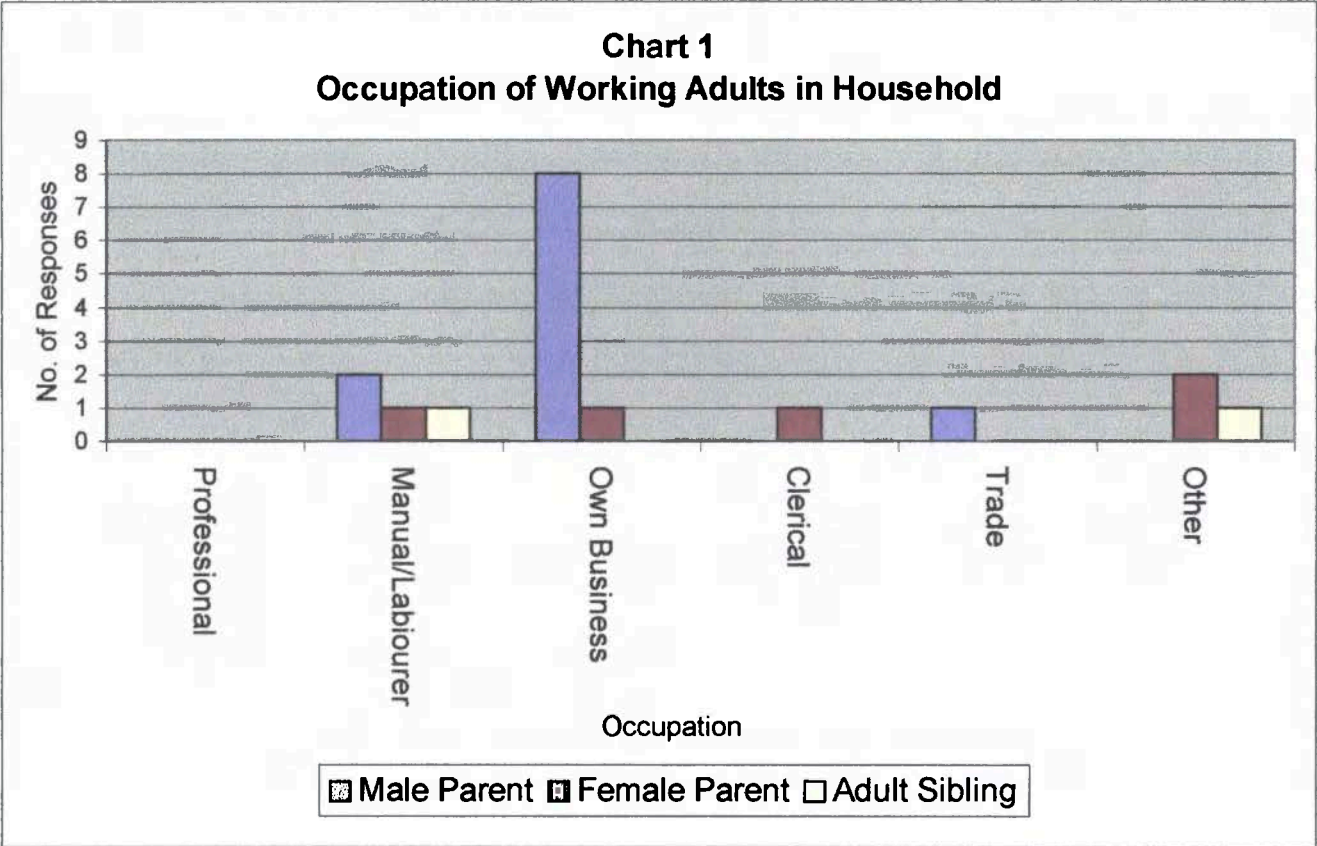
	<i>No.</i>
<i>Parents and adult siblings</i>	7
<i>Parents</i>	5
<i>Parent and Step-parent</i>	1

Other than one, all students lived with their parents or their parents and adult siblings. Only one student lived in a blended family.

7. Welfare Benefits.

Six students indicated that the family did not receive any benefits and one did not know if the family received any benefits. Of those families who received benefits, four received Education Maintenance Allowance, one unemployment benefits and one student knew that both parents were on a pension but uncertain of which type.

8. Occupation.



Eight male parents and one female parent were in their own business, this included one family business where both parents worked together in their own business. The two next highest areas of occupations were manual/labourer and other. Six students indicated that their mother was occupied in home duties, two indicated that both parents were currently out of work and one indicated that an adult sibling was out of work.

Student Interview Schedule

Refer to appendix 4.2 for results in interview schedule format.

Section 1.

1. Schools Attended between Years 5 and 9.

All students had attended one primary school and one secondary school between years 5 and 9. This question which was designed to consider transience became irrelevant to

this research project due to the fact that the sampling process had ensured that the students had attended only one secondary school. Refer to the methodology chapter for further explanation.

2. Expulsion from School.

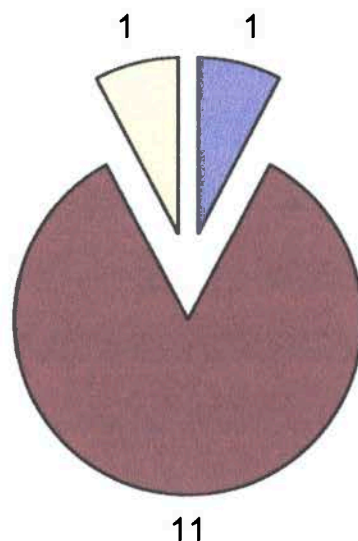
None of the sample group had ever been expelled from school.

3. Suspension from School.

Only one of the sample group had ever been suspended from school and this was on one occasion only.

4. Frequency of Trouble at School.

Chart 2
Reported Frequency of Trouble at School by No. of Responses

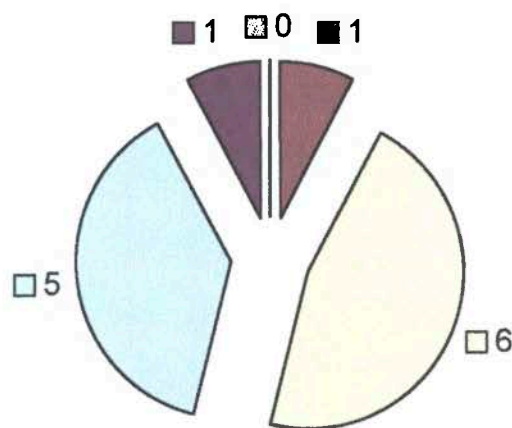


☒ More than most kids ☒ About the same as everyone else ☐ Less often than most kids

The majority of students felt that they got into trouble at school about the same as their peers, indicating that the majority of the group felt they were reflective of the norm. Only one student felt that he got into trouble at school more often than most students and one student felt that she was in trouble less often than most students.

5. Academic Success at School.

Chart 3
Reported Level of Success at School Work by No. of Responses



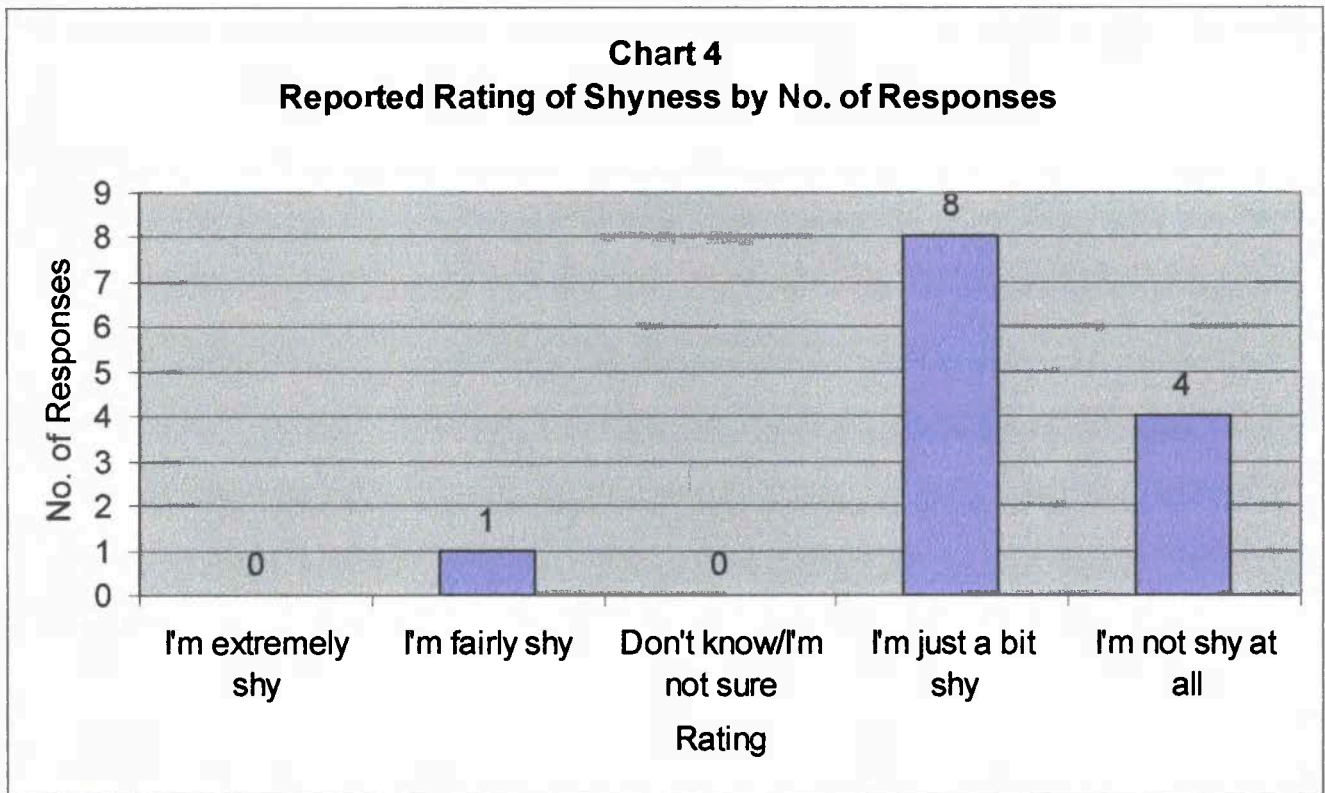
■ Not well I usually fail ■ Below average □ Average □ Better than average ■ Very well

Chart 3 shows that twelve of the thirteen students believed that they were achieving in their school results at an average or above average level. Only one student reported that they performed below average.

6. Belief in How Well they Fit in at School.

Students were asked to rate how well they felt they fitted in at school on a scale from 'I don't fit in at all, I feel out of place all the time' to 'I fit in well'. All students indicated that they either fitted in okay most of the time or that they fitted in well at school, indicating that in they did not feel out of place at school and probably had good friendship groups.

7. Rating of Shyness.



Only one student indicated that they were fairly shy with the majority being either just a bit shy or not shy at all.

8. Frequency of being Angry.

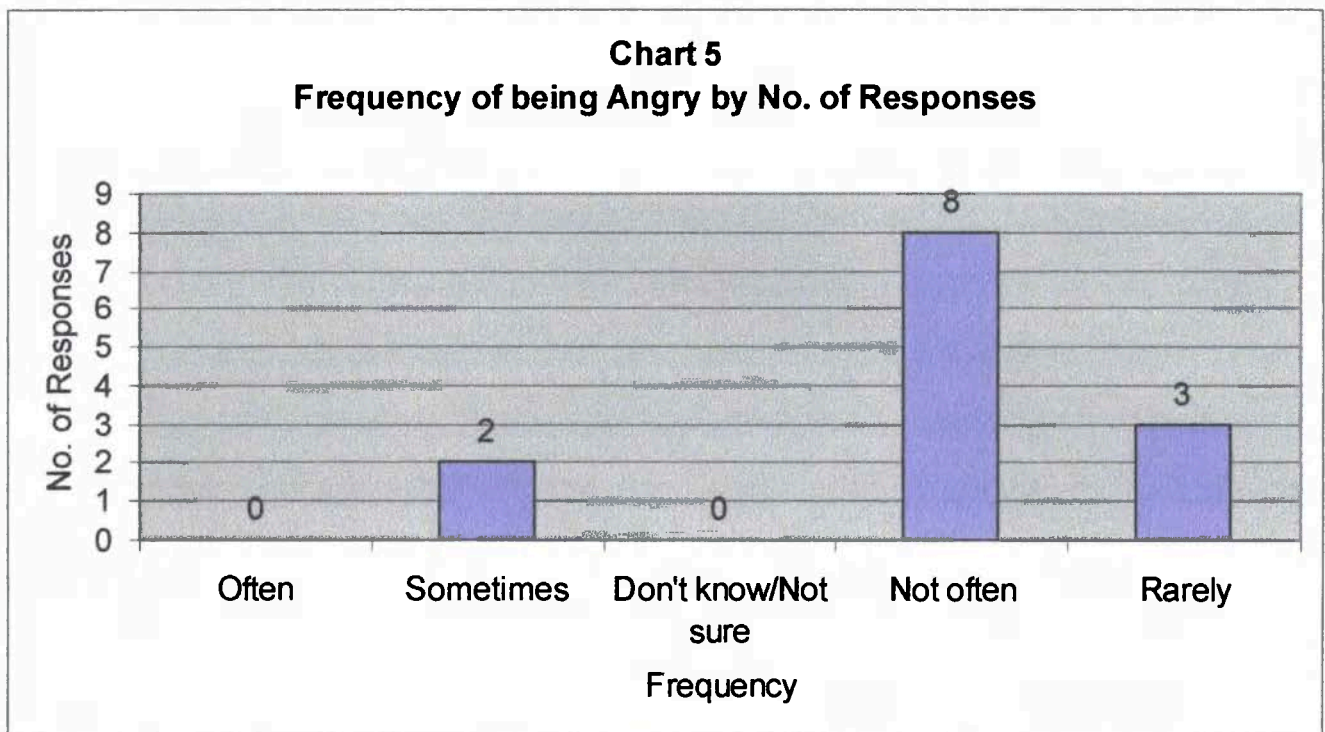


Chart 5 indicates that problems of anger at school was not apparent in the sample group, with the majority of the group reporting that they either did 'not often' or 'rarely' get angry at school. The two students that indicated that they sometimes get angry at school qualified this response by indicating that the level of anger was not great.

7. Bullying.

All students indicated that they do not ever get bullied at school.

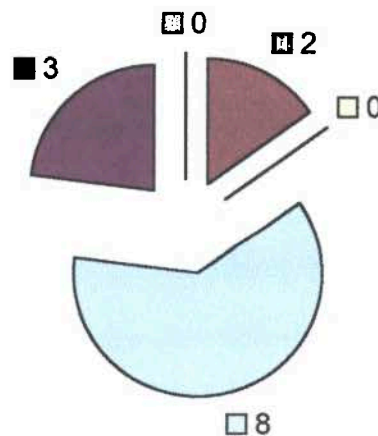
10. Teacher Relationships.

Nine of the thirteen students believed that they had a good relationship with a teacher or teachers. In explaining how this made them feel different about school the main themes were that:

- you like to go to class and want to do the work;
- the teacher helps you;
- you can ask the teacher questions; and
- you can talk about problems.

Four students indicated that they didn't feel there were any teachers with whom they had a good relationship. They indicated that this didn't affect how they felt about going to school but two of them did indicate that there was a teacher who helped them and offered advice.

Chart 6
Importance of Good Teacher Relationships to Ability to Learn by
No. of Responses



■ Not at all important ■ Of little importance ■ Important ■ Fairly important ■ Very important

All students believed that good teacher relationships was of some importance, with eleven students indicating that good teacher relationships were either fairly important or very important.

11. Effect of Culture on Other Students Attitudes.

Four students believed that their culture had an affect on other students attitudes to them. They indicated that:

- 'students thought they were more of a trouble maker' (because of their culture);
- 'people sit on opposite sides of room, Australian – Others, they don't communicate';
- 'only affects some peoples attitudes'; and
- 'there is a little bit of a divide between the cultures'.

Five indicated that culture was not an issue and four students were from an Australian background.

12. Effect of Religion on Other Students Attitudes.

A student's religion did not appear to affect the attitudes of other students for the majority of students in the sample group. Two students indicated that they were not religious, nine indicated that their religion did not affect other students attitudes towards them and the two students who indicated that religion was an issue indicated that;

- 'it is difficult to fit in, when your religion has for example special eating requirements'; and
- 'at first it was difficult but other people in the school are the same religion and that makes it easier, they can stick together'.

Section 2.

1. Importance of an Education.

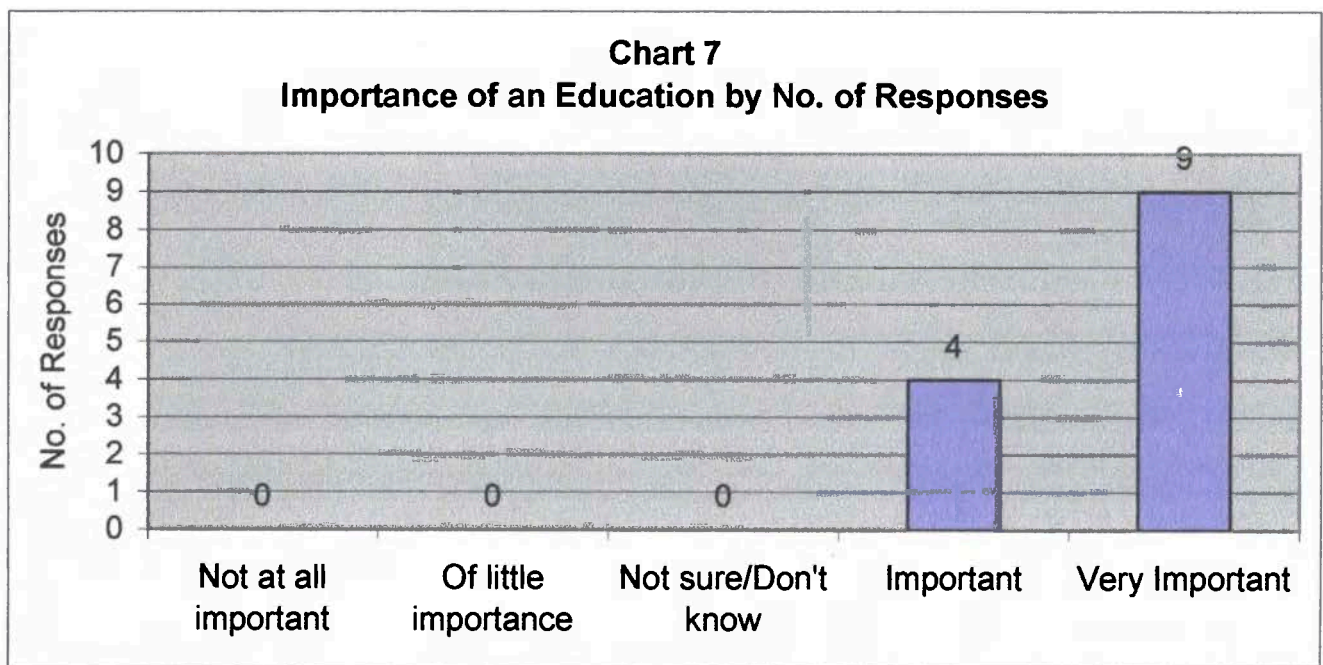


Table 6: Importance of an Education.

	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>1. Do you believe that you could get the job you would like without an education?</i>	0	4	9
<i>2. Do you believe that an education will help you to have a better life?</i>	0	13	0
<i>3. Do you think that school is a waste of time?</i>	0	0	12

Chart 7 and table 6 indicate that the sample group had strong beliefs that getting an education is important. The four students who believed that they could get a job without an education still believed that a certain level of education was necessary. These students hoped to work in a trade or pursue a sporting career. One student stated that 'You could get a job but not a very good one'. One student indicated that school is a waste of time sometimes and has not been included in the table.

2. Effects of Missing School.

The majority of students believed that missing school had an effect on their ability to complete their school work with the main themes of their responses being;

- it is hard to catch up if too much work is missed;
- but you can
- ask friends to help you to catch up;
 - you can go to teachers to get work
- and this group indicated that they,
- always try to catch up.

One student although believing that missing school had an effect on her ability to complete her work indicated 'If the class is not important you can miss it'. Another student indicated that he 'Just missed the work'.

Five students indicated that missing school did not effect their ability to complete their school work, with the main themes of their responses being;

- you can ask friends to help you to catch up;
 - you can go to teachers to get work;
 - can miss if not much on; and
 - easy to catch up,
- this group also indicated that they,
- always try to catch up;

Interestingly there is a large amount of overlap in the themes from the negative and the positive responses with the exception that, the negative group believed it was easy to catch up on missed work and the positive group believed it is harder to catch up.

3. Future Career.

Other than one student all had at some stage sought advice about future careers, with ten students having an idea about what job they would like to have. Only one student did not have any idea of what job he would like to pursue and two indicated that they didn't know or were unsure at this stage. As table 7 shows the majority of students did hope to continue school until year twelve or further.

Table 7: Planned Year Level of Finishing School.

<i>Year 11</i>	2
<i>Year 12</i>	6
<i>Tertiary/Higher Ed</i>	5

4. Curriculum

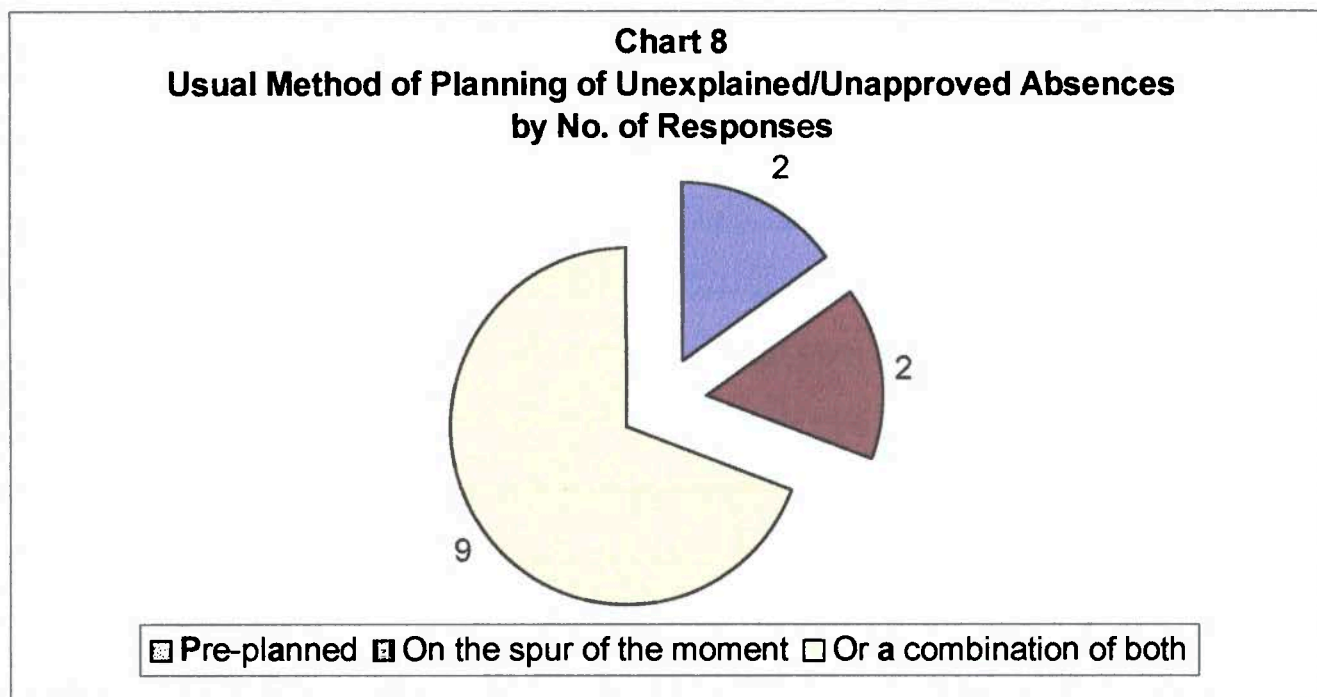
The majority of students indicated that there was not anything they would like to be learning at school that they were not now. The three students who indicated that they would like to be learning other things were interested in learning more in the trade/textile and VET areas. Consistent with this only four students suggested that they would want to go to school more if they took part in the designing of the curriculum. Three indicated that they would make the curriculum more interesting also suggested things like 'make it more fun' 'more group things'. One student suggested that involvement would mean that you would know what was on and even if you were a bit sick you wouldn't miss the class.

5. Future Concerns.

Five students had no real concerns about the future with an equal number who were concerned about their future job choice or employment. One student was concerned about getting into a course in the future and two female students were concerned about an early or arranged marriage and therefore not finishing school, as this was part of their culture.

Section 3.

1. Usual Method of Planning of Unexplained/Unapproved Absence.



Nine students indicated that an unexplained/unapproved absence could be either pre-planned or occur as a spur of the moment decision. Whereas two students usually pre-planned their absence and two students were usually absent as a spur of the moment decision.

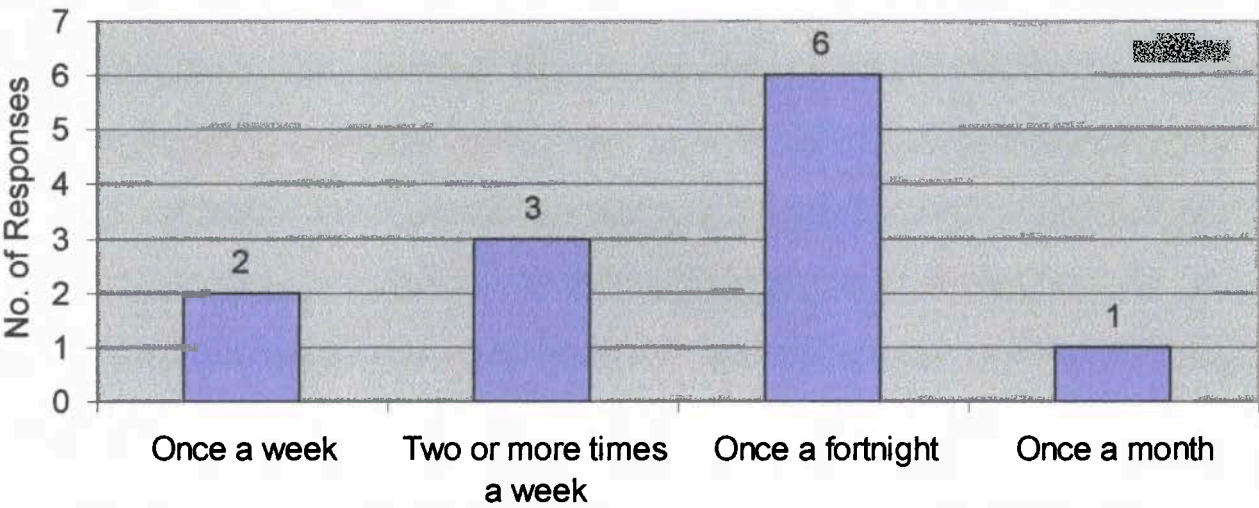
2. Number of Days Absence per Month.

Table 8: Estimation of the Number of Days Missed per Month.

<i>Number of days</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Responses</i>	1	4	2	1	0
<i>Number of days</i>	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Responses</i>	2	1	0	0	1

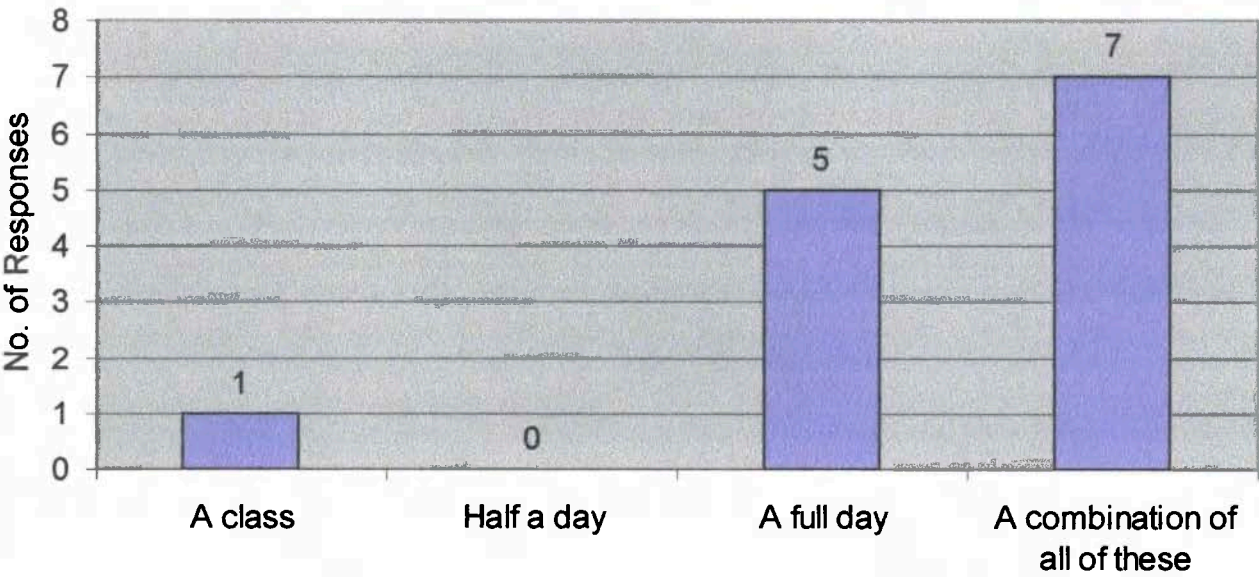
There is inconsistency between the estimated number of days missed per month displayed in table 8 and the frequencies reported in chart 9. A review of actual absences for the sample group on a month by month basis revealed a wide variation both across the group and individually in the levels of absences per month. Due to these inconsistencies these results only serve to demonstrate that the majority of students reported that their absences normally occur with a frequency of one day a fortnight. Three students did however report that their absences normally occur with a frequency of two or more days a week.

Chart 9
Frequency of Unexplained/Unapproved Absences by No. of Responses



3. Type of Unexplained/Unapproved Absence.

Chart 10
Type of Unexplained/Unapproved Absence by No. of Responses



Although five students indicated that they are normally absent for a full day the majority of students normally had absences that were a combination of either a class, a half day or a full day. One student indicated that he normally missed a single class (or a couple of single classes in a day) but did on occasions miss full days.

4. Lateness and Roll Marking.

Five students indicated that when they are late to school or miss roll marking that they obtain a late pass and/or ensure they are recorded as being at school, whereas another five indicated that if late they just go straight to class. Three students used both methods depending on circumstances.

Students made comments such as;

- 'Should get pass, but ladies in office hassle you';
- 'Sometimes just can't be bothered';
- 'If I leave early I just miss second roll mark';
- 'If the bell has just gone will get late pass, otherwise will go straight to class'.

5. Reasons for Missing School.

Family reasons.

Six students only indicated that they had family reasons for missing school with the remaining seven students indicating that they did not have any family reasons for missing school. Results showed that socio-economic issues did not appear to be a reason for missing school. Religious events were however a reason for missing school for three students. Three individual reasons were; to help in the family business occasionally; to help at home; because parent/s never find out. One student indicated that due to the distance he lived from school and his parent's job demands it was difficult to get to school, he therefore had days off. This issue was however resolved in fourth term when he moved closer to school. Refer to chart 11 (Appendix 4.3) for full details of family reasons for missing school and the number of responses given for each reason.

Personal reasons.

All students indicated at least one personal reason for missing school. Six students indicated that an illness like having a headache would be a reason for missing school. A high number of students (8) would miss school because they couldn't be bothered with three of those students also indicating that they didn't like school. For four students peers were a reason why they would miss school. For the five students who had other reasons for missing school, these reasons were because of; heat (2); tiredness (2); family events such as weddings (1) and not wanting to go to a class you don't like. Refer to chart 12 (Appendix 4.4) for full details of personal reasons for missing school and the number of responses given for each reason.

School Reasons.

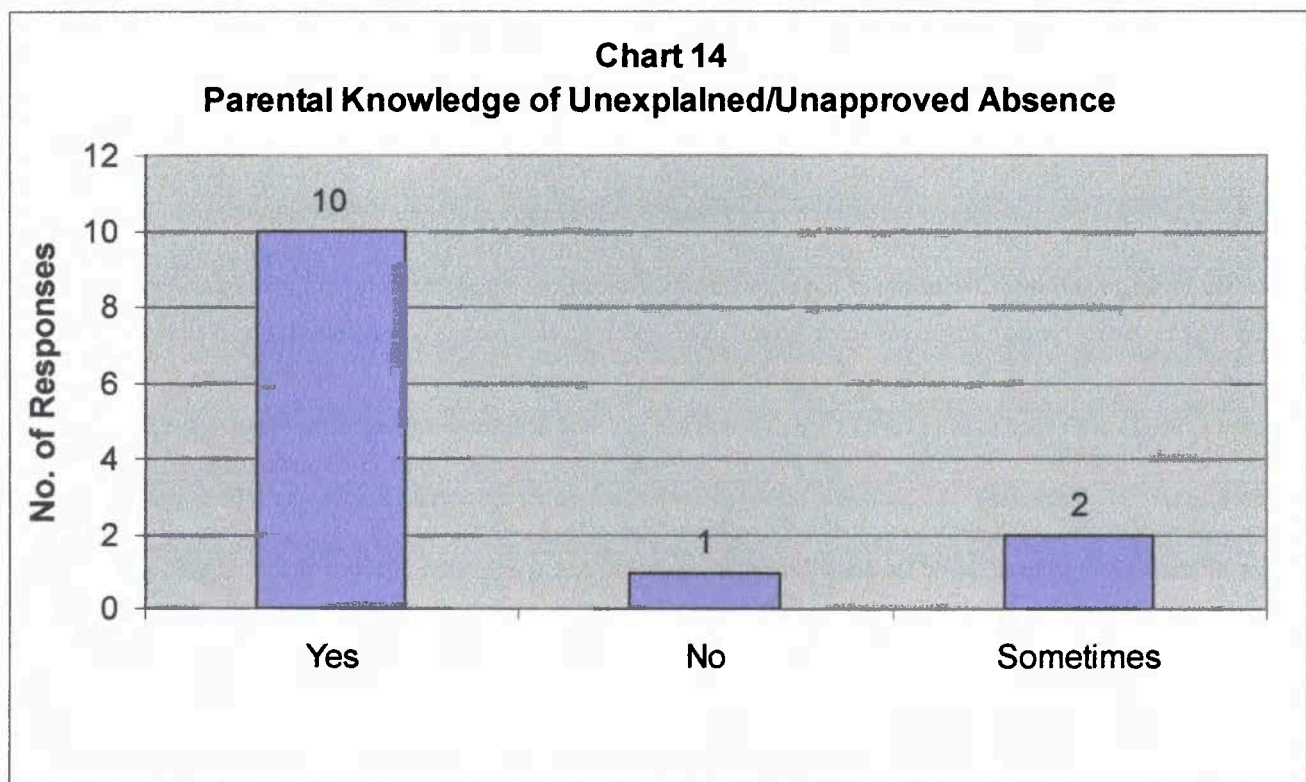
Eleven students had school based reasons for missing school whereas two students did not indicate any school based reasons. In total five students indicated that they missed school because school work was boring and that the curriculum was irrelevant. This was broken down into two students who indicated both reasons, three who indicated that they missed school because they thought that school work was boring

and three who thought that the curriculum irrelevant. Five students indicated that they missed school due to reasons related to school work and six students indicated that they would miss school to catch up on school work. One student stated that she ‘Missed school if the work isn’t going to be interesting and because sometimes she sits there with nothing to do because other kids are behind.’ Refer to chart 13 (Appendix 4.5) for full details of school reasons for missing school and the number of responses given for each reason.

6. Notes.

All but one student was aware that their parents should provide a note explaining their absence. Two students indicated that their parents didn’t know that they had to contact the school regarding their absence. There were English language difficulties at home for two students but four students were required to write notes for their parents signature. Five students indicated that they did get notes from their parents but often didn’t give it to the school. Nine students commented that they just forgot to or kept forgetting to bring the notes.

5. Parental Knowledge.



Clearly parents are aware of their child’s absence, with ten students indicating this was the case. Another two students responded that their parents knew sometimes that they were absent from school and only one student indicated that his parents did not normally know when he was absent from school. The student who indicated that his parents did not normally know he was absent from school, when asked how his parents normally find out about his absence stated that ‘They don’t’.

6. Parents.

All thirteen student indicated that their parents thought that it was important for them to go to school. Five students responded that their parents try to make them go to school if they don't want to go and eight stated that their parents don't try to make them go. It was however important to note that question 6.1 'When you don't go do they try to make you go to school?' was open to interpretation as the word 'try' could mean different degrees of force or coercion. Upon seeking further clarity all of the students who responded positively to this question indicated that their parents asked but did not force them to go to school and would accept them staying home. None of the students were in conflict with their parents or totally refusing to go to school.

Chart 15 (Appendix 4.6) details the reasons why parents would let their child stay home and the number of responses to each reason. Twelve of the thirteen students indicated that if the day was too hot or if they were feeling a bit ill their parents would let them stay home. Having a relative visit from overseas (10), school camp (9) and school excursion (8) had the next highest level of responses, followed by sports day (6), special religious events (5) and parent unwell (5).

9. What Students do when they miss school.

All students indicated that they normally just stay home when they miss school. Seven of these students indicated that it was also normal for them to hang out with friends when not at school. Chart 16 (Appendix 4.7) details what students indicated they normally do when absent.

Chapter

5

Discussion

Comparison of Sample Group to Literature

Even though the focus of this research is students reasons for non-attendance a comparison of the sample group to the key indicators related to missing school contextualises the sample and provides a point of analysis for their reasons for missing school. As stated previously in this report these factors are considered in the main to not only place a student at risk of leaving school but also act in complex ways to impact on a student's attendance.

In particular the work of Reid (1999), Batten and Russell (1995), Brooks, Milne, Paterson, Johansson and Hart (1997), Stainsby and Webster (2000) and the House of Representatives report on Truancy and Exclusion from School (1996) provides a picture of the factors common to students who miss school or are at risk of leaving school early. The main factors commonly raised are:

1. family issues such as breakdown, conflict, transience and low socio-economic status;
2. lack of parental support through placing little value on education or by not providing an environment conducive to studying or doing homework;
3. low self-esteem;
4. continual experience of academic failure and subsequent low academic self concept;
5. disruptive behaviours such as not following instructions or rules and inappropriate anger responses;
6. poor student/teacher relationships;
7. alienating or inflexible school practices or environment;
8. schools that are not responsive to students' needs;

The sample group's responses revealed differences in a number of these factors, these will be discussed briefly.

1. ***Family issues such as breakdown, conflict, transience and low socio-economic status.*** It did not appear that the sample group experienced the family issues normally associated with or considered to contribute to students who miss school. Issues such as transience and family breakdown were not evident as the group reported high levels of stability. It was difficult to determine the socio-economic status of the group as none reported financial reasons for missing school but four

students did indicate that they receive Education Maintenance Allowance, which is normally associated with low levels of income. This must however be balanced against very high levels of own business ownership and the possibility for quite a variance in real income levels. The low level of family reasons for missing school also supports the contention that family issues were not prominent in the sample group.

2. ***Lack of parental support through placing little value on education or by not providing an environment conducive to studying or doing homework.*** From what the students reported there was clearly a high value placed in the importance of an education both from parents and students. Supporting this is what Batten and Russell (1995) reported as ‘... consistent evidence of high educational aspirations among many immigrants groups.’ and the suggestion that higher retention rates in students of non-English migrants may be the result of parental encouragement and the adoption of these values by their children. (Hayden, cited in Batten & Russell, 1995) The sample group consisted mainly of students from immigrant background and this may account for this difference.
3. ***Low self esteem.*** The majority of students did not appear to have low self esteem as they reported fitting in well at school, were not subject to bullying, were not particularly shy and appeared to have good friendship groups.
4. ***Continual experience of academic failure and subsequent low academic self concept.*** An experience of low academic success did not appear to occur in the sample group, with the opposite most likely being the case. Almost all students considered themselves at least average students.
5. ***Disruptive behaviours such as not following instructions or rules and inappropriate anger responses.*** Suspension or expulsion was not an issue for the sample group, in general they did not see themselves as different to their peers in the level of trouble they got into at school. They also reported low levels of anger at school suggesting that anger was not an issue. Conformity did not appear to be an issue as no student suggested that they disliked being told what to do.
6. ***Poor student/teacher relationships.*** Different to the common factor of poor student/teacher relationships most students reported a good relationship with at least one teacher and believed that such a relationship was important.
7. ***Alienating or inflexible school practices or environment.*** There is some evidence of alienating or inflexible school practices in the ways that lateness and roll marking is done. From the perspective of the students they chose to make a judgement on whether to ensure they are recorded as present when late or leaving early or just not bother. These actions could result in the statistics on their absences being skewed. There is also a contradiction in a number of students finding school work boring or irrelevant yet not having an interest in being involved in curriculum development. This could reflect an issue of alienating or inflexible school practices or environment or possibly a combination of this and students inability to articulate what they want or need due to their age or developmental stage.
8. ***Schools that are not responsive to students’ needs.*** Research has shown that students may miss school for such things as to help at home or work in the family business or to possibly look after siblings, whilst these factors were reported it was only in very small numbers and therefore not considered common. An area where there did appear to be an emerging theme of needs was related to religious

or cultural events and this will be discussed later in the report. In general though the results did not appear to indicate a lack of response to students' needs.

These comparisons indicate that the sample group did not reveal many of the characteristics normally presented in the literature as reflecting the child who is a non-attender. The sample group appeared to reflect a group who displayed no particularly significant issues with either their family life, schooling or personally. Their school experience seemed to be reasonably positive with students perceiving themselves as fairly typical in a number of aspects. The sample group did however have some degree of problem with school work/curriculum.

These results were very similar to research conducted by Kilpatrick (1996) where some of his key findings were that students; found school somewhat boring; liked most teachers and had low levels of bullying and exclusion by peers. He described these students as 'reluctant attenders', which as with this project was an unexpected result. In 1998, Kilpatrick also found in his research into post registration truancy, that there was not one common stereotype of a non-attender that is as might be expected unhappy, unpopular or non-conforming; this group appears to be the equally non-typical.

This then raises the issue of the possibility of sub-groups of students who miss school at varying levels and for different reason, but at sufficient levels to impact on their learning and on the school. Clearly as found in other research there is no typical non-attender and these results would indicate that there are implications for schools in dealing with this diversity in non-attendance and non-attenders. Depending on the make up of the different sub-group and the homogeny in their reasons for missing school, a diversity of methods encompassing more than one perspective is needed. As White (1996, p.43) states 'To frame a strategy solely in terms of 'high risk' students is far too limited an approach.'

Students Reasons for Missing School

Family Reasons

Due to the small level of responses in this area, students family reasons for missing school on their own did not reveal any issues but did reinforce along with other socio-demographic data the possibility that financial problems were not a reason for missing school for this sample group. The indication by three students that religious events were a family reason for missing school is supported in other results suggesting that religious and cultural requirements can impact on attendance. This will be discussed in more detail further in the report.

Personal Reasons

Students reported varied personal reasons for missing school indicating that there are clearly a large variety of reasons why students miss school. The main and most predominant issue raised here for schools is the high level of responses indicating that a personal reason for missing school is that students just can't be bothered going. This raises questions about students level of interest and engagement in school as well as the applicability and relevance of school curriculum and practices to students of this age.

Research has shown that the middle years of school are a time when developmental and transitional events impact on a students education. This impact is multiple and varied and includes such things as the onset of puberty, loss of interest in school work, non-attendance and a possible mismatch between the developing adolescent and the school structures which can all cause either alienation or act as a barrier to attendance. (Educational Research Development Committee 1981, Blyth 1990, Conger & Galambos 1997, Braggett 1997, Alderman & Maehr 1994, cited in Dwyer 1996b)

This is an issue that schools need to embrace as it has far reaching implications for teaching practices, curriculum and school structures. More detailed analysis of the middle years of schooling and the implications for schools was made in the previous research report and will therefore not be repeated here.

Five of the sample group did however voluntarily indicate to the researcher that they perceived year 9 as the last year that they could 'muck around' and that year 10 had been different as they had matured and that they had to settle down in preparation for VCE. For some students there appears to be a divide between the middle years and the final three years of school. At the time of being interviewed these students were almost at the completion of year ten and they were therefore able to articulate what they perceived as a change in their behaviour. This matter was not pursued as it was outside the scope of this report but did appear to offer some support for the concept of differences in the middle school years and the need for a different approach at this time and in the more senior years.

School Reasons

There was a clear theme in the responses to school reasons for missing school and this was related to school work and curriculum. The House of Representatives Report into Truancy and Exclusion from School (1996, p.33) reported that

'Constant reference was made, particularly by young people to the boredom, disruptive behaviour and rejection which resulted from rigid academic curricula which are pointless for some students, irrelevant to their current and intended lifestyles and too difficult for others.'

Whilst the majority of this group did not find the school work too hard there was a reasonable level of boredom and lack of understanding of the relevance of the curriculum reported.

Teaching is based on the imparting of a set series and quantity of knowledge, this is also framed through policy around outcomes expected to be achieved through the school experience. If the school experience is however not interesting or irrelevant to students and possibly even alienating, at what stage does a reluctant attender become a chronic non-attender. In other words how fragile is this relationship and what life or school crises could possible shift a student from one sub-group to another. Schools need to consider how their structures contribute to this situation and what changes can be made to make school curriculum more interesting and relevant. Recent changes, which have seen the incorporation of vocational training in schools, have been a step towards addressing this.

The effects of missing school are cumulative and this was evident in the results with a number of students missing school to catch up on school work. This only serves to increase the issues resulting from non-attendance and this was reinforced by the majority of students who found it hard to catch up if too much work was missed. It was interesting however that there were still a number of students who did not find it hard to catch up. Without further investigation understanding this variance is difficult.

Students Reasons for Unexplained/Unapproved Absences and the Relationship to Parent Condoned Absences

One of the major results of this research is students overwhelmingly reporting their parents support and approval of their absences even though technically these absences were recorded as unexplained/unapproved absences. In fact virtually all absences were parent condoned and approved. Reid (1999) suggests that parent condoned absences are technically an absence which occurs with parents knowledge and parents are either

unwilling or unable to do anything about it. Parents may in some circumstances even encourage their child's absence for personal or family reasons such as to helping at home.

For schools a parent condoned absence can become an approved absence through the provision of a note indicating for example that a child was ill. Even if the school is suspicious that this was not the case, limited resources do not allow them the time to pursue the validity of the excuse. For this sample group students indicated that both their parents and they believed that an education was important. So for this group the unexplained/unapproved nature of their absence had more relationship to their failure to provide a note explaining their absence than any lack of valuing an education. Also parents were in certain circumstances ready to question their child's absence and willing to make their child go to school. An issues appears to lie in what parents see as valid reasons for missing school, for example, during hot weather, school camps, school excursions or sports days students sought their parents permission to stay home and parents accepted this as an appropriate reason for missing school.

All but one student indicated that their parents always approved of their absence and this is support by the fact that all students usually just stayed home when not at school.

Further investigation of this matter by the researcher showed that parent condoned absences also had a relationship to school results. When asked for more in-depth information about this issue students indicated that parents would be more concerned about them missing school and be more forceful about them going to school if their results were to go down.

Parental condoned absences may also have a relationship to motivation and interest in school as all but one student felt that even a bit of illness was enough of a reason for their parents to allow them to miss school. Also the high levels of preparedness by students to miss sports days, excursion or school camps may also reflect a lack of interest in school activities. It should be noted that one student indicated that not all students could get to go on school camp at one school as there was limited places.

This was not investigated but would account for the number of students with unexplained/unapproved absences during camp times.

An issue that appears to have implications for schools now and possibly even more so in the future are the parent condoned absences related to culture or religion. As schools become more and more multicultural they will need to find ways of adapting or changing school practices to match the issues faced by students due to the demands of their culture or religion. This was evident in the research and needs to be dealt with proactively to prevent alienation and division due to culture or religion.

Another important issue for schools is the education of parents about the importance of school attendance and the value of all school activities in obtaining a holistic education. It needs to be reinforced with parents that the progressive nature of learning in some subjects and the inability to repeat practical exercises means that missing classes is disruptive to learning and impacts on teachers and schools. Schools need to find meaningful ways of involving parents in their child's education and reinforce through education the importance of attendance.

In summary, this research provides support for the contention that this group of students is not what is normally stereotyped as the non-attender and have in fact made a conscious choice supported by their parents to miss school. They appear to have placed other priorities ahead of schooling and this provides challenges for school in keeping students' interested and in making the curriculum more relevant to students and their varied futures.

There are also implications for schools in groups of students who find that the school environment or practices are such that missing school is not an issue. This does not mean that schools need to become more punitive or institutional but that they may need to understand how their practices may reinforce existing inequalities or differences and how students can use to their best advantage systems like poor discipline policy, fragmented authority to release students and diversity among staff in implementing school policies.

Next to this is the need to deal with the relationship that parents have with absences in general. The provision of education for parents and students about the importance of regular attendance and what the school would consider valid reasons for missing school is essential. Parents should also be made aware of the statutory requirements they have in ensuring their child attendance is within the limits of the school's approval.

Schools are also facing new challenges in the changes that come with multiculturalism and the demands this places on students during school times. Challenges in the areas of motivation, engagement and attendance can only be expected to increase as there will be a body of students who are at school due to no other options being available to them and policies focusing on retention. As Dwyer (1994) suggests there is a shelter effect from the lack of options for young people and this can equate to being considered as forced retention. School practices and what

they teach will need to be flexible enough to provide a meaningful and engaging school experience to all students to prevent increasing levels of non-attendance and/or disengaged or unmotivated students.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Network;

- Begin a program of educating and reinforcing with both parents and students the importance of regular attendance patterns and the structural and educational reasons for this. Ensuring that the development of any literature is produced in a number of languages for non-english speaking or reading parents.
- Include in this education process information for parents on their statutory requirements and what the school would view as valid reasons for an absence.
- Explore the funding options available through DEET, the School Focussed Youth Service or any other possible funding bodies, to assist with the cost of the development of any literature, brochures, pamphlets or programs.
- Continue to find ways of adapting curriculum and developing diversity in curriculum content with the aim of keeping the interest and motivation of all groups of students.
- Continue to obtain feedback from students on their school experience, both the positive and negative experiences to enable an understanding of;
 - the barriers or alienating aspects of school and
 - the educational processes that make school interesting and relevant.
- Conduct further research into parents reasons for allowing absences from school.

List of Appendices:

- 2.1 Summary of Risk Factors (to early school leaving)
- 2.2 Diagrammatical demonstration of the Political, Economic & Policy issues impacting on attendance.
- 3.1 Letter to Parents Explaining Research & Consent Form.
- 3.2 Student Interview Schedule. (Including socio-demographic schedule)
- 3.3 Topics for Discussion at Each Interview
- 4.1 Findings Socio-demographic Schedule.
- 4.2 Findings Student Interview Schedule.
- 4.3 Chart 11, Family reasons for Unexplained/Unapproved Absences by No. of Responses.
- 4.4 Chart 12, Personal reasons for Unexplained/Unapproved Absences by No. of Responses.
- 4.5 Chart 13, School reasons for Unexplained/Unapproved Absences by No. of Responses.
- 4.6 Chart 15, Reasons Why Parents Would Let Their Child Stay Home by No. of Responses.
- 4.7 Chart 16, What Students do When Not at School by No. of Responses.

Appendix 2.1

Summary of Risk Factors (to early school leaving)

The Individual

Psychosocial factors

Self-esteem
 Motivation
 Cognitive constructs
 Socially limited personality

Physical factors

Health, illness, and disability

Behavioural Factors

Disruptive behaviour
 Passivity
 Pregnancy/motherhood
 Young offenders
 Drug use/substance abuse
 Academic performance

The Family

Family structure

Fragmented and reconstituted family structures
 Family size

Family functioning

Disturbed parent/child relationships
 Conflict
 Abuse
 Modelling
 Mobility

Family socio-economic context

Income
 Education

Separation from family

Homelessness
 Wards of state

The School

School organisation

Organisational policies and practices
 Discipline
 School leaving and Re-entry

Curriculum

Content
 Decision-making
 Teaching-learning strategies
 Assessment

School climate

Teacher/student relationships
 Peer relationships
 School Counsellors/psychologists
 Student participation
 School/home relationships
 Staff professional development

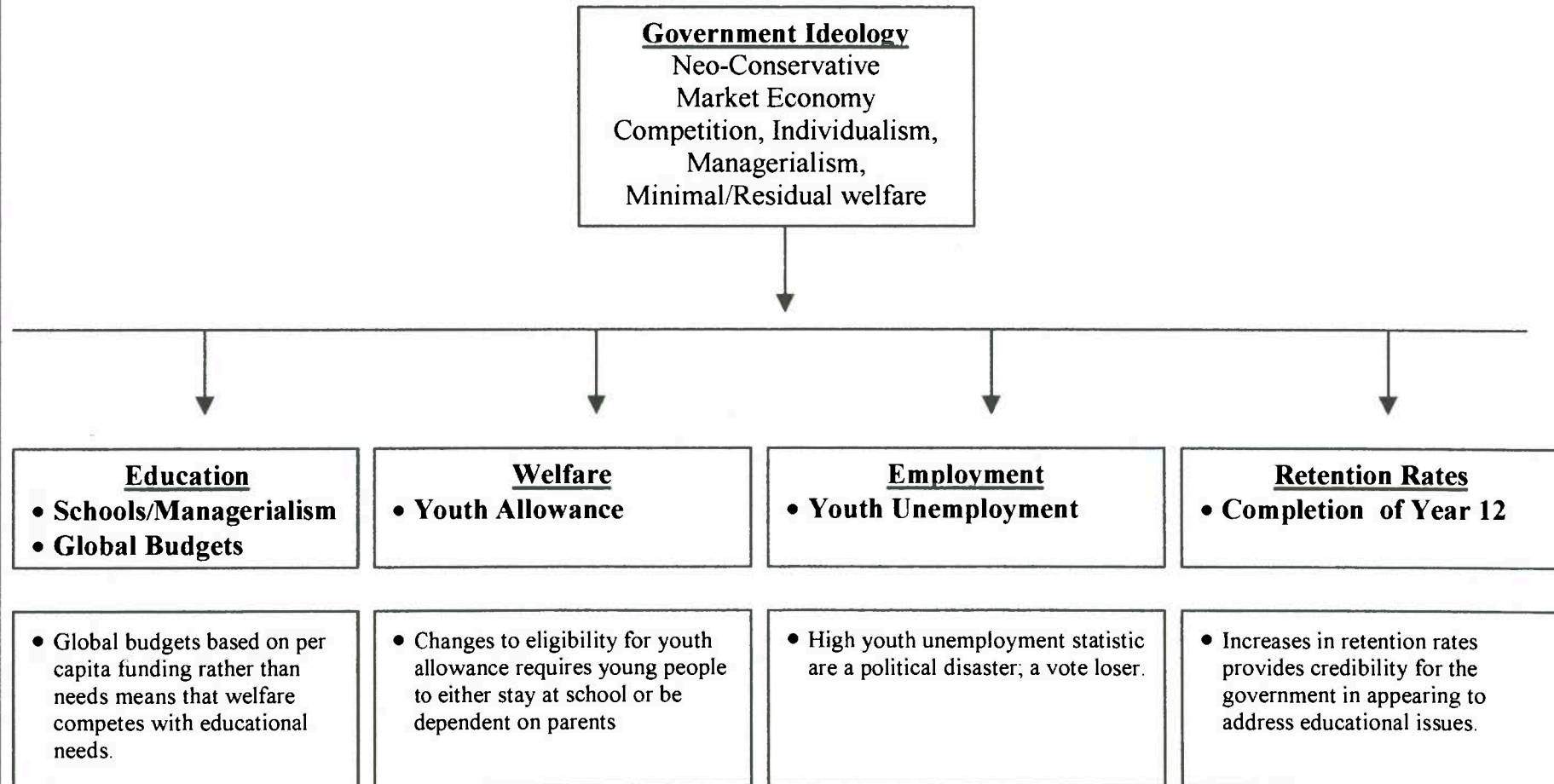
Societal factors

Poverty

Extracted from Batten, M. & Russell, J., 1995, *Students at Risk: A Review of Australian Literature 1980 – 1994*, ACER, Melbourne.

Appendix 2.2

Diagrammatical demonstration of the Political, Economic and Policy issues impacting on attendance.



St Albans Network of Schools
An Unapproved Absence or an Absence with Reason
Students Reasons for Missing School without Explanation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education has become a political and economic tool ; is subject to the whims of government ideology and social pressures for educational outcomes and welfare support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Allowance has been linked to attendance levels at VCE, where payments can be withdrawn for failure to meet set attendance requirements. Reeks of ideology of mutual obligation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High youth unemployment levels increase the government's welfare costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reduction in rates (which has occurred since 1995) places pressure on the government, due to increased youth unemployment statistics and increased welfare costs. This is however counteracted by the criterion for Youth Allowance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role and scope of schools has broadened with schools now being seen as the place to solve social issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This policy places many students back into the education system who may have in the past found that school was not a place for them. Issues then exist regarding students' motivation and level of engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth unemployment requires development and commitment to a sound employment policy, creation of jobs and a commitment to a maximum level of unemployment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is underpinned by the assumption that education to year 12 is a social and public good and leads to future employment or education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per capita funding places schools in competition with each other for students, therefore the need to be seen to be successful and provide more educationally. This only serves to marginalize those who require more support to remain at school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equates to forced education and a shift to the family for financial responsibility, with a government withdrawal from welfare support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The minimalising of youth unemployment levels through other policies avoids the need to; make changes to the institution of education; allow for different learning needs and the development of practices that engage all students in learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst retention rates are considered to be at an acceptable level both politically and socially, changes to educational practices and structures are either minimal or ignored.

- A change to managerialistic practices where reporting of outcomes is considered to be a reflection of success, loses sight of the human element of education.

- Through policy change the government is requiring schools to be responsible for a diversity of student needs as well as being more responsive to those needs, yet funding and resources are inadequate to meet all demands.

- Assumes that retention means participation and engagement. For some reality is forced retention and disengagement. Attendance levels are therefore affected.

- Global budgets with funding on a per capita basis assumes equality of needs but results in inequality and the reinforcing of existing inequalities.

- Schools have a monitoring role with attendance in relation to the Youth Allowance. Statistics are unreliable and inaccurate and post registration absences create 'duty of care' issues for schools.

Appendix 3.1

Letter to Parents Explaining Research

Dear

I am a final year Social Work student at Victoria University and I am conducting research on behalf of the St Albans Network of Schools into unapproved student absences.

The Network is keen to gain a greater understanding of this issue, and hope in the long term to be able to minimise unapproved absences by students. The information gained through this research project will help the schools in achieving this understanding. Any information provided by participants will be treated confidentially. Names will not appear on any written material, nor will any details about individual students be discussed with schools.

I am contacting you because the school's records show that *NAME* had unapproved absences last year. I am seeking approval from you for *NAME* to be part of this research project and ask that you sign the attached consent form and return it in the envelope provided by *DATE*. *NAME*'s participation is an important part of the project and your consent would be appreciated.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, feel free to contact me Tuesday to Thursday at Brimbank College on 93678949. If I am unavailable I will return your call as soon as possible.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sheryl Tunnecliff

(Please note this letter and the consent form were also used to obtain consent for another research project 'An Examination of Unapproved Absences', 2000)

Appendix 3.1

Consent Form

Igive permission for my child
..... of Year..... to participate in the
research being conducted by S. Tunnecliff, on absenteeism.

I also give permission for my child's student file to be reviewed by S. Tunnecliff for
the purposes of the research only.

I understand that any information provided will be managed with appropriate
confidentiality and sensitivity and that my child's name will not appear in any written
material.

I also understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that my child can be
withdrawn from the project at any time.

.....

Signature

Name:.....

Date:.....

Appendix 3.2

Student Interview Schedule

Please answer each question as honestly as you can, with an answer as close as possible to what you believe to be true. The information required is about your absences in Year 9. It refers to the times you were absent from school either without your parent/s permission or you were absent with your parents permission and the school was not contacted explaining why you were absent. To answer each question please tick the appropriate box or insert the necessary answer.

Section 1.

In this section I want to find out about **you**: how you feel about yourself and things that happen at school.

1. How many schools have you attended between Years 5 and 9? ☐

2. Have you ever been expelled from school? Yes ☐ No ☐

2.1 If yes, how many times? ☐

3. Have you ever been suspended from school? Yes ☐ No ☐

3.1 If yes, how many times? ☐

4. How often do you get in trouble each week at school? (Please circle one)

↓ ↓ ↓
More than About the same as Less often than
most kids. everyone else. most kids

5. How well do you feel you do at school work? (Please circle one)

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
Not well Below average Average Better Very well
I usually fail than average

6. Describe how well you think you fit in at school? (Please circle one)

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

I don't fit in at all I feel out of place a lot I only feel out of place some of I fit in okay I fit in well
I feel out of place place a lot of place some of most of the time all of the time
all of the time of the time the time

7. How would you rate how shy you are? (Please circle one)

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

I'm extremely shy I'm fairly shy Don't know I'm just a I'm not shy
I'm not sure bit shy at all.

8. How often do you get angry at school? (Please circle one)

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Often Sometimes Don't know/Not sure Not often Rarely

8.1 Tell me about some of the situations at school when you get angry?

.....
.....

9. Do you ever get bullied at school? Yes ☐ No ☐

9.1 If yes, how often does it happen? (Please circle)

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

A lot (very often - Regularly Don't know Only occasionally Almost never
maybe even daily) (say each week) Not sure

9.2 Can you tell me about some of the ways in which you get bullied?

.....
.....
.....

10. Is there any teacher/s that you feel you have a good relationship with.

Yes ☐ No ☐

10.1 If yes, please explain how that makes you feel different about school.

.....
.....
.....

10.2 If no, how does that make you feel about going to school?

.....

.....

.....

10.3 How important would you rate good teacher relationships to your ability to learn? (Please circle one)

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Not at all Of little Important Fairly important Very important

Important importance

11. If your culture isn't Australian , do you think that has an effect on other people's attitudes towards you at school?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

12. Do you think that your religion has an effect on other people's attitudes towards you at school?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

I'm not religious ☐

Section 2.

In this section I want to find out about what you think about getting an education.

1. How important do you think an education is?

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Not at all Of little Not sure/ Important Very important

important importance Don't know

2. Do you have any idea of the type of job you would like?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

3. Do you believe that you could get the job you would like without an education?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

4. Do you believe that an education will help you to have a better life?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

5. Do you believe that missing school has an effect on your ability to complete your school work?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

6. Do you think that school is a waste of time?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

7. Have you ever sought advice at school about possible careers?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

8. What year level do you hope to continue school until?

9. Is there anything you would like to be learning at school that you are not now? (Please give details)

.....

.....

.....

10. If you were allowed to take part in the designing of the curriculum would that make you want to go to school more?

Don't know ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐

11. Can you tell me what your greatest concern for the future is?

.....

.....

.....

Section 3.

In this section I want to know the reasons why you are absent from school and what you do when you miss school.

1. When you are absent from school is it usually:

Pre-planned ☐ On the spur of the moment ☐
Or a combination of both ☐

2. How many days do you estimate that you miss each Month? ☐

2.1 How does that normally occur?

Once a week	<input type="checkbox"/>	Two or more times a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once a fortnight	<input type="checkbox"/>	Once a month	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify).....

2.2 When you are absent from school is it for: (tick one)

A class	<input type="checkbox"/>	Half a day	<input type="checkbox"/>
A full day	<input type="checkbox"/>	A combination of all of these	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.3 When you are late to school or miss roll marking do you normally:

Obtain a late pass and/or ensure you are recorded as being at school and not absent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Go straight to class	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Do you miss school for any of the following reasons? (Please tick as many as applicable.)

Family reasons.

My parent/s is/are at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	My parent/s never find out	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fights at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	I'm needed to help at home	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious events	<input type="checkbox"/>	No money for lunch	<input type="checkbox"/>
No money for books	<input type="checkbox"/>	No money for clothes	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify).....
.....

Personal reasons.

It is difficult to get to school by public transport	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to be with friends who aren't at school	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friends at school ask me to go with them	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would be late for school and would rather not go	<input type="checkbox"/>
School is a long way from home	<input type="checkbox"/>
Illness eg. period pain, headache	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hangover from the use of alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hangover from the use of drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't fit in at school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't like school	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel scared at school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't be bothered	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify).....
.....

School Reasons.

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| I get bullied at school | <input type="checkbox"/> | I don't like school work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I dislike the teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | I can't do the school work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don't like being told what to do | <input type="checkbox"/> | School work is too easy | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Because of tests or exams | <input type="checkbox"/> | School work is boring | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To catch up on work from school | <input type="checkbox"/> | Curriculum is irrelevant | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify).....

- 4. Did you know that if you are absent from school your parent/s has/have to contact the school explaining why you are absent.**

Yes ☐ No ☐

- 5. When you do not attend school do your parents normally know?**

Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

- 5.1 If no, how do they normally find out that you did not attend school?**

(please specify).....

- 5.2 If the school is not notified by your parent/s of your absence is it because:**
 (Please tick as many as applicable)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Your parent/s don't know every time you miss school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Your parent/s don't know that they have to contact the school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| There are English language difficulties at home | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| They provide you with a note but you don't give it to the school | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify)

- 6. Do your parents think that it is important for you to go to school?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

6.1 When you don't go do they try to make you go to school?

Yes ☐ No ☐

6.2 If yes, please explain why you don't go.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

6.3 If no, could any of the following be reasons why your parent/s don't try?
(Please tick as many as applicable)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| They've given up trying to make me | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I get too angry so they don't try | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My parent/s don't care if I go | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My parent/s don't think that an education is important | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It causes too many fights at home so they don't bother anymore. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| They know that I hate school, so they don't try anymore. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| They would rather that I was working | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have to help out at home regularly | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Any other reason (please specify).....

.....

.....

7. Would your parent/s let you stay home for any of the following reasons?
(Please tick as many as applicable)

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A relative visiting from overseas | <input type="checkbox"/> | School camp | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School excursion | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sports day | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To work in the family business | <input type="checkbox"/> | The day is too hot | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| You're feeling a bit ill | <input type="checkbox"/> | To look after brothers or sisters | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Special religious events | <input type="checkbox"/> | Parent unwell | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify).....

.....

8. What do you normally do when you do not attend school?

(Please tick as many as applicable)

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Just stay home | <input type="checkbox"/> | Hang out with friends | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hang out at the shopping centre | <input type="checkbox"/> | Play arcade games | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Get in trouble with the Police | <input type="checkbox"/> | Use drugs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Drink alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> | Work in the family business | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify).....
.....
.....

Thank you for being part of this research. Your help is appreciated.

Appendix 3.2

Student Interview Schedule
Socio-demographic details

1.	Age.	<input type="text"/>	Year Level	<input type="text"/>
2.	Gender.	Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	How many brothers and sisters do you have?	<input type="text"/>		
3.1	What are their ages?			
3.2	Have any of your brothers or sisters left school?			
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.3	What age/s were they when they left school?			
4.	Were you born in Australia?			
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4.1	Were your parent/s born in Australia?			
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4.2	Is English your first language?			
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4.3	If no, what language is spoken at home?.....			
5.	What suburb do you live in?.....			
5.1	Who do you live with?			
	Parents <input type="checkbox"/>	Grandparents	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Friends <input type="checkbox"/>	Other relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	No one I'm homeless <input type="checkbox"/>			
	Other (please specify)			
5.2	What type of housing do you live in?			
	Own or buying <input type="checkbox"/>	Public housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Rented house <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know/not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5.3	How many places have you lived in, in the past 5 years?	<input type="text"/>		

6. **Who are the adults that live in your household?** (please indicate your relationship, eg. Mum, Stepfather etc.)

.....
.....
.....

7. **Do you know if your family receives any of the following benefits?** (please tick)

Education Maintenance Allowance	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unemployment benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sickness benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know/not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. **For each working adult in your house please indicate your relationship to them and the type of job they have?** (eg. Mum, Own business)

1.....	Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Manual/Labourer	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Own business	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Clerical	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		<input type="checkbox"/>

2.....	Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Manual/Labourer	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Own business	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Clerical	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		<input type="checkbox"/>

3.....	Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Manual/Labourer	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Own business	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Clerical	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		<input type="checkbox"/>

4.....	Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Manual/Labourer	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Own business	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Clerical	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 3.3

Topics for discussion at each interview.

At the beginning of each interview the following was discussed with each student.

- ☐ **The purpose of the research project was explained to them.**
- ☐ **That even though their parents had provided permission for them to participate in the research project they did not have to participate.**
- ☐ **That they could choose not to answer a particular question and they can stop the interview at any stage if necessary.**
- ☐ **That the interview is confidential but this is limited to information of a non-reportable nature. If they were to indicate any intention to harm themselves or others or if they indicated that others are harming them (i.e. child protection issues) that these matters will be discussed with the appropriate school personnel**
- ☐ **That their completed interview schedule would only be viewed by the researcher S. Tunnecliff.**
- ☐ **That their name will not appear on any written material.**

Appendix 4.1

Findings

Student Interview Schedule

Section 1.

1. How many schools have you attended between Years 5 and 9?

One primary school	13
One secondary school	13

2. Have you ever been expelled from school? Yes 0 No 13

3. Have you ever been suspended from school? Yes 1 No 12
3.1 If yes, how many times? Once

4. How often do you get in trouble each week at school? (Please circle one)

↓	↓	↓
More than most kids.	About the same as everyone else.	Less often than most kids
1	11	1

5. How well do you feel you do at school work? (Please circle one)

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Not well I usually fail	Below average	Average	Better than average	Very well
0	1	6	5	1

6. Describe how well you think you fit in at school? (Please circle one)

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
I don't fit in at all I feel out of place all of the time	I feel out of place a lot of the time	I only feel out of place some of the time	I fit in okay most of the time	I fit in well
0	0	0	6	7

7. How would you rate how shy you are? (Please circle one)

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
I'm extremely shy	I'm fairly shy	Don't know I'm not sure	I'm just a bit shy	I'm not shy at all.
0	1	0	8	4

8. How often do you get angry at school? (Please circle one)

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Often	Sometimes	Don't know/Not sure	Not often	Rarely
0	2	0	8	3

8.1 Tell me about some of the situations at school when you get angry?

.....

.....

9. Do you ever get bullied at school? Yes 0 No 13

10. Is there any teacher/s that you feel you have a good relationship with.

Yes 9 No 4

10.1 If yes, please explain how that makes you feel different about school.

Yes

Makes you feel like you want to do the work for them.
 Understand each other better, can tell them about problems and they will understand.
 Helps out more, makes you want to do work.
 Feel like you like to go to that class, helpful
 Help you out more, makes a difference because you can ask questions. Once they trust you can do more things they won't be suspicious.
 Won't cause trouble because you get on with the teacher.
 It's easier. If the teacher doesn't like you get in trouble. If the teacher likes you it's easier to get work done. You want to do the work.
 It's easier to work you feel able to ask them questions.
 If you like the way he/she teaches you learn more.

10.2 If no, how does that make you feel about going to school?

No

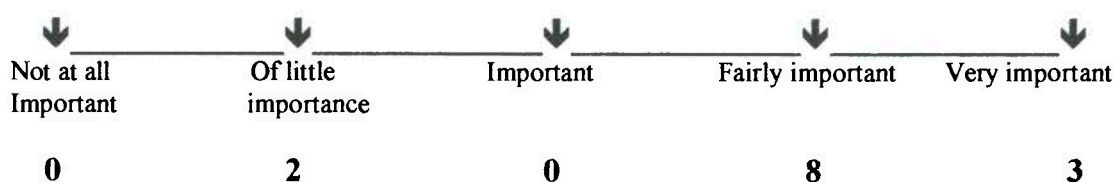
Doesn't seem to affect wanting to go to school

Doesn't mind going to school, no close relationships but one teacher is encouraging and it is good to go to that class

Doesn't make a difference, but does have one teacher who helps with advice.

If the teacher isn't as strict can do more of what I want.

10.3 How important would you rate good teacher relationships to your ability to learn? (Please circle one)



11. If your culture isn't Australian , do you think that has an effect on other people's attitudes towards you at school?

Don't know 0 Yes 4 No 5

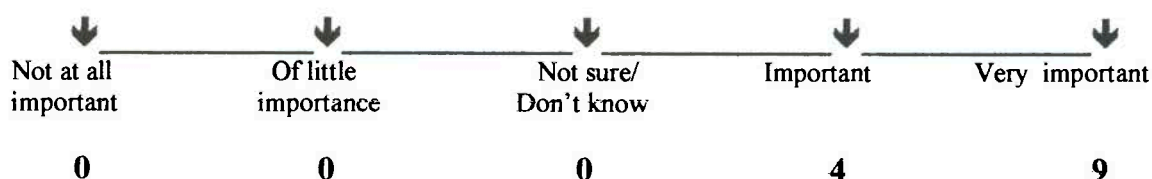
Four students were from an Australian background.

12. Do you think that your religion has an effect on other people's attitudes towards you at school?

Don't know 0 Yes 2 No 9
I'm not religious 2

Section 2.

1. How important do you think an education is?



2. Do you have any idea of the type of job you would like?

Don't know 2 Yes 10 No 1

3. Do you believe that you could get the job you would like without an education?

Don't know 0 Yes 4 No 9

4. Do you believe that an education will help you to have a better life?

Don't know 0 Yes 13 No 0

5. Do you believe that missing school has an effect on your ability to complete your school work?

Don't know 0 Yes 8 No 5

Comments

Look at timetable and if not much on knows can miss class. Make sure catches up.

Too many days off makes it hard to catch up. Can ask friends to help.

Always tries to catch up.

Teachers tell you what has to be done. Always catches up.

Class not important can miss them. If late you know which classes you can catch up, see friends to catch up.

Go to teacher to get missed work. Sometimes teachers will let you know what was missed depending on the teacher.

So much catching up makes it impossible to catch up.

Catches up on some work, usually see friends to get work.

Get the work and ask them questions if necessary. Always tries to catch up.

Do work at home, in spare time, in library. Get information from friends.

Just miss the work.

Make an effort to catch up. Go to see teachers and ask friends.

Try to catch up, see teachers and other students.

You can catch up easily, stay home after school do work. Ask teacher what missed and get work.

6. Do you think that school is a waste of time?

Don't know 0 Yes 0 No 12

One student indicated that school is a waste of time, sometimes.

7. Have you ever sought advice at school about possible careers?

Don't know 0 Yes 12 No 1

8. What year level do you hope to continue school until?

Year 11	2
Year 12	6
Tertiary/Higher Ed	5

9. Is there anything you would like to be learning at school that you are not now? (Please give details)

Yes 3 No 10

No textiles in VCE, no choice for that. VET subjects, correspondence, off campus.
Electronics.
More difficult tasks in the trade subjects.

10. If you were allowed to take part in the designing of the curriculum would that make you want to go to school more?

Don't know 0 Yes 4 No 9

11. Can you tell me what your greatest concern for the future is?

Deciding what future job you want.
Knowing what job you want to do.
Concerned about early marriage and arranged marriage.
Make money, not have to struggle to find a job.
Health of family. Can get into a course.
Stuffing up career course.
Want to finish school not get married young as in culture.
Get a good job and a steady job.

Five students indicated they had no real concerns about the future.

Section 3.

1. When you are absent from school is it usually:

Pre-planned	2	On the spur of the moment	2
Or a combination of both	9		

2. How many days do you estimate that you miss each Month?

Number of days	1	2	3	4	5
Responses	1	4	2	1	0
Number of days	6	7	8	9	10
Responses	2	1	0	0	1

2.1 How does that normally occur?

Once a week	2	Two or more times a week	3
Once a fortnight	6	Once a month	1

Other **1** Two or three times a month

2.2 When you are absent from school is it for: (tick one)

A class	1	Half a day	0
A full day	5	A combination of all of these	7

2.3 When you are late to school or miss roll marking do you normally:

Obtain a late pass and/or ensure you are recorded as being at school and not absent	5
Go straight to class	5

Three students indicated that they use a combination of the above two methods.

Comments

Should get pass, but ladies in office hassle you
 Some of both. Sometimes just can't be bothered
 If bell just gone get late pass, otherwise go straight to class
 Sometimes go straight class but usually ensures that a late pass is obtained
 If already missed a couple of periods will write in book. Will go straight to class if only 5 – 10 minutes late. If left early would talk to teacher and say that contact group had been missed.

If leave early just miss second roll mark.
 Sometimes go straight to class, sometimes get late pass.

3. Do you miss school for any of the following reasons? (Please tick as many as applicable.)

Family reasons.

My parent/s is/are at work	0	My parent/s never find out	1
Fights at home	0	I'm needed to help at home	1
Religious events	3	No money for lunch	0
No money for books	0	No money for clothes	0

Other

Needed to help in family business occasionally
 Parent's job means sometimes not able to drive to school (lives long way from school)

Personal reasons.

It is difficult to get to school by public transport			1
I want to be with friends who aren't at school			2
My friends at school ask me to go with them			2
I would be late for school and would rather not go			1
School is a long way from home	1	I don't fit in at school	0
Illness eg. period pain, headache	6	Don't like school	3
Hangover from the use of alcohol	1	I feel scared at school	0
Hangover from the use of drugs	0	Can't be bothered	8

Other

Would not go to a class you don't like.
 Tired from school work, want a day off.
 Tired from going to bed late.
 If a hot day goes to pool
 If too hot
 Family events such as engagements, weddings etc.

School Reasons.

I get bullied at school	0	I don't like school work	3
I dislike the teachers	2	I can't do the school work	1
I don't like being told what to do	0	School work is too easy	0
Because of tests or exams	2	School work is boring	5
To catch up on work from school	6	Curriculum is irrelevant	5

Other

School work is not easy, rather be watching TV than doing homework
 Miss school if the work isn't going to be interesting. Miss school because sometimes sits there with nothing to do because other kids are behind..

4. Did you know that if you are absent from school your parent/s has/have to contact the school explaining why you are absent.

Yes 12 No 1

5. When you do not attend school do your parents normally know?

Yes 10 No 1 Sometimes 2

5.1 If no, how do they normally find out that you did not attend school?

(please specify).....
.....
.....

5.2 If the school is not notified by your parent/s of your absence is it because:
(Please tick as many as applicable)

Your parent/s don't know every time you miss school	2
Your parent/s don't know that they have to contact the school	2
There are English language difficulties at home	2
They provide you with a note but you don't give it to the school	5
Other	0

Comments

Lose notes and forget to hand them in.
Sometimes get note but forget to bring to school. Sometimes forget to write one.
Writes note for mother's signature, sometimes forgets to bring to school.
Forget to write note, busy household and each day goes by and keep forgetting
Forget to write note and then keep forgetting.
Have to write note for parent's signature and sometimes forget to bring to school.
Parents forget to give note and then get to school and don't have it.
Sometimes a note is taken to school, have to write notes for parents.
Forget to bring and then continue to forget.

6. Do your parents think that it is important for you to go to school?

Yes 13 No 0

6.1 When you don't go do they try to make you go to school?

Yes 5 No 8

6.2 If yes, please explain why you don't go.

If just a bit of a headache they would make him go.
 Don't like school.
 Only make him go if marks were to fall.
 If only a bit sick they would make him go.
 Encourage him to go if a bit ill but wants him to go for tests etc.
 May try to make him go for say an excursion or something like that but if he
 doesn't go he has to work in family business.

6.3 If no, could any of the following be reasons why your parent/s don't try?
 (Please tick as many as applicable)

They've given up trying to make me	0
I get too angry so they don't try	0
My parent/s don't care if I go	0
My parent/s don't think that an education is important	0
It causes too many fights at home so they don't bother any more.	0
They know that I hate school, so they don't try any more.	0
They would rather that I was working	0
I have to help out at home regularly	0

Any other reason (please specify)

.....

7. Would your parent/s let you stay home for any of the following reasons?
 (Please tick as many as applicable)

A relative visiting from overseas	10	School camp	9
School excursion	8	Sports day	6
To work in the family business	3	The day is too hot	12
You're feeling a bit ill	12	To look after brothers or sisters	4
Special religious events	5	Parent unwell	5

Other (please specify)

The last week of school is usually just activities parents happy to let stay
 home.
 If sister is visiting from interstate or for special planned shopping days.

8. What do you normally do when you do not attend school?

(Please tick as many as applicable)

Just stay home	13	Hang out with friends	7
Hang out at the shopping centre	3	Play arcade games	1
Get in trouble with the Police	0	Use drugs	1
Drink alcohol	0	Work in the family business	2

Other

Go with family members to shopping trips for engagements etc.

Finish school work/clean the house

Pool

Pool

Appendix 4.2

Findings

Student Interview Schedule **Socio-demographic details**

1. Age.

Age	15	16	17
Responses	4	8	1

Year Level

All respondents were in year 10

2. Gender.

Male

9

Female

4

3. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

No. of Siblings	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No. of Responses	1	4	2	1	1	3	0	1

3.1 What are their ages?

Siblings ranged from two years of age to twenty eight years. With most siblings falling in the age range of 5 – 15.

Position in family	Oldest Child	Between youngest & oldest	Youngest Child
No. of Responses	5	5	2

3.2 Have any of your brothers or sisters left school?

Yes

6

No

6

3.3 What age/s were they when they left school?

20 / 16 / 16, 18 / 16, 17 / On completion of TAFE / Uncertain of age

6. **Who are the adults that live in your household?** (please indicate your relationship, eg. Mum, Stepfather etc.)

	No.
Parents and adult siblings	7
Parents	5
Parent and Step-parent	1

7. **Do you know if your family receives any of the following benefits?** (please tick)
- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Education Maintenance Allowance | 4 |
| Unemployment benefits | 1 |
| Sickness benefits | 0 |
| Other | 1 |
| Don't know/not sure | 1 |

Six students indicated that they receive no benefits.

8. **For each working adult in your house please indicate your relationship to them and the type of job they have?** (eg. Mum, Own business)

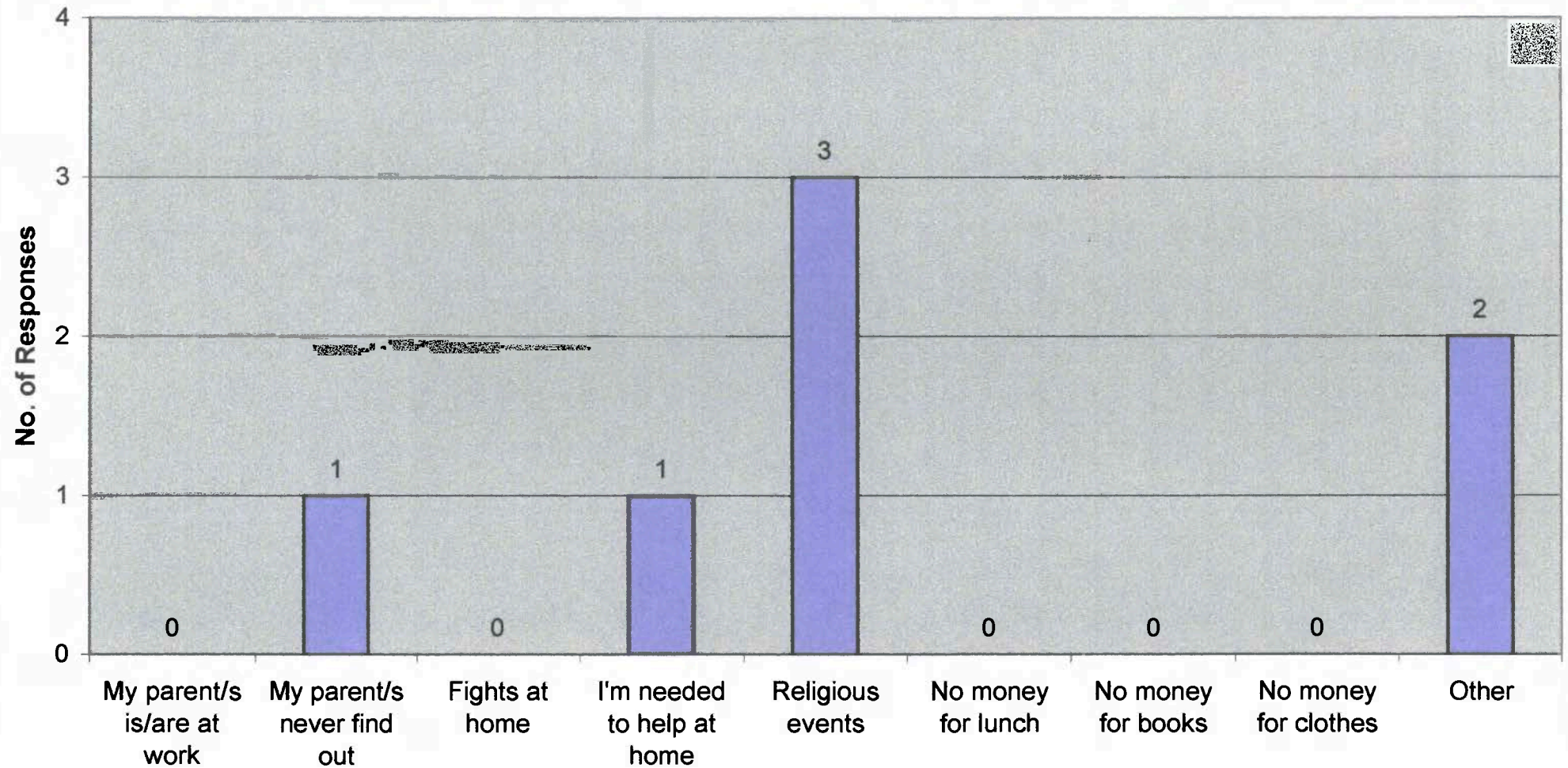
1 Male Parent	Professional	0
	Manual/Labourer	2
	Own business	8
	Clerical	0
	Trade	1
	Other.....	0
2 Female Parent	Professional	0
	Manual/Labourer	1
	Own business	1
	Clerical	1
	Trade	0
	Other.....	2
3 Adult Sibling	Professional	0
	Manual/Labourer	1
	Own business	0
	Clerical	0
	Trade	0
	Other.....	1

Six students indicated that their mother was occupied in home duties, two indicated that both parents were not working and one student indicated that an adult sibling was not working.

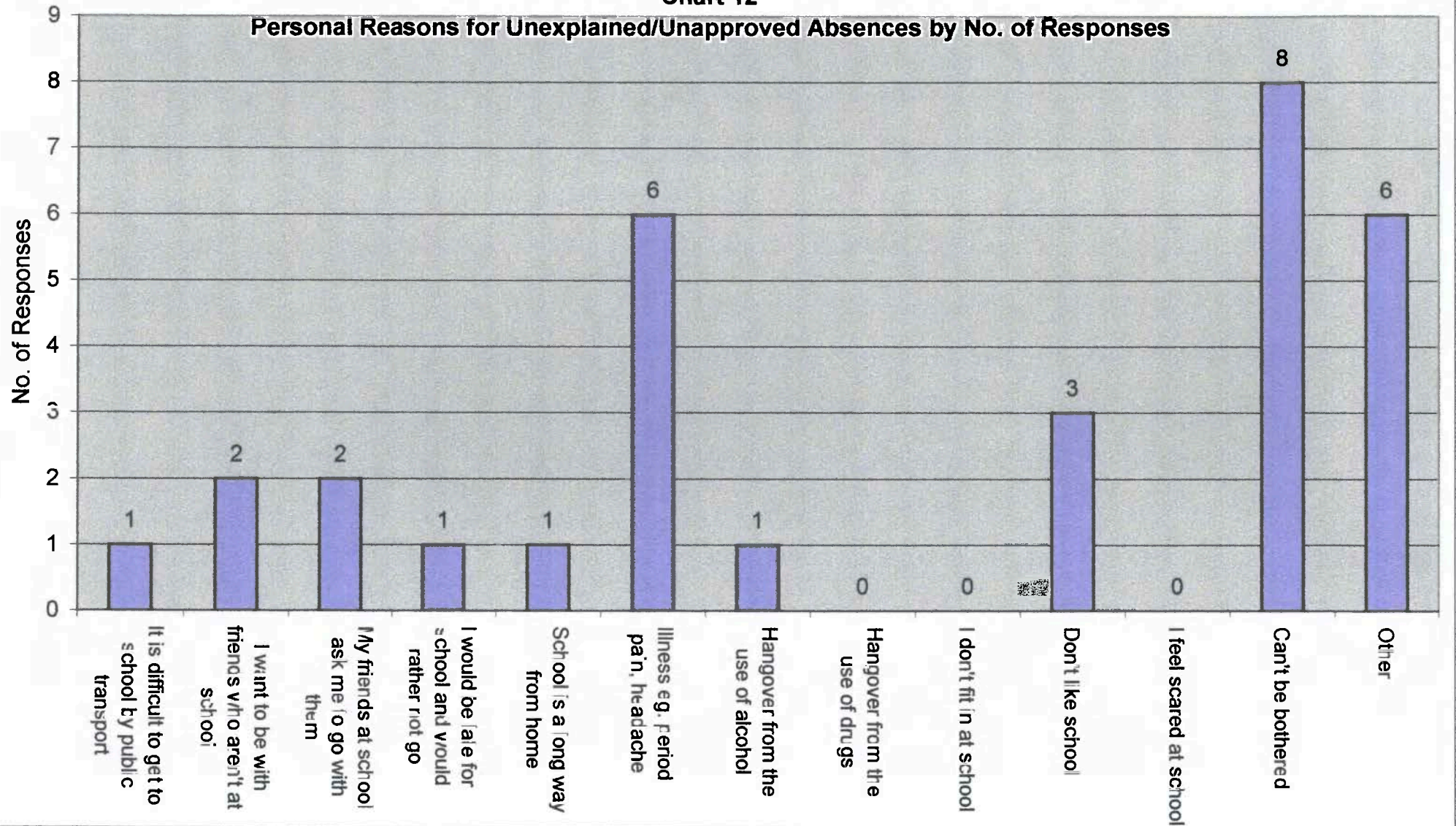
Appendix 4.3

Chart 11

Family Reasons for Unexplained/Unapproved Absences by No. of Responses



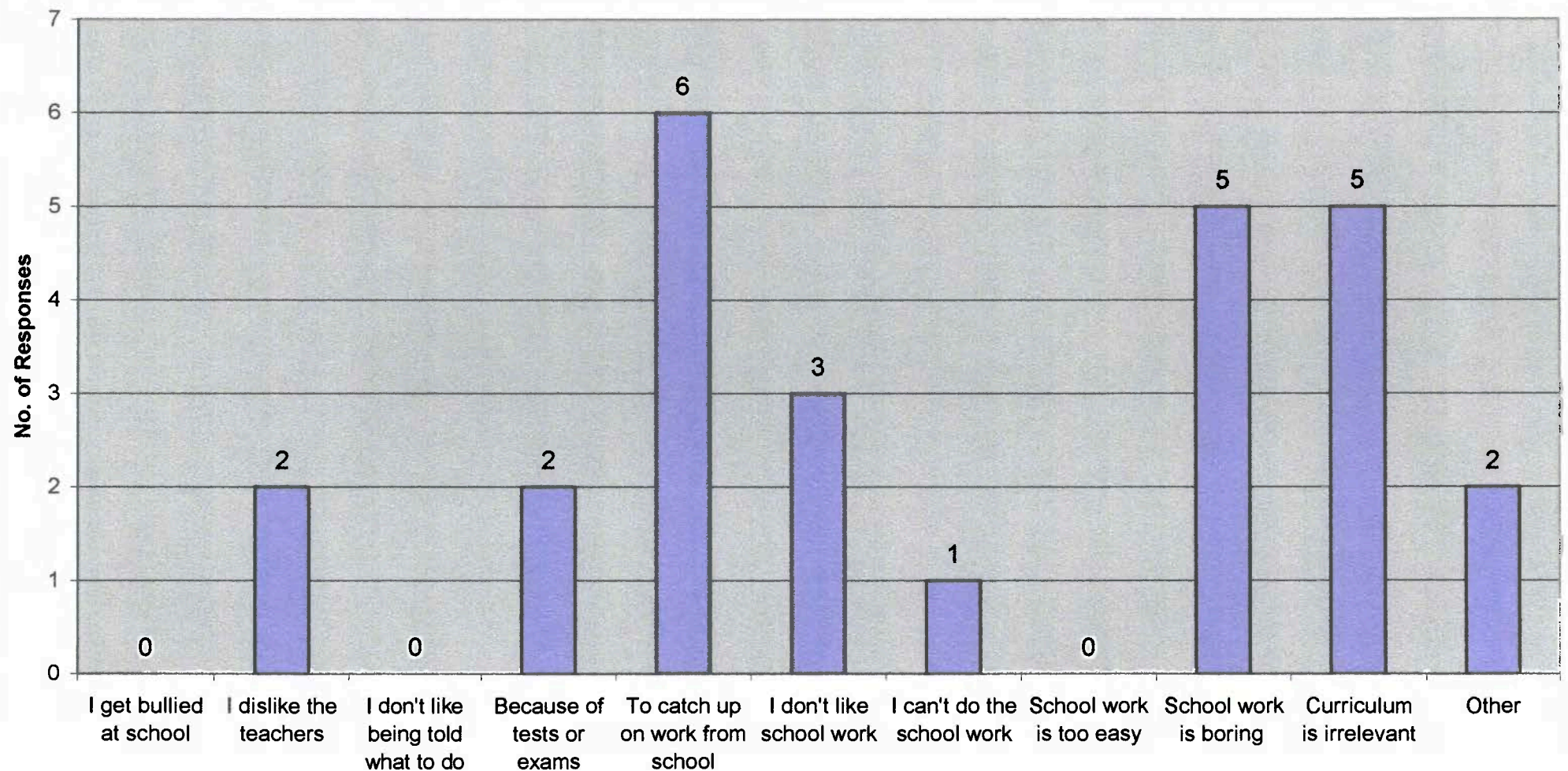
Appendix 4.4
 Chart 12



Appendix 4.5

Chart 13

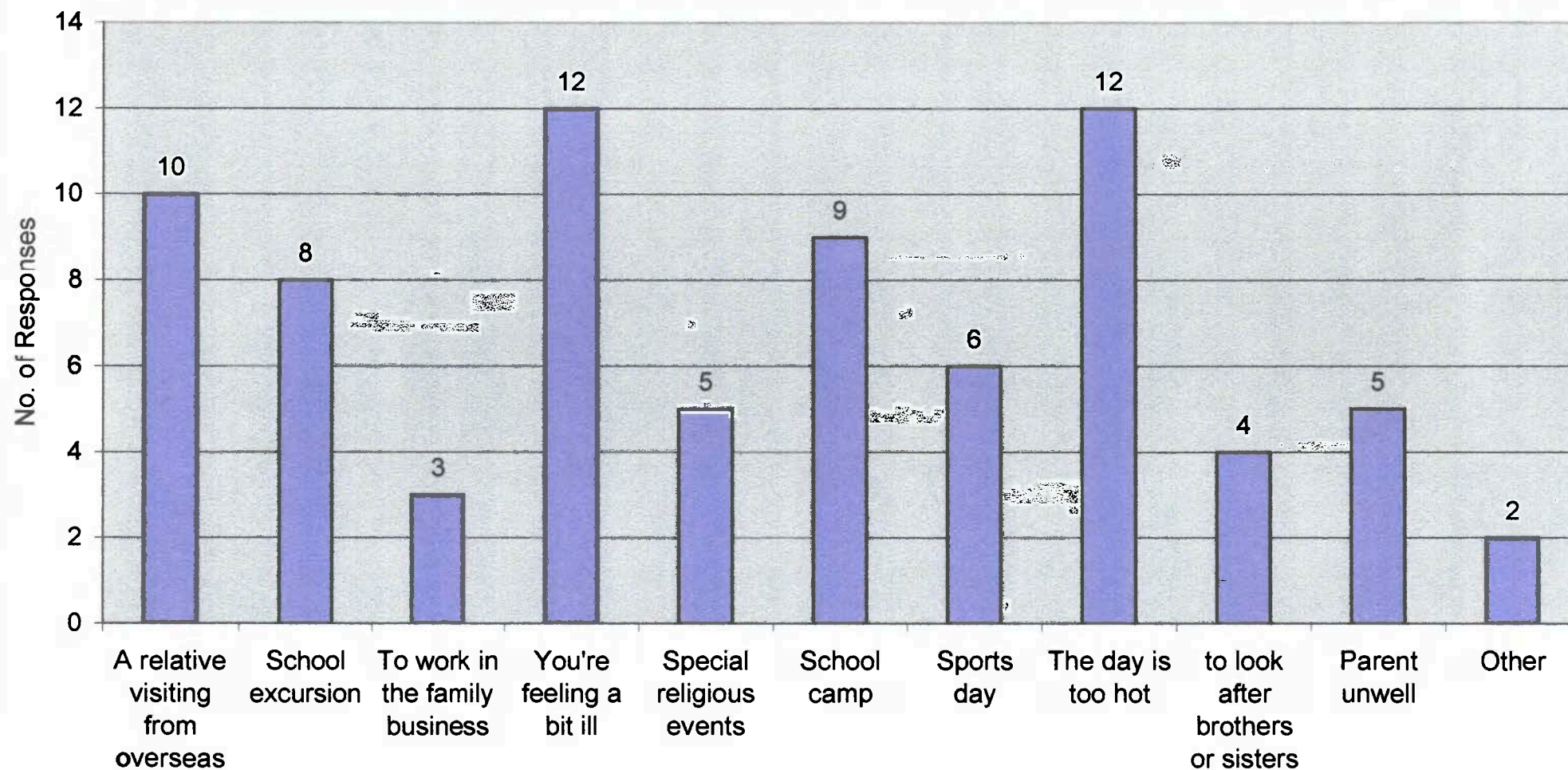
School Reasons for Unexplained/Unapproved Absences by No. of Responses



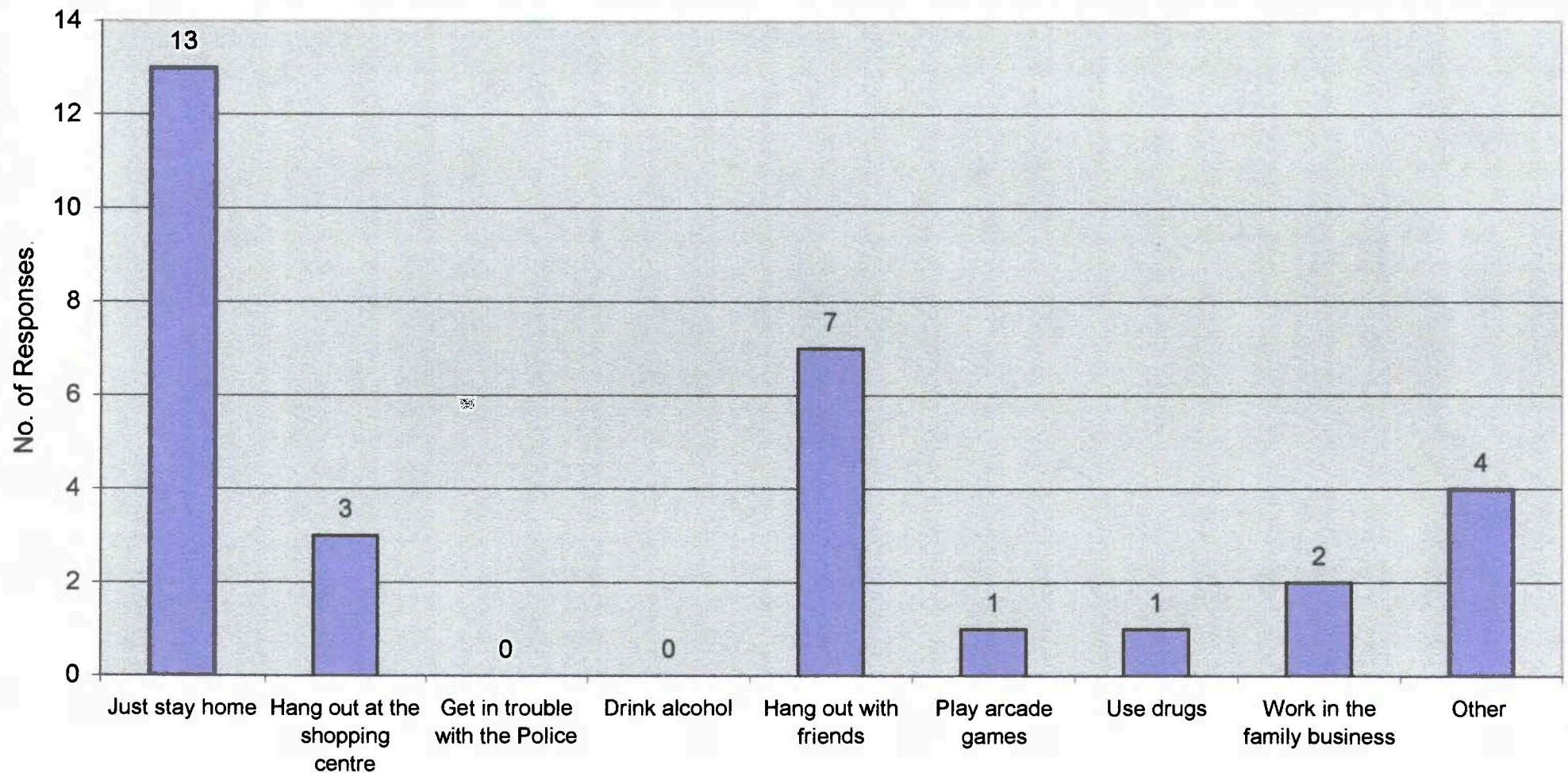
Appendix 4.6

Chart 15

Reasons Why Parents Would Let Their Child Stay Home by No of Responses.



Appendix 4.7
Chart 16
What Students do When Not at School by No. of Responses



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