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**ADDRESSING LOCALISED STUDENT ABSENTEEISM AND
SCHOOL WITHDRAWAL**

An Action Research Strategy

September 2010



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The National Research Institute**

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**ADDRESSING LOCALISED STUDENT ABSENTEEISM AND SCHOOL
WITHDRAWAL**

An Action Research Strategy

by

**Patricia Paraide, Longamel Kippel, Arnold Kukari,
James Agigo, and Kaminiel Irima**

**NRI
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ACRONYMS

AGE	Accelerating Girls' Education
BEICMP	Basic Education Infrastructure Curriculum Material Project
BEDP	Basic Education Development Project
BOM	Board of Management
CFS	Child Friendly School
ECBP	Education Capacity Building Program
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
NRI	National Research Institute
NDOE	National Department of Education
PRIDE	Pacific Regional Initiative for Development and Education
PEA	Provincial Education Adviser
PEO	Provincial Education Officer
PDOE	Provincial Department of Education
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SLIP	School Learning Improvement Program
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to our colleague, the late Longamel Kippel, who was team leader of this project. She passed away towards the end of the project. The National Research Institute acknowledges her valuable contribution to educational research in Papua New Guinea. Longamel's rich contribution to education research was attributed to her educational background and wealth of experience in a wide area of the education field, her sensitivity to different PNG localities and cultures, and her respect, loyalty, and dedication to the people of Papua New Guinea.

One of her views was that research information should be disseminated widely and used by the rural and urban populations so that they can find strategies to help themselves in order to undo the mentality of dependency. She believed that Papua New Guineans were capable of this, if they were given the opportunity and support to begin again to be self-reliant. Her view supports one of the national Department of Education's goals — education for self-reliance. Dissemination of research information to all is a research legacy that Longamel has left for Papua New Guinean educators to seriously consider, support, and practise.

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The National Research Institute (NRI) would like to acknowledge with sincere thanks the Pacific Regional Initiative for Development and Education (PRIDE) for funding this study.

NRI would also like to acknowledge with sincere thanks the Department of Education for approving this study to be conducted in the PNG schools. Also, NRI would like to thank the provincial education advisers of the provincial sites for allowing the researchers to carry out the study in their provinces, the provincial education officers, the teachers, parents, current students and those who had withdrawn from school in the primary and secondary schools in the provincial sites for agreeing to participate in the study. Their contributions have made the production of this report possible.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study was conducted by a research team comprising staff from the National Research Institute and the National Department of Education (NDOE) — the Late Longamel Kippel (Team Leader), Patricia Paraide, Arnold Kukari, James Agigo, and Kaminiel Irima. The NDOE officers were involved to enhance their capacity building in research.

Background

The outcomes of the research conducted by the National Research Institute into participation and retention of students in primary and secondary schools suggested that an action research strategy should be introduced to a range of schools to assist staff, boards of management, parents, students, and community members to improve participation and retention rates in schools.

The follow-up retention study was an action-oriented research aimed at working with schools, parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders to identify problems and causes for drop out resulting in the low retention of students in localised contexts. Through a participatory process, the study identified, and implemented, action-oriented strategies and strengthened school strategies that were already in place to improve retention rates, school attendance, participation, and achievement.

Aims of the Study

The aims of the study were to:

- identify current factors that contribute to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school;
- identify current strategies which are already in place in the school communities that encourage students to stay in school; and
- assist schools and communities to identify other suitable strategies to address issues pertaining to students' absenteeism and withdrawal through action research.

Methodology and Approach

Four provinces were selected, one per region, on the basis of low retention rates. This information was based on data from the national Department of Education. Four schools — one secondary and three primary schools — from each province were identified by the provincial education offices to participate in the study. The primary schools were representative of urban, semi-rural, and rural schools. The schools were selected because of their retention and absenteeism problems. A total of 16 schools — 12 primary schools and four secondary schools — participated in the study. The data show that 1 440 students, 96 withdrawn students, 164 teachers, and 160 parents participated in the study.

The survey was administered to teachers, provincial education officers, current students, and withdrawn students from the selected schools. Focus group discussions were also conducted with parents, teachers, provincial education officers, and students. Action research was also used to assist teachers and mature students to identify issues that affect their particular schools, and develop strategies to deal with them. The data from the survey and focus group discussions captured the issues in particular localities. Some of these issues can

be generalised, such as the inability to pay school fees, health, family and home environment, social activities, and transport problems.

The provinces and schools have not been identified in order to protect the participants' identities. Some of the findings presented in this section identify the current contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal, some of the existing strategies used by the school sites to address these issues, and the development of new ones.

Selected Findings

School Fees

The inability to pay school fees is faced by many parents in PNG. It is one of the major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. The primary and secondary school students were asked whether their parents had difficulties with paying their school fees (see Tables ES1 and ES2).

Table ES1: Primary School Students' School Fees

Response	Percentage
Yes	43
No	25
Sometimes	31
No Response	1

Table ES2: Secondary School Students' School Fees

Response	Percentage
Yes	52
No	14
Sometimes	34
No Response	0

Forty-three percent of the primary school students and 52 percent of secondary school students stated that their parents had difficulties with paying their school fees. The qualitative data also show that the inability to pay school fees was the highest contributing factor to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal in most of the school sites.

Reasons for School Withdrawal

For further insights as to why students withdraw from school, students were asked to give reasons for their withdrawal from school (see Table ES3).

Table ES3: Primary School Students' Reasons for Withdrawal

Reason	Percentage
Inability to pay school fees	48
Teachers' abuse	1
Learning difficulty	3
Outside influences	8
Not interested in school	11
Behaviour problems	3
Other reasons	23

These data further strengthen the assessment that the inability to pay school fees is the highest major contributing factor to students' withdrawal. The 11 percent of students who were not interested in school were those who do not value formal schooling. The qualitative data show that students were generally not interested in formal schooling because they were of the view that the subjects were not worthwhile, and that participation in activities outside of school were more favoured because they were interesting.

The students were also asked why they thought their parents had difficulties with paying school fees (see Table ES4).

Table ES4: Reasons for Difficulties in Raising School Fees

Reason	Percentage
Families unable to make money	11
Large family	9
Alcoholic parent	3
Single parent	11
Other siblings in school	16
Only form of income is subsistence farming	17
Low income	24
Family problems	9

Low income, subsistence farming as the only form of income, and having other siblings in school were the major contributing factors to parents' difficulties in paying their children's school fees. Being single parents, the inability to make money, having large families, and family problems were increasingly contributing factors as well. The qualitative data show that family problems in this study refer generally to parent(s) not being able to support their children's school fees and their general welfare, and other school needs because they had moved on to a new life or had died.

The teachers were also asked to give reasons for male and female students' withdrawal from school (see Tables ES5 and ES6). The teachers were of the view that the major contributing factors to male students' withdrawal from school were peer pressure, inability to pay school fees, and family problems. Poor parental support, outside influences, drug and/or alcohol abuse, and formal schooling not valued were also notable contributing factors.

Table ES5: Teachers' Reasons for Male Students' Withdrawal from School

Reason	Percentage
Peer pressure	21
Outside influence	8
Poor parental support	9
Illness	3
Transport problems	2
Cannot afford school fees	18
Hunger	5
Family problems	10
Difficulties with school work	4
Do not value school	6
Drug and/or alcohol abuse	7
No response	7

Table ES6: Teachers' Reasons for Female Students' Withdrawal from School

Reason	Percentage
Peer pressure	7
Outside influence	8
Illness	1
Poor parental support	9
Pregnancy/get married/male interests	4
Sexual abuse (by parents/relatives/family friends)	4
Family problems	5
Adolescence issues	8
Cannot afford school fees	13
Hunger	4
Involvement in household chores	8
Bullying	1
Violence in the home	3
Drug and/or alcohol abuse	4
No response	21

The teachers were also of the view that the major contributing factors for female students' withdrawal from school were the inability to pay school fees, poor parental support, outside influence, adolescence issues, involvement in household activities, and peer pressure. Other notable contributing factors were drug and/or alcohol abuse, hunger, family problems, sexual abuse, and pregnancy.

The qualitative data show that the highest major contributing factor for female students' absenteeism and school withdrawal is the inability to pay school fees. The data also show that continuous excessive involvement in household chores, sexual abuse, pregnancy, violence in the homes, poor parental support, peer pressure to stay away from school, involvement in outside activities, and teacher absenteeism are also contributing factors. To understand further why students leave school, the students who had withdrawn from school were also asked why they had left school (see Table ES7).

Table ES7: Withdrawn Students' Reasons for Withdrawal from School

Reason	Percentage
Election problems	5
Inability to pay school fees	48
Continuous illness	7
Outside influence	4
Expulsion from school	6
No space in school	4
Hunger	6
Fights and problems	5
School problems	6
No response	9

Forty-eight percent of the students who had withdrawn from school stated that they withdrew from school because their parents could not pay their school fees. Other reasons were continuous illness, expulsion from school, hunger, and school problems. The qualitative data show that peer pressure, drug and alcohol abuse, family problems, excessive involvement in household activities, and child abuse were also contributing factors.

Teaching and Learning/School Resources

School problems are also contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school, especially inadequate textbooks and desks. To gauge the magnitude of this issue, teachers were also asked whether they had sufficient teaching and learning/school resources (see Table ES8).

Table ES8: Teaching and Learning/School Resources

Response	Percentage
Sufficient	4
Insufficient	95
No response	1

These data indicate that most of the school sites had insufficient resources. The qualitative data show that desks and textbooks were shared by three or four students. The classrooms had few class readers and wall charts, and most of the schools had few library books. Most of these materials were in need of urgent replacement.

Punctuality

Punctuality is a common issue encountered by all schools. The students were asked about school punctuality. They were asked to rate their own status of punctuality (see Table ES9).

Table ES9: Primary School Students' Punctuality

Frequency	Percentage
Hardly ever	27
Sometimes	63
Every day	4
No Response	6

Sixty-three percent of the students are sometimes late for school. The qualitative data show that punctuality is an issue in most of the schools. Transport difficulties, involvement in household chores, violence and abuse in the home, poor weather, and involvement in outside activities were contributing factors for students' lateness.

Community Support

Good community support is vital to the success of school initiatives aimed to support and improve students' welfare, student retention, and attendance. The teachers were asked whether their schools had a good working relationship with the communities and had good community support (see Table ES10).

Table ES10: Community Support for Schools

Response	Percentage
Yes	29
No	71
No response	20

Seventy-one percent of the teachers answered 'no' to whether the school received community support, and were asked to provide examples (see Table ES11).

Table ES11: Examples of Poor Community Support

Example	Percentage
Parents do not attend meetings or work around school	44
Parents do not cooperate with the school	11
Lack of parental support for students' learning	2
Poor school security/arson on school properties/rundown buildings	7
Students' and parents' poor attitude towards schooling	11
No response	18
Not applicable	7

The teachers who responded 'yes' to good community support were also asked to provide examples (see Table ES12).

Table ES12: Examples of Good Community Support

Example	Percentage
Community care for and respect school	4
Parents meetings well attended	1
Community assist school in kind	5
Community assist school with fundraising activities	3
Community support teachers well	1
School has effective BOM	1
Others	1
No response	13
Not applicable	71

The 71 percent of the teachers who answered 'not applicable' were those who responded 'no' when asked if their schools had good community support. These data show that most of the schools were not well-supported by their communities. The qualitative data show that schools had existing strategies to address students' poor school attendance and retention. The success of these existing strategies depended on the community's involvement and teachers' commitment. They were generally effective when teamwork among teachers and the communities was strong.

Students' Reasons for Attending School

Parents and students generally want to gain from formal schooling. Parents encourage their children to attend school, if they value what the students' will gain from it. The students were asked why they attended school (Tables ES13 and ES14).

Table ES13: Primary Students' Reasons for Attending School

Reason	Percentage
Learn to read and write	22
Gain more knowledge	42
Get formal employment	0
Improve standard of living/better future	15
Other	21

Table ES14: Secondary Students' Reasons for Attending School

Reason	Percentage
Learn to read and write	12
Gain more knowledge	46
Get formal employment	13
Improve standard of living/better future	23
Other	6

The data show that 42 percent of primary school students and 46 percent of secondary school students stated that they wanted to gain more knowledge from formal schooling. Twenty-two percent of primary school students attend school so that they can master literacy skills. The students also attend school so they can gain knowledge to improve their standard of living or have a better future. Only 13 percent of secondary school students expect to get formal employment. However, the qualitative data show that the dream of improving the standard of living and having a better life is linked to the hope of getting formal employment.

Future of Students Who Withdrew from School

Many wonder what fate awaits students in their communities when they withdraw from school. To establish what they actually do after they withdraw from school, the students who had dropped out of school were asked what they were currently doing.

Table ES15: Withdrawn Students' Activities at Home

Activity	Percentage
Subsistence farmer	21
Work with parents	46
Formal employment	4
Do part-time jobs	4
Spin around/do nothing	19
Other	6

Forty-six percent of the students who had withdrawn from school work with their parents, and 21 percent become subsistence farmers. The response 'work with parents' generally referred to working in the garden, in cash crop production, and other work to assist their families in the community. These data suggest that many students actually become useful to their families back in their communities. The 19 percent who are not constructively occupied are those who generally get involved in undesirable activities.

Suggested Strategies to Improve Retention

Poor school retention and absenteeism need to be adequately addressed first in order to achieve the goal of Universal Basic Education. Some schools already have effective strategies to address these issues. However, more effective strategies need to be identified to support the campaign to improve students' school retention and attendance. The provincial education officers were asked to suggest strategies to improve students' retention in schools (see Tables ES16 and ES17).

Table ES16: PEOs' Suggested Strategies for Basic Education

Strategy	Percentage
Strengthen parental support and guidance for students	15
School provide lunch and sporting activities in school	28
Support strategies to be/already established in and outside of school	43
No response	14

Table ES17: PEOs' Suggested Strategies for Secondary Education

Strategy	Percentage
Free education	32
Provision of adequate teaching and learning materials	18
Support strategies to be/already established in and outside of school	30
Improve counselling in schools	14
No response	6

The teachers were also asked to suggest strategies to improve students' retention in schools (see Table ES18).

Table ES18: Teachers' Suggested Strategies

Strategy	Percentage
Students to be self-reliant	4
No repetition of grades	6
Develop strong relationship among teachers, parents, and students	20
Encourage partnership with school and community	10
Students streamed to subjects of interest (Grades 6–8)	5
Introduce forms of entertainment in schools	6
Introduce strong child abuse victim protection	3
Free education/subsidised education	21
Better trained teachers	6
Make learning meaningful/worthwhile/interesting	9
Strengthen counselling in schools	6
Encourage parents to save up for school fees	3
Introduce corporal punishment	1

The teachers held the strong view that free education or subsidised school fees and the development of strong relationship among teachers, students, and parents would improve students' retention in school. This view is strongly supported by other data in this study. Many parents have difficulties in earning sufficient money for their children's school fees because of family, social, and economic factors. The communities' strong involvement in the strategies that were established to improve school attendance and retention proved to be effective.

Staffing

Teacher appointment is seen as a catalyst for useful and effective learning. Staffing shortages can affect other teachers' teaching loads in schools and can contribute to teachers' absenteeism. Teacher absenteeism is one of the contributing factors to student absenteeism and school withdrawal. The qualitative data show that most of the school sites had teacher shortages.

The qualitative data also show that staffing at each school site varied. Some primary school sites had achieved gender equity in terms of teacher appointment. Some had more females than males while others had more males than females. Ninety-two percent of the primary schools had male headteachers. The secondary school sites' teaching staff were dominated by males, and all the principals were male (see Table ES19).

Table ES19: Number of Teachers in PNG

Gender	All Teachers		Headteachers	
	No.	%	No.	%
Female	17 017	38.42	2 139	25.56
Male	27 278	61.58	6 228	74.44
Total	44 295		8 367	

Source: NDOE 2009.

The data show that gender equity in terms of teacher supply has room for improvement. In addition, only 25 percent of headteachers in PNG are females. This is only 12.5 percent of the total female teacher population. Approximately 23 percent of the male teacher population are headteachers. The data suggest that another 10.5 percent of female headteachers could be chosen from the current female teachers' population so that gender equity could be achieved at the headteacher level. The dominant role of male headteachers may have an effect on female enrolment and retention, especially in primary schools. Decisions that may affect female students' welfare in the schools may be overlooked, such as the lack of female ablution facilities to cater for senior females' needs. Such a lack contributed to senior female students' school absenteeism.

Conclusion

This study found that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal were similar at all school sites. Although contributing factors varied in the site schools, the data show that the inability to pay for school fees was the highest common major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. The major contributing factors for parents' inability to pay for their children's school fees were low-income earners, the only form of income was subsistence farming, inability to raise funds because of low economic environments, had other children in school, unemployment, and only one parent earning a formal income.

Hunger, illness, teacher absenteeism, and family problems were also major contributing factors. Other contributing factors were peer pressure, difficulty with subject content, students and parents do not value formal schooling, bullying, drug and alcohol abuse, outside influences, pregnancy, various forms of child abuse, student involvement in household and seasonal chores, and cultural activities. These findings support the 2002 retention study and other NRI studies which also found that these are contributing factors to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. This study found that family problems which lead to poor parental support for the students' education, violence in the home, school fee problems, and all forms of other child abuse in the home affected some students in all the school sites.

It was also found that students' absenteeism was a common concern in all school sites, although the degree of the problem varied. This findings support the 2002 retention study which also identified absenteeism as a concern in all school sites in that study. The major contributing factors to students' absenteeism were hunger, illness, inadequate learning

resources in schools, teacher absenteeism, and difficulties with school fees. Other contributing factors were involvement in household, seasonal and cultural activities, students do not value formal schooling, lessons are not interesting, poor parental support, drug abuse, rainy seasons, and transport, water, security, and family problems.

The study found that most of the school sites had existing strategies which were used to address the various factors that affected their particular students' school attendance and retention. Some of the strategies that were used were common in all school sites. Some examples were paying school fees in instalments and schools' casual employment for poor parents to earn school fees and in-kind support for schools when parents were unable to pay for school fees. However, these existing strategies did not adequately support the schools. For example, the in-kind support from the parents which was used to lower school fees was not fully utilised by the schools and the parents because schools needed money to function efficiently. Paying in instalments did not work well because many parents did not pay off their children's school fee debts. The effectiveness of other strategies that were used by the schools varied as well. Some did not work, many were partly successful, and a few were successful. The varying successes were largely influenced by external factors, such as community support, hindrances, and local environments.

The study found that reading was a motivating factor for students' school attendance. School libraries can support this interest. However, school libraries in most of the school sites were understocked, lacked new and up-to-date books, and were not well-organised to encourage students to use them. Some schools did not have a school library. Students' library use was minimal or non-existent in the school sites that had libraries. Investment in school libraries did not seem to be priority in all site schools. Other NRI studies have noted that school libraries in primary schools are not well-developed in other provinces as well. It seemed that libraries as a teaching resource to further support both students' and teachers' literacy, research skills, and independent learning had not been fully realised by many school administrations, especially at the primary level. Library facilities need to be better developed so that teachers and students are adequately supported in terms of learning resources.

The study also identified that sporting activities was another motivating factor for students' school punctuality, attendance, and retention. Sporting activities also contributed to the development of student discipline and responsibility in one of the school sites. Most of the primary school sites lacked sporting facilities. Other studies have also identified sporting facilities as generally lacking in primary schools. Sporting facilities are a vital component in students' education and development and should have equal financial support and teachers' commitment as other school programs.

School counselling services are a vital component in any educational institution. Counselling services are generally used to support students, if they need them. It can be used to support problem students and to encourage their school attendance and retention when they are absent for various reasons, or are intending to withdraw from school. The study found that students' counselling services were minimal in all the school sites. Teachers generally referred 'problem students' who had the intention of withdrawing from school to the headteachers. Some teachers spoke with the students' parents about their children's absenteeism and their intention of withdrawing from school, while some did not take any action. Apart from this, no other counselling support for students existed.

The highest contributing factors to female absenteeism was the lack of appropriate female ablution facilities. All primary school sites lacked such facilities. Some school sites had achieved gender equity in terms of teachers' appointments and student enrolments. Some schools had more males, while others had more females. Most of the school sites had male headteachers. In the high school sites the teaching staff was dominated by males. The appointment of mostly male head teachers may have some bearing on decisions to support female students' welfare in the schools.

The success of the action research and the strategies used to address poor student school attendance and retention depended very much on effective school leadership, good school management, accountability of school finances, strong commitment from all stakeholders, and strong community involvement in addressing the issues that affected the students' school attendance and retention. The schools that had such deficiency had serious problems in relation to teachers' and students' school attendance and retention.

The action research was successful in school sites that had strong leadership, committed teachers, sound teacher cooperation and team work, and good community support. Those who were involved made the effort to make the identified strategies to address students' absenteeism and school withdrawal work for the school and students. The action research did not work well in schools that had weak leadership, uncooperative teachers, and poor community support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. School Fees

The 2002 retention study found that the inability to pay school fees was a major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. Reports from the national newspapers have also reported current concerns regarding students' school withdrawal as a consequence of the inability to pay school fees. One province in PNG has made a commitment to subsidise its students' school fees at all levels of education, for some years now. This study found that all the school sites reported the inability to pay for school fees as a major contributing factor to students' withdrawal from school.

Recommendation 1a

That the NDOE and PDOE seriously consider free education for primary school students in communities that have no or low economic environments, and families that are unable to raise sufficient money for their children's school fees.

Recommendation 1b

That the NDOE and PDOE seriously consider heavily subsidising school fees for the rest of the primary school-age population.

Recommendation 1c

That the NDOE and PDOE consider reducing school fee incentives for top students in primary and secondary schools.

Recommendation 1d

That the NDOE and PDOE seriously consider subsidising school fees for secondary students whose families genuinely cannot raise money for school fees or those from very low economic areas.

Recommendation 1e

That PDOE and school administrations encourage communities to identify practical strategies which would be effective in their own communities to assist low income families to raise money for their children's school fees.

Recommendation 1f

That the PDOE and school administrations strongly encourage parents and guardians to save for their children's school fees all year round, and bank in restricted saving accounts, such as the BSP Achievers Account.

2. Teaching and Learning Resources

Most of the teachers in the school sites reported inadequate teaching and learning resources and school resources. Other NRI studies had identified inadequate learning materials as a serious issue in many PNG schools. This study identified inadequate teaching and learning resources as a major contributing factor to student absenteeism and school withdrawal in the school sites.

Recommendation 2a

That the NDOE and PDOE encourage schools administrations and BOMs to make financial commitments to purchase sufficient recommended school textbooks and sell to students.

Recommendation 2b

That school administrations and BOMs encourage students to take good care of their textbooks so that they can sell them off to other students, when they or other siblings do not need them anymore.

Recommendation 2c

That school administrations develop a standard assessment to assess conditions of secondhand books for sale and that all secondhand books be sold through the school.

Recommendation 2d

That school administrations also buy secondhand books from students to give to students who cannot afford school textbooks.

Recommendation 2e

That the school administrations and BOMs encourage the communities to assist the school through fundraising activities in order to purchase school textbooks for sale.

Recommendation 2f

That the PDOE, through standard officers, closely monitor school administrations' accounts of school textbook purchases and sales.

3. Maintenance of School Infrastructure and School Furniture and Replacement

Other NRI studies have found that the maintenance of school infrastructure and school furniture is an issue in many schools. This study found that broken school furniture, rundown classrooms, and insufficient desks contribute to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal.

Recommendation 3a

That the PDOE strongly encourages school administrations and BOMs to make commitments in yearly school budgets for school infrastructure maintenance to minimise the deterioration of school infrastructure and furniture.

Recommendation 3b

That school administrations and BOMs make a commitment in yearly school budgets for the regular replacement of school furniture.

Recommendation 3c

That school administrations and BOMs encourage parents who are carpenters to assist with the maintenance of school buildings and school furniture, for a small fee.

Recommendation 3d

That school administrations and BOMs utilise vocational schools' carpentry and maintenance services, where possible, if their fees are affordable.

Recommendation 3e

That school administrations and BOMs encourage communities to supply timber from their forests (if available), for school use.

Recommendation 3f

That school administrations and BOMs consider a reduction in children's school fees when parents supply timber for the school.

4. School Counselling Services

Other NRI studies have found that school counselling services are inadequate in many schools. This study found that school counselling services were minimal or non-existent in all the school sites.

Recommendation 4a

That the NDOE and PDOE strengthen professional support for existing school counsellors.

Recommendation 4b

That the school administrations and BOMs develop approachable counselling service environments in schools to encourage students to seek counselling support.

Recommendation 4c

That the NDOE and PDOE seriously consider school counsellors to be exempt from normal teaching duties to enable them to focus on the students' welfare.

Recommendation 4d

That school administrations and BOMs work collectively with counselling service providers in the school community (if any), to support students.

5. Professional Support for Headteachers

The success of strategies that were implemented to improve students' attendance and retention depended very much on strong school leadership, teamwork, good management, and accountability of school finances. This study found that, in school sites where these areas were weak, the schools generally lacked community support.

Recommendation 5a

That the NDOE and PDOE provide continuous professional support for headteachers in relation to financial management and accountability.

Recommendation 5b

That the NDOE and PDOE provide continuous professional support for headteachers in relation to good school management practices.

Recommendation 5c

That the NDOE and PDOE provide continuous professional support for headteachers in relation to practical strategies that can develop team work among teaching staff and the community.

Recommendation 5d

That the NDOE and PDOE provide professional support for headteachers and teachers to develop skills to interact well with the school communities, to gain community support.

6. Students' Involvement in Household/Seasonal Chores

The 2002 retention study found that student involvement in household and seasonal chores were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. This study found that this is still a contributing factor to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal in all the school sites. While household chores can be viewed as part of the students' education, excessive students' involvement which interferes with school attendance should be discouraged.

Recommendation 6a

That the PEO, school administrations, and teachers conduct awareness on the differences between household chores given as part of the students' education and students used as domestic servants to protect children from possible child labour abuse.

Recommendation 6b

That community leaders be given responsibility to encourage parents to balance home and formal education so that their children can gain from both worlds.

Recommendation 6c

That the PEO, school administrations, and teachers conduct awareness for students concerning their rights to education, health, and other welfare needs.

7. Child Abuse

The 2002 retention study found that child abuse in the school and home is a contributing factor to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. This study found that family problems which lead to poor parental support for students' education, violence in the home, school fee problems, and all forms of other child abuse in the home contribute to student absenteeism and school withdrawal in most of the school sites.

Recommendation 7a

That the NDOE, PDOE, and school administrations provide a joint awareness campaign on the protection of children against child abuse for all stakeholders.

Recommendation 7b

That school administrations and BOMs be made aware of the appropriate authorities that can assist with the protection of children against all forms of child abuse.

Recommendation 7c

That school administrations and BOMs interact with communities and tap into traditional ways of protecting children against all forms of child abuse.

Recommendation 7d

That the PDOE, school administrations, and BOMs work closely with churches and law-enforcing institutions to conduct continuous campaigns against all forms of child abuse in their homes and schools

8. Existing Strategies to Improve Students' School Attendance and Retention

This study found that most of the school sites had existing strategies to address poor school retention and attendance. Some did not work because of external contributing factors which hindered progress, many were partly successful, and a few were successful. Community support in most of the school sites was lacking. Some facilities were underdeveloped.

Recommendation 8a

That the PDOE encourages school administrations to revisit strategies that were partly effective and weaknesses are identified and strengthened.

Recommendation 8b

That the PDOE encouraged school administrations and communities to identify local strategies which can be used effectively to improve school attendance and retention.

Recommendation 8c

That school administrations, BOMs, and school communities work together as a team to consider and tailor other possible strategies to improve students' school attendance and retention.

Recommendation 8d

That the PDOE strongly encourages school administrations and BOMs to commit funding to the development of sporting facilities and activities, especially at the primary level of education.

Recommendation 8e

That the NDOE and PDOE strongly encourage school administrations and BOMs to commit funding in the school yearly budgets for the development of school libraries, as a top priority.

9. Infrastructure Support for Senior Female Students

A number of studies have found inadequate support for senior female students needs, especially at the primary school level. This study found that a common contributing factor to

female students' absenteeism in most of the school sites was the lack of female ablution facilities to cater for senior females' needs.

Recommendation 9

That the PDOE strongly encourage school administrations and BOMs to construct appropriate toilet facilities that will adequately cater for senior female students.

10. Subjects/Lessons Taught in Schools

Another contributing factor to student absenteeism and withdrawal from school is boring lessons/subjects, the view that subjects are not worthwhile, and parents and students do not value formal education. Some students' value community and home education more because they see its value in their everyday lives.

Recommendation 10a

That the NDOE and PDOE encourage school administrations to build into their school programs half a day school inservices, once a week, so that teachers receive continuous professional support on the provision of interesting, innovative, and worthwhile lessons.

Recommendation 10b

That the school administrations continuously encourage teachers to prepare worthwhile and meaningful lessons so that students can view formal schooling as important in their future everyday lives.

Recommendation 10c

That school administrations explore and put into place practical school programs that link formal learning with everyday living for their particular students.

Recommendation 10d

That the NDOE and PDOE develop a policy to guide school administrations to integrate seasonal and cultural activities with the formal school curriculum to cater for their particular students' educational needs.

INTRODUCTION

This study was funded by the Pacific Regional Initiative for Development and Education (PRIDE) project. This is jointly funded by New Zealand Aid and the European Union. The National Research Institute acknowledges the support of the PRIDE project.

The completion of this report has been delayed because of the 2007 National Elections and because the team leader of this project, the late Longamel Kippel, had difficulties in accessing the SPSS software needed for the analysis of the quantitative data. Unfortunately, she became too ill to work on the report in the final three months of 2008. NRI apologises for this delay.

Background

The education system in PNG has been undergoing structural and curriculum reforms for the past fourteen years. The aims of the education reform is to address issues of education access and retention of students, the provision of a relevant curriculum that is suitable for PNG's current economic, political, educational, social and spiritual needs, gender equity in access to education, provision of nine years of basic education for a wider range of students, and to prepare students for life back in their communities, as well as further education and employment. Since the education reform, the country has witnessed an increase in enrolment, and in particular, an increase in female enrolment at all levels of education. It had been reported that student enrolment in elementary and primary levels of education now stands at about 50 percent males and 50 percent for females. One of the current challenges is the retention of students in schools. Retaining students so that they are able to complete any education level is an issue. Students withdraw from all levels of school for various reasons.

A retention study that was carried out in 2002 identified internal and external factors which contribute to students' absenteeism and eventual withdrawal from school. The factors that were identified then still contribute to students' absenteeism and eventual withdrawal from school in the present time. These factors are complex and interrelated, and how they are addressed by individual schools is challenging. The success of solving absenteeism and withdrawal is dependent on team efforts from the teachers to address the issue, involvement of community support in addressing the issue, and the identification of practical solutions that can be sustained by the schools.

Education Goals

The National Education Plan, 2005–2014 is consistent with Papua New Guinea's Goals and Directive Principles, international obligations, in particular, the Millennium Development Goals and Education For All, government objectives in the education sectors as outlined by the Medium Term Development Strategy, and community demands, as determined during provincial consultations. The aim of this plan is to address the eight millennium development goals to which PNG is committed. These include the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achievement of universal basic education, promotion of gender equity and empowerment of women, reduction of the child mortality rate, improvement of maternal health, prevention of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and the development of global partnerships for development.

These goals are addressed through the reform curriculum to prepare students to deal with these issues when they complete formal schooling. The education plan's first priority is basic education, the second is vocational and technical training, the third is secondary education, and fourth is tertiary education. Student retention, especially at the primary and secondary levels of schooling, is vital in order to prepare students to address the eight Millennium Development Goals in their future lives.

Universal Basic Education

In education, the focus of the Medium Term Development Strategy is to support the implementation of the education reform aimed at achieving Universal Primary Education and now commonly referred to as Universal Basic Education. Under the goal of Universal Basic Education, its aim is for all children to receive nine years of basic education. The current education plan is committed to a priority focus on resources that are directed towards basic education, including curriculum reforms, teacher training, infrastructure, and rural education facilities, while also ensuring adequate funding is available to support the planned increase in teachers' salaries.

Universal Basic Education is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. In some reports, the achievement of Universal Basic Education in PNG has been compared with other Pacific countries. Such reports state that some Pacific countries have achieved Universal Basic Education, whereas PNG has not. However, what has not been highlighted in such reports is that other Pacific countries' land masses and populations are generally smaller than that of Papua New Guinea. Basic services, such as basic education, may have been achieved in those other Pacific countries because they are smaller in land mass and have smaller populations. Furthermore, their terrain is not as challenging to access, and their cultures are not as diverse as those in Papua New Guinea. According to the 2000 National Census, Papua New Guinea's population was approximately 5.2 million. The population has increased considerably, nine years on.

Eighty-five percent of PNG's population live in the rural areas. More than 800 different languages are spoken throughout Papua New Guinea. Given these constraints, the achievement of Universal Basic Education is a challenging one for Papua New Guinea, but it can be achieved, if well-supported financially and in kind.

The education plan aims to have in place strategies to improve retention to approximately 70 percent between Grades 1 and 6 by 2014. In Papua New Guinea, Universal Basic Education cannot be achieved if the retention issue is not adequately addressed.

Retention Study

Given the issue of poor students' retention in Papua New Guinean schools, a retention study was conducted to establish its status. The study found that, in addition to students' withdrawal from school, absenteeism was also a major issue. Absenteeism tended to increase during the third and fourth terms of the school year in both primary and secondary schools. The study also found that some of the contributing factors for students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school include, the inability to pay for school fees, family problems, illness, hunger, peer pressure to stay away from school, bullying by fellow students and teachers, long distance travelled to school, transport problems, sexual abuse, violence in the home, drug and alcohol abuse, poor parental support, teacher absenteeism, lessons not being

challenging, worthwhile or boring, children's excessive involvement in household chores, and security issues, especially for female students. It found that illness and the inability to pay school fees were the major contributing factors to students' poor retention.

The study also found that an emerging major contributing factor to school withdrawal was family problems. Family problems affect the payment of school fees, parental support for students, and the treatment of students (on occasions, poor treatment) wherever they take refuge with relatives during family separation, or to escape violence in the homes. For some students, this led to other factors like turning to alcohol and drugs for comfort, to bullying others, and generally bad behaviour which resulted in expulsion from school. Some female students find comfort elsewhere. Some become pregnant and consequently leave school.

The outcome of the research conducted by the National Research Institute into participation and retention of students in primary and secondary schools suggested that an action research strategy should be introduced to a range of schools to assist staff, boards of management, parents, students, and community members to improve participation and retention rates in schools.

The follow-up retention study was action oriented research which was aimed at working with schools, parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders to identify problems and causes for drop-out, resulting in low retention of students in localised contexts. Through a participatory process, the study identified and implemented action-oriented strategies and strengthened schools' strategies that were already in place to improve retention rates, school attendance, participation, and achievement.

Aims of the Study

The aims of the study were to:

- identify current factors that contribute to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school;
- identify current strategies that are already in place in the school communities and which encourage students to stay in school; and
- assist schools and communities to identify other suitable strategies to address issues pertaining to students' absenteeism and withdrawal through action research.

Methodology and Approach

Four provinces were selected — one per region — on the basis of low retention rates. This information was based on data from the national Department of Education. Letters of request for permission to conduct research were sent to the Provincial Education Advisers of the selected provinces. Four schools — one secondary and three primary schools — from each province were identified by the provincial education office to participate in the study. The primary schools were representative of urban, semi rural, and rural schools. The schools were selected because of their retention and absenteeism problems. A total of 16 schools — 12 primary schools and four secondary schools — participated in the study. The data show that 1 440 students, 96 withdrawn students, 164 teachers, and 160 parents participated in the study.

The survey was administered to teachers, provincial education officers, current students, and withdrawn students in the selected schools. Focus group discussions were also conducted

with parents, provincial education officers, teachers, and students. Action research was also used to assist teachers and mature students to identify issues that affected their particular schools and to develop strategies to deal with them. The data from the survey and focus group discussions captured the issues in particular localities. Some of these issues can be generalised, such as the inability to pay for school fees, health, family and home environment, social activities, and transport problems

The provinces and school sites have not been identified in the report in order to protect the participants' identity.

SECTION 1: CURRENT FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO STUDENT ABSENTEEISM AND WITHDRAWAL FROM SCHOOL

Introduction

The study found that the common contributing factors to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal were the inability to pay for school fees, illness, family problems, teacher absenteeism, teachers' abuse of students, child abuse, formal schooling not valued, lessons not interesting, inadequate teaching and learning materials, run-down school infrastructure, hunger, lack of security, peer pressure, long distances travelled to school, involvement in household chores, transport problems, weather, students' bullying, pregnancy, early marriage, outside activities, cultural commitment, seasonal activities, drug and alcohol abuse, and learning difficulties.

The magnitude of these issues varied in each school site. Illness and the inability to pay for school fees were found to be the major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. Family problems, hunger, and insufficient learning and teaching resources were also major contributing factors.

Teachers and Welfare

Both female and male teachers have contributed to education in PNG, before and since independence. The achievement of gender equity is one of PNG's goals. The NDOE is promoting gender equity through school enrolment, but gender equity is not well-promoted during headteachers' appointments. Table 1 presents more information on the current teacher population in PNG.

Table 1: Number of Teachers in PNG, 2009

Gender	All Teachers		Headteachers	
	No.	%	No.	%
Females	17 017	38.42	2 139	25.56
Males	27 278	61.58	6 228	74.44
Total	44 295		8 367	

Source: NDOE 2009.

These data show a serious deficiency in gender equity in the teaching population. One contributing factor could be that female facilities, such as dormitories in the teacher training institutions in PNG are not equal to those of the male students. There may be fewer female dormitories which limits the intake of female students in the first place. Another possibility could be that females prefer other professions because they offer more appealing incentives.

The number of headteachers in Papua New Guinea is 8 367. Only 25 percent of headteachers in PNG are females. This is approximately 12.5 percent of the total female teacher population. About 23 percent of the male teacher population are headteachers. The data suggest that another 10.5 percent female headteachers could be chosen from the current female teacher population so that gender equity can be achieved at the headteacher level. The dominant role of male headteachers may have an impact on female students' enrolment and retention, especially in primary schools. Decisions that may affect female students' welfare in the schools may be overlooked. The qualitative data show that senior female students are

absent from school some days because the primary schools lack appropriate female ablution facilities to cater for their needs.

The female teachers responded well to the surveys. Tables 2 and 3 present information on the teachers in the school sites.

Table 2: Teachers' Survey Participants

Response	Percentage
Male	33
Female	67

Table 3: Teacher Participants' Age

Age Group	Percentage
17–20	1
21–25	24
26–35	34
36–46	29
Over 46	12

Some 50 percent of the teachers in the school sites were between 21 and 35 years of age. Many of the primary school teachers have a Diploma in Primary Teaching. Most young secondary school teachers have a Bachelor Degree in Education.

Teachers' welfare is an issue in PNG (Guy 1999). One of the contributing factors to teachers' absenteeism is the lack of affordable accommodation, which is a vital incentive that can be used to greater advantage by schools. The availability of teachers' accommodation in the school premises can ease some of the teachers' family burdens. When teachers' welfare is well-catered for, their productivity level can increase, which may further enhance positive contributions to the overall development of schools. Teachers' accommodation was an issue in all the school sites, and the unavailability of accommodation generally contributed to teacher absenteeism. Teacher absenteeism is one of the contributing factors to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. The teachers were asked if they had accommodation (see Table 4).

Table 4: Teachers' Accommodation

Response	Percentage
Yes	9
No	91

The data show that only nine percent of the teachers in the school sites had accommodation. Other NRI studies have also found that the lack of teachers' accommodation is an issue for many teachers in PNG.

Teacher appointment is seen as a catalyst for good and effective learning. There are schools in the provinces that exist in silos, with little or no community involvement. There are others in which the school administrations are ineffective or where school funds have been abused. Committed and quality teachers can devise innovative ways to encourage students to attend classes regularly and stay in school. Well-managed schools can entice productive teachers to want to work in their schools. However, not all schools are well-managed or situated in desirable locations. Therefore, teachers actually taking up their

appointments in such schools face a real challenge. Most of the school sites reported staffing shortages. Tables 5 and 6 show the number of teachers who were actually in the schools.

Table 5: Primary School Teachers

Males	Females	Total
47	56	103

Table 6: Secondary School Teachers

Males	Females	Total
41	20	61

The appointment of teachers in each school site varied. Some primary school sites had achieved gender equity in terms of teacher appointment. Some had more females than males, while others had more males than females. Ninety-two percent of the primary schools had male headteachers. Teaching staff in the secondary school sites were dominated by males and all the principals were male.

The quality of teachers appointed to schools can have a bearing on how a school is administered. Better qualified teachers are generally innovative and can contribute to the effectiveness of teaching, students' learning, and welfare. Students' interest in school subjects and activities can contribute to the improvement of school attendance and retention. Table 7 presents information on teachers' qualifications.

Table 7: Teachers' Qualifications

Qualification	Percentage
Primary Teaching Certificate	30
Diploma in Primary Teaching	46
Diploma in Secondary Teaching	5
Bachelor of Education	8
Other	7
No Response	4

The teachers who hold Diplomas in Secondary Teacher Education and Bachelor of Education Degrees are secondary school teachers from the four secondary school sites.

School Resources

This study found that overcrowding and a shortage of learning resources are contributing factors to students' absenteeism, especially senior students. Other NRI studies have also found that insufficient or lack of school resources, such as textbooks, school furniture, classrooms, teachers' houses, water tanks, and toilet facilities contribute to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. The teachers were asked whether they had sufficient teaching and learning/school resources (see Table 8).

Table 8: Teaching and Learning/School Resources

Response	Percentage
Sufficient	4
Insufficient	95
No response	1

These data show that most of the school sites had insufficient school resources. The qualitative data show that desks and textbooks were shared by three to four students. Moreover, some of the students were reluctant to share resources with others. Most classrooms had no or limited class readers and wall charts, and most of the schools had low stocks of library books. Where they did exist, some of these school materials were in appalling conditions.

School Infrastructure

Insufficient and lack of infrastructure development and maintenance, and neglect of school infrastructure also contribute to students' school absenteeism and school withdrawal. Case studies are presented here to highlight this issue.

Case Study 1

The school had sufficient classrooms, but there was an empty classroom in the school. The school had a school library. However, the students and teachers reported that it had not been used for the past three years. Most of the books that were in stock were old and many had been donated. The headteacher reported that new library books had not been budgeted for in 2006 and 2007. Reading was stated as a motivating factor for students' school attendance, so the lack of available appropriate facilities did not adequately support their interest. This school provided limited opportunities for reading experiences in the classrooms as well. The students reported that they did not have class readers, so when lessons were boring, they generally stayed away from school.

There were sufficient toilets in the school. However, the female toilet facilities did not adequately cater for the senior females' needs so they were absent from school some days. Also, there were insufficient staff houses on the school premises. Some of the teachers lived in their communities and commuted to school each day. Teacher lateness and absenteeism was an issue in this school. Lateness was the result of transport difficulties and bad weather. These were also the major contributing factors to teacher absenteeism.

Case Study 2

There were enough classrooms in this school. However, insufficient teachers' houses contributed to teachers being forced to find accommodation elsewhere and commute to school each day. This has contributed to teachers' school lateness and absenteeism. The school has no school library. It was reported that the school has never had a school library since it was converted into a primary school. The students were encouraged to use other educational institutions' library facilities. These other institutions are tertiary institutions and a secondary school and most of their books cater for their own students' population.

The school did not have a staffroom and had not had one for a number of years. Consequently, teachers generally spent their recess time and lunch hours in their classrooms, which limited professional sharing among teachers. Meetings held during the study were conducted at the assembly stand. Furthermore, no specific counselling areas for students' were noted. As a consequence, the counselling of students is generally conducted anywhere. During the study, it was noted that students were counselled outside the classroom in front of other students. On one occasion, students were shouted at during a counselling session which took place outside one of the classrooms.

Case Study 3

This school had enough classrooms for its student population. However, there were insufficient teachers' houses on the school premises. To address this issue, the school promoted the appointment of husband and wife teams. Most of the teachers' houses did not have water tanks. Two teachers lived away from the school and commuted to school each day. The school had only one water tank, which did not adequately cater for the school population.

In 2007, the school used its school subsidy funding to complete a double classroom which had a middle room for the school library. Steady progress on this project was noted during the study, and it was almost completed by the end of the study. In the meantime, it was noted that library books and textbooks were stored in a storeroom (not stored well, just dumped) and not used by students. The books were old donated ones. The school had not budgeted for new library books in the past. However, the purchase of new books is in the school's future plans.

The school also purchased a lawnmower, a photocopying machine, and one water tank in 2007. It was reported that more water tanks would be installed in the near future to cater for students' and teachers' needs. Water shortage is an issue in the school during the dry seasons.

The pit toilets were in an appalling condition. It was found that the school had inadequate land to build proper ablution blocks for females and males. The senior female students were generally absent from school some days because of the lack of appropriate toilet facilities to cater for their needs.

Case Study 4

There were enough classrooms for the school population. However, most of the classrooms were rundown and in need of urgent maintenance. Some of the classrooms had broken louvres, floors, and walls and leaking roofs. The building that housed the staffroom and the school library were in a similar state, but the roof was in sound condition. The teachers' houses were also in urgent need of maintenance. During the final visit, it was reported that there had been no water for three months, and that there had been no electricity for the past seven weeks.

The teachers were typing and photocopying test papers at the primary school. The staff and students were using pit toilets. The staff and families bathed, did their laundry, and fetched water to drink from the river. This situation was hard on the students, especially the female students. Many of them commuted long distances each day so on some occasions they were absent from school. Although the school had a school library, it was understocked and many of the books were outdated. It was reported that the purchase of new library books was not budgeted for each year.

Case Study 5

A double classroom was burnt down in 2005, and another was built in 2007 to replace it. In 2008, construction began on another double classroom to provide enough classrooms, in the school. The school administration block was burnt down at the beginning of the 2007

school year, but this had not been rebuilt by the end of the study. Although there were sufficient toilets for the students, the female toilets lacked appropriate facilities for the senior female students' needs. There was a shortage of teachers' houses. The existing staff houses were in need of urgent maintenance.

A library building was built five years ago under the BEICMP project, and had been converted into a classroom. The few library books that were in it were now being stored in central locations for use by the lower and upper primary school levels. The headteacher reported that K8 000 had been raised from a school fete for library books, but it had not been used. Money that had been raised from school market fees was also earmarked for library books. However, this had not been spent as well. The money was left in the school project account. There didn't seem to be any urgent commitment to the purchase of library books.

Case Study 6

The school opened ten years ago, and since then there has been no maintenance or additional infrastructure development. It was noted during the first visit that the classrooms were rundown, and lacked toilets and water tanks. A teacher who was interviewed during the second visit reported that the state of the school had not improved since the first visit. The classrooms were so small that it was difficult to organise the students into groups for group activities. Furthermore, the school lacked a library, readers, and other textbooks. There was only one set of syllabuses and teachers' guides, and very limited teaching resources.

Case Study 7

This school has been supported by various donor projects, companies, organisations, and individuals. It was supported by the BEICMP project in 2001–2002. Under this project, a double classroom was built and furniture (chairs and tables) were bought for these classrooms. The building was for a school library and a classroom. It was noted that only a few books were in the library. The school had not done any other major development to the school library since it was built.

The Save the Children Fund donated secondhand library books, sports equipment, and twenty desks for the Grade 3 classrooms. A law firm also donated library books. All these donations were not in the school library during the study. Three other classrooms were built by a logging company. The water pump in the school was donated and installed by JICA. Another three water tanks were donated by a former Member of Parliament.

The school had enough staff houses, and had sufficient toilet facilities for both male and female students. However, there were no toilet facilities for senior females, so they were absent from school on some days.

During the first visit, the steps of the three classroom buildings built by the logging company were falling apart and the classrooms were not painted. This was discussed with the teachers. On the second visit, all the broken steps had been fixed and a first coating of paint had been applied to the three classrooms by the logging company.

Case Study 8

The buildings in the school, including teachers' houses, classrooms, dormitories, and the messing facilities were in urgent need of major maintenance. There were gaping holes in the classroom floors, broken louvres, and leaking roofs. Safety for students and teachers in these classrooms was a major concern. There was possible danger of students and teachers falling through one of these floors during lessons.

Some of the teachers reported that they were appalled by the deteriorating condition of the school infrastructure when they initially arrived in the school. Most of the buildings were still in the same state during the second visit. However, some maintenance work was done to a few of the school buildings during the second visit. The school did not have a school library. The former library building was condemned by the health authorities. The principal of the school stated that it still had no financial commitment to rebuild a school library.

Case Study 9

A three-in-one classroom was under construction during the study. The construction of the project was a decision made by the school administration, school Board of Management, and the parents.

The school was well-maintained although it has problems with drainage during the wet season. The classrooms were all in a straight line with the administration block, which was a two-storey building in the middle.

Case Study 10

This school had sound school infrastructure.

Case Study 11

There is insufficient staff housing in the school. Some of the teachers live in the communities and travel to school each morning. A teacher had requested a transfer to another school, if staff housing was not made available in this school.

Case Study 12

The school had enough staff houses. All the teachers live in houses provided.

Case Study 13

There is insufficient staff housing in the school. There were only five staff houses on the school premises. Some teachers lived in town or in the communities and commuted to school each day.

School Fees

Family and economic issues are major contributing factors to the inability of parents to pay school fees. This study found that the inability to pay school fees continues to be a problem at all school sites. It is a major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and

withdrawal from school. In many cases, students were terminated from school until school fees were fully paid. If money was scarce, some parents still preferred their male children to attend school. To gain more information on those parents who have to deal with school fee issues, the students were asked whether their parents had difficulties with paying their school fees (see Tables 9 and 10).

Table 9: School Fees for Primary School Students

Response	Percentage
Yes	43
No	25
Sometimes	31
No Response	1

Table 10: School Fees for Secondary School Students

Response	Percentage
Yes	52
No	14
Sometimes	34
No Response	0

Only twenty-five percent of primary school parents and fourteen percent of secondary school parents could afford to pay their children's school fees. Forty-three percent of the primary school students and fifty-two percent of secondary school students stated that their parents had difficulties with paying their school fees. The qualitative data also show that parents' inability to pay school fees was the major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in most school sites. To establish the factors that contribute to parents' inability to raise sufficient funds to pay their children's school fees, the students were asked why their parents had difficulties (see Table 11 and 12).

Table 11: Primary School Students' Difficulties in Raising Fees

Reason	Percentage
Families unable to make money	11
Large family	9
Alcoholic parent	3
Single parent	11
Other siblings in school	16
Only form of income is subsistence farming	17
Low income	24
Family problems	9

Low income, subsistence farming as the only form of income, and other siblings in school were the major contributing factors to parents' difficulties in paying primary school children's school fees. Being single parents, the inability to make money, large families, and family problems were also contributing factors. There was no respondent for 'not applicable', in the primary school students' responses.

The major contributing factors concerning the inability to raise sufficient funds for secondary students' fees were subsistence farming as the only form of income, parents' unemployment, only one income in the family, other siblings in school, and parents being low-income earners. Only twenty-five percent of parents were able to afford the secondary

school fees. In this case, unemployment also means parents who depend on informal income activities. Family problems in this study refer generally to the parent(s) not being able to support the children's general welfare, school fees, and other school needs because they had moved on to a new life or had died.

Table 12: Secondary School Students' Difficulties in Raising Fees

Reason	Percentage
Low income earners	7
Don't save for school fees	2
Alcoholic parent	2
Single parent	1
Disabled parents	1
Poor family/unable to make money	7
Unemployed parents	14
Only one parent working	11
Other expenses to pay	1
Other siblings in school	13
Only form of income is subsistence farming	15
Family problems	1
Not applicable	25

The major contributing factors concerning the inability to raise sufficient funds for secondary students' fees were subsistence farming as the only form of income, parents' unemployment, only one income in the family, other siblings in school, and parents being low-income earners. Only twenty-five percent of parents were able to afford the secondary school fees. In this case, unemployment also means parents who depend on informal income activities. Family problems in this study refer generally to the parent(s) not being able to support the children's general welfare, school fees, and other school needs because they had moved on to a new life or had died.

The qualitative data show that the parents also stated that the contributing factor to their inability to pay their children's school fees was their inability to raise sufficient funds. Many had subsistence farming as their only source of income, which generally did not generate much income. Many had other children in other educational institutions, for whom they had to cater, while in other cases only one of the parents had a source of formal income which made it difficult to support large families. Many others were low-income earners.

Given all the expenses for other needs, the parents had very little left from their earnings for their children's school fees. However, some parents were able to meet all their children's school fee needs. These parents were generally those who had better paid employment. Some employers paid for their employees' children's school fees, while other families were supported by logging and other companies.

Absenteeism

This retention study showed that students' absenteeism is a major concern. It found that it is still a major concern in Papua New Guinean schools. To establish the contributing factors to students' absenteeism, the students were asked why they were absent from school some days (see Table 13).

The major contributing factors concerning primary school students' absenteeism were illness and hunger. In this case, hunger relates to the students who do not have breakfast and lunch. Other data in the study show that, at the school sites where students had healthy food for breakfast and lunch, illness was not a major contributing factor to absenteeism. They also show that some families lack food because of insufficient gardening land. Low wage-earner families near and in the urban areas are generally affected by lack of food because of insufficient land for gardening. Fifteen percent of the primary school students' generally attend school every day.

Table 13: Primary School Students' Reasons for Absenteeism

Reason	Percentage
No books	2
Do not value school	3
Household chores	2
School fee problems	1
No clean clothes	2
Poor parental support	2
Death in family	1
Illness	34
Hunger/no food	20
Transport problems	1
Long distance travel	1
Tribal fight	1
Drug abuse	1
Hit by other students	1
Family problems	3
Angry with parents	1
Rainy season	3
Difficulty with learning	1
Not applicable	15
No response	5

Similar issues affected secondary students' school attendance (see Table 14).

Table 14: Secondary School Students' Reasons for Absenteeism

Reason	Percentage
Insufficient school materials	66
Water problem	1
Teacher absenteeism	5
School fee problems	6
School not interesting	4
Illness	2
Hunger	6
Transport problems	4
Family problems	4
Difficulty with learning	1
Not applicable	1

The major contributing factor concerning secondary students' absenteeism was insufficient school materials, which related mainly to textbooks and other learning materials.

As other data show, desks and textbooks are shared between three or four students at many of the school sites. Other NRI studies have also found that the shortage of textbooks and other learning resource is a major issue in many schools and does cause frustration, especially among senior students. The unwillingness to share desks and books is also one of the contributing factors to students' frustration. This was particularly evident in Grades 7 to 10 classes.

Students' Punctuality

Students' lateness for school is a common concern in all Papua New Guinean schools. All of the school sites in the study reported lateness as a common concern. To gain more insight into this issue, the students were asked to rate their lateness for school (see Tables 15 and 16).

Table 15: Primary School Students' Punctuality

Frequency	Percentage
Hardly ever	27
Sometimes	53
Often	10
Every day	4
Never	6

Table 16: Secondary School Students' Punctuality

Frequency	Percentage
Hardly ever	25
Sometimes	50
Often	8
Every day	8
Never	9

Sixty-three percent of primary school students and fifty-eight percent of secondary school students were sometimes or often late for school. Only six percent of primary school students and nine percent of secondary school students were punctual for school. The qualitative data show that punctuality was an issue at most of the school sites. Difficulties with transport, involvement in household and seasonal chores, violence and other abuse in the home, poor weather, and involvement in outside activities were contributing factors to students being late for school.

Students' School Withdrawal

Papua New Guinea is improving its provision of education access to a wider range of the student population. However, students' school retention is an issue. Students withdraw from school before the completion of the various levels of education. They withdraw from school for various reasons. To gain more insight into this issue, the students were asked to state the reasons for other students' withdrawal from school (see Tables 17 and 18).

Table 17: Primary School Students' Reasons for Withdrawal

Reason	Percentage
Inability to pay school fees	48
Teachers' abuse	1
Learning difficulty	3
Outside influences	8
Not interested in school	11
Behavioural problems	3
Other reasons	23

Table 18: Secondary School Students' Reasons for Withdrawal

Reason	Percentage
Inability to pay school fees	34
Teachers' abuse	1
Learning difficulty	5
Outside influences	14
Not Interested in school	25
Behavioural problems	4
Other reasons	14
No response	3

These data further strengthen the assessment that the inability to pay school fees is the highest contributing factor to students' withdrawal. Another notable contributing factor to students' school withdrawal was the lack of interest in formal schooling. This was particularly stronger for secondary school students. Other data in this study also show that students withdraw from school because the parents and their children do not value formal schooling. This has implications for teaching practices in schools and the subjects offered in formal schooling. Another notable contributing factor to school withdrawal is outside influences. Outside influence is particularly strong for secondary school students.

The teachers were also asked to give reasons for male and female students' withdrawal from school (see Tables 19 and 20).

Table 19: Teachers' Reasons for Male Students' Withdrawal from School

Reason	Percentage
Peer pressure	21
Outside influence	8
Poor parental support	9
Illness	3
Transport problems	2
Cannot afford school fees	18
Hunger	5
Family problems	10
Difficulties with school work	4
Do not value school	6
Drug and alcohol abuse	7
No response	7

The teachers were of the view that the major contributing factors to male students' withdrawal from school were peer pressure, the inability to pay school fees, and family

problems. Poor parental support, outside influences, drug and alcohol abuse, and formal schooling not being valued were also notable contributing factors.

The teachers were also of the view that the major contributing factors concerning female students' withdrawal from school were the inability to pay for school fees, poor parental support, outside influence, adolescence issues, involvement in household activities, and peer pressure. Other notable contributing factors are drug and alcohol abuse, hunger, family problems, sexual abuse, and pregnancy.

Table 20: Teachers' Reasons for Female Students' Withdrawal from School

Reason	Percentage
Peer pressure	7
Outside influence	8
Illness	1
Poor parental support	9
Pregnancy/get married/ male interests	4
Sexual abuse (by parents/relatives/family friends)	4
Family problems	5
Adolescence issues	8
Cannot afford school fees	13
Hunger	4
Involvement in household chores	8
Bullying	1
Violence in the home	3
Drug and alcohol abuse	4
No response	21

The qualitative data also show that the major contributing factor to students' school withdrawal is the inability to pay school fees. They also show that continuous excessive involvement in household and seasonal chores, sexual abuse, pregnancy, violence in the home, poor parental support, peer pressure to stay away from school, involvement in outside activities, and teacher absenteeism are also contributing factors to students' withdrawal from school.

Students who had withdrawn were also asked why they had left school (Table 21).

Table 21: Withdrawn Students' Reasons for Withdrawal from School

Reason	Percentage
Election problems	5
Inability to pay for school fees	48
Continuous illness	7
Outside influence	4
Expulsion from school	6
No space in school	4
Hunger	6
Fights and problems	5
School problems	6
No response	9

Forty-eight percent of the students who had withdrawn from school stated that they withdrew from school because their parents could not afford their school fees. Other reasons were continuous illness, expulsion from school, hunger, and school problems. The qualitative data show that school problems are generally linked to rundown school infrastructure, severe shortage of learning and teaching materials, poor community support, and weak BOM and school leadership.

The teachers were asked which students were most likely to withdraw from school when they reached a certain grade or age (see Table 22).

Table 22: Students Most Likely to Leave School

Response	Percentage
Males	17
Females	40
Both	18
None	6
No response	19

Forty percent of the respondents stated that females were most likely to leave when they reached a certain grade or age. The qualitative data show that female students tend to leave at a certain age to get married. Other data in the study show that secondary school students are more vulnerable to outside influences, which can result in school withdrawal.

Students' Reasons for Attending School

The parents and students generally want to gain from formal schooling. Parents encourage their children to attend school, if they value what the students' will gain from it. The students were also asked why they attend school (see Tables 23 and 24).

Table 23: Primary Students' Reasons for Attending School

Reason	Percentage
Learn to read and write	22
Gain more knowledge	42
Get formal employment	0
Improve standard of living/better future	15
Other	21

Table 24: Secondary Students' Reasons for Attending School

Reason	Percentage
Learn to read and write	12
Gain more knowledge	46
Get formal employment	13
Improve standard of living/better future	23
Other	6

The data show that forty-two percent of primary school students, and forty-six percent of secondary school students stated that they wanted to gain more knowledge from formal schooling. Twenty-two percent of the primary school students stated that they wanted to learn how to read and write. Only thirteen percent of secondary school students expect to get formal employment. However, the qualitative data show that the dream of improving the

standard of living is linked to the hope of getting formal employment. The quantitative data also show that the resources which support improved mastery of literacy skills are lacking at all the school sites.

Readers at varying levels in community, primary, and secondary schools did not adequately cater for the school student populations. One secondary school site did not have a school library, while those that had a library had limited book stocks and lacked recently published books. A number of the primary school sites did not have school libraries, while those that did were understocked and did not have the environment to encourage students to read for information or pleasure during their lessons or leisure time. Other NRI studies have identified similar deficiencies in schools in other provinces.

The students were asked for their views on who has the major responsibility for keeping students in school (see Tables 25, 26 and 27).

Table 25: Primary School Students' Major Responsibility

Responsibility	Percentage
Government	19
Parents	24
BOM	38
Community	2
Other	11
No response	8

Table 26: Secondary School Students' Major Responsibility

Responsibility	Percentage
Government	21
Parents	18
BOM	54
Community	1
Other	5
No response	1

Table 27: Withdrawn Students' Major Responsibility

Responsibility	Percentage
Government	29
Parents	10
BOM	17
Community	2
Teachers	15
Students	19
Other	2
No response	6

The primary and secondary school students felt that the BOMs have the major responsibility of keeping students at school, followed by the government, and parents. On the other hand, the withdrawn students felt that the Government has the major responsibility of keeping students at school, followed by the students, the BOMs, and the teachers.

Future of Students Who Withdrew from School

Many wonder what fate awaits students in their communities when they withdraw from school. To establish what they actually do after they withdraw from school, the students who had dropped out of school were asked what they were currently doing (see Table 28).

Table 28: Withdrawn Students' Activities at Home

Activity	Percentage
Subsistence farmer	21
Work with parents	46
Formal employment	4
Do part-time jobs	4
Spin around/do nothing	19
Other	6

Forty-six percent of the withdrawn students work with their parents. The qualitative data show that the response 'work with parents' was generally referred to working in the garden, cash crop production and other work to assist their families in the community. The 19 percent who were not constructively occupied are those who generally get involved in undesirable activities. These data suggest that many students who withdraw from school do contribute positively to their families' lives in their communities.

SECTION 2: ESTABLISHED STRATEGIES IN SCHOOLS

The study found that absenteeism and students' withdrawal are issues at all the school sites. Individual schools address common issues by utilising varying strategies. Success in addressing absenteeism and students' withdrawal in individual school sites varies depending on the influence of internal and external factors. The provincial administrations have existing policies that guide school administration.

Administration

School administrations are guided by the national Department of Education and provincial policies on school enrolment, school attendance, school discipline, and support for students. The Provincial Education Officers (PEOs) were asked whether there were any provincial policies on school enrolment, students' absenteeism, discipline in schools, and school lunches (see Table 29).

Table 29: Provincial Policy on School Enrolment

Policy	Percentage
No written policy, but apply national policy	43
All school-age children to be enrolled at school	29
Other	14
No response	14

Only twenty-nine percent of the respondents stated that there was a policy, whereby all school-aged children should enrol in school. Other NRI studies have found that many PEOs are not aware, or have not been made aware, of national or provincial policies concerning school enrolments.

Hunger is one of the contributing factors to students' withdrawal from school. To find out more about how provinces deal with this issue, the PEOs were asked whether there was a provincial policy on school lunches (see Table 30).

Table 30: Provincial Policy on Lunches

Policy	Percentage
No policy, but adhere to national policy	86
Students bring lunch to school	14

Fourteen percent of respondents stated that there was a policy which encouraged students to bring their lunch to school. However, this policy isn't effective for students who do not have food or money in the first place. These students may continue to be absent and may eventually withdraw from school because of lack of food.

The PEOs were also asked whether there was a provincial policy on students' absenteeism (see Table 31).

Table 31: Provincial Policy on Students' Absenteeism

Policy	Percentage
No policy, but adhere to national policy — 30 day rule	72
Policy not stated	14
No response	14

Seventy-two percent of the respondents stated that there was no provincial policy on absenteeism. However, they were guided by the national policy which states that, after thirty days of continuous absenteeism, the students can be dismissed from school. This policy does not necessarily support students who are absent because of various forms of child abuse, the inability to pay school fees, and involvement in cultural, household, and seasonal activities, which may be important factors in their lives.

The PEOs were also asked whether there were any provincial policies on discipline in schools, because weak school discipline can contribute to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school (see Table 32).

Table 32: Provincial Policy on Discipline in Schools

Policy	Percentage
No standard policy, but adhere to national policy	43
Major PEB policies under the <i>Provincial Education Act 2005</i>	40
Other	17

Eighty-three percent of the respondents stated that there was no specific provincial policy. However, schools were guided by the PEB policy under the *Provincial Education Act 2005*. This study found that students' and teachers' absenteeism and punctuality in school activities was an issue at most of the site schools.

Teachers need continuous professional support in order to continue to be effective in their duties. Past studies have found that boring lessons are a contributing factor to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. This study found that this is still an issue (see Table 33).

Table 33: Provincial Policy on the Supervision of Teachers

Response	Percentage
No Policy, but adhere to NDOE policy	39
Supervision conducted by authorised supervisors	43
Teachers encouraged to comply with duty statements	18

The data show that there is no provincial policy on the supervision of teachers. Forty-three percent of the respondents stated that supervision of teachers is conducted by designated officers in the schools. This study was unable to establish whether such a practice actually exist at the school sites, or its effectiveness. However, lessons observed during this study were generally teacher centred. Other NRI studies found that inspectors' visits to many schools have been an issue for some time. Inspectors are now known as standards officers, and their primary role is to support teachers' professional development.

School Counselling Services

Counselling is one strategy that is used in schools to support students in order to improve attendance and retention. The effectiveness of counselling services at the school sites varied. Some had some form of counselling, while in others, it was very minimal or non-existent. To find out more on the quality of counselling services at the school sites, the teachers were asked how they dealt with students who showed signs of withdrawing from school (see Table 34).

Table 34: Counselling Services in Schools

Action Taken	Percentage
Alert the headteacher	60
Discuss the issue with parents	9
Take no action	28
No response	3

The data show that most of the teachers would rather alert the headteacher or discuss the matter with parents when students showed signs of withdrawing from school. No-one suggested discussing the issue with the students. The headteachers may not have sufficient time to establish why students wish to withdraw from school. Twenty-eight percent of the teachers did not take any action at all.

Other data in this study and the 2002 retention study (Guy *et al.* 2002) show that students face various forms of abuse in their homes and schools because of a variety of factors. These are traumatic experiences and are contributing factors to the students' decisions to be absent from or withdraw from school. These data suggest that counselling services at the school sites was weak. Such services need to be strengthened in order to adequately support students in terms of counselling and other forms of welfare services, and to encourage students to stay in school and complete their various levels of education.

Community Support

Good community support is vital to the success of school initiatives aimed at supporting and improving students' welfare in order to improve school retention. This study found that the school sites that had good community support made good progress in their campaign to improve school attendance and school retention. The students were asked why parents come to school (see Table 35).

Table 35: Parents' Involvement with Schools

Reason	Percentage
Collect term assessment	24
Assist with school projects	16
Attend parents meetings	50
Children in trouble	5
No response	5

Fifty percent of the students stated that their parents come to school to attend meetings. However, the teachers' data do not support this claim. The teachers were asked whether the school had good community support (see Table 36).

Table 36: Community Support for Schools

Response	Percentage
Yes	29
No	71
No response	20

Seventy-one percent of the teachers stated that their schools had poor community support. The teachers who answered 'no' were asked to provide examples of weak community support (see Table 37).

Table 37: Examples of Poor Community Support

Example	Percentage
Parents do not attend meetings/work around school	44
Parents do not cooperate with school	11
Lack of parental support for students' learning	2
Poor school security/arson on school properties/rundown buildings	7
Students' and parents' have poor attitude towards schooling	11
No response	18
Not applicable	7

The teachers who responded 'yes' to good community support were also asked to provide examples (see Table 38).

Table 38: Examples of Good Community Support

Example	Percentage
Community care for, and respect of, school	4
Parents' meetings well-attended	1
Community assists school in kind	5
Community assists school with fundraising	3
Community support teachers are well	1
School has effective BOM	1
Others	1
No response	13
Not applicable	71

The seventy-one percent of teachers who answered 'not applicable' were those who responded 'no' when asked if their school had good community support. These data suggest that most of the schools were not well-supported by their communities. The qualitative data show that, at the school sites which had strong community involvement, the strategies which had been established to improve school attendance and retention were successful, whereas those with weak community support had difficulties with their implementation.

Examples of Existing School Strategies

Case Study 1

Sports

The school has an established strategy to improve students' absenteeism and school withdrawal. Organised sports were introduced in 2007. The students were grouped in house colours. Each team was given responsibilities each day and were expected to perform them to the best of their abilities. If one team member was absent from sporting activities or work parade, allocated tasks were not done well or incomplete, or an accident occurred during the use of tools, then points were deducted from a team's overall score.

The points were displayed on the board outside the office to enable students to monitor their progress. Every member of the team had to work hard to keep their points consistent or improve further (see Table 39).

Table 39: PA3 Primary School Point Award System

Areas	White Kanai		Red Parrots		Black Eagles		Blue Seagulls	
	Weekly Points	Overall Sports						
Assembly	10	-	20	-	20	-	20	-
Colour	23	1388	8	991	22	1003	18	923
Discipline	20	-	20	-	20	-	20	-
Game Pts	30	Overall work	49	Overall work	8	Overall work	15	Overall work
Tools								
Clean Area	982		1 001		1 129		1 035	
Total Points	2 370		1 992		2 132		1 958	

The school reported a marked improvement in students' attendance and discipline in 2007. The students were interested in sports and the competition motivated them to work well. A marked improvement in the students' school punctuality was also noted. The changes in the students' behaviour were attributed to the school's sports program which was aimed specifically to improve students' attendance and retention. Some of the top athletes from this school were selected to represent their province in sporting activities in other provinces. Such recognition encouraged and motivated the students to attend school so they could participate in sporting activities.

A change in the students' general attitude towards schooling was also noted by the teachers and parents. The researcher witnessed a well-behaved group of students which was in great contrast to the students' undisciplined behaviour at the other three school sites in this province. Parents noted the emergence of positive behaviour in the students, which was better when compared with 2006 and previous years. Teachers and parents also noted more responsible behaviour from the general student population. The students took pride in their appearance and work, and made every effort to be punctual for school.

Regular School Meeting

The staff had regular formal and informal meetings. They worked as a team to implement the strategies that had been identified to improve students' attendance and retention. The school increased the number of meetings with the parents because the teachers viewed this as a valuable exercise to secure community support for the school. During such meetings, the parents were encouraged to budget their income during the year and to save up for their children's school fees. They were also reminded during these meetings to encourage their children to attend school regularly.

School Market

In the school market, the women sold mainly fruit, kulau, cooked bananas, breadfruit, yams, kaukau, taro, sago, tapioca, fish, and greens cheaply to the students. It was reported that the school BOM insisted that nutritious food must be sold at this market so that students would eat healthy meals in school. Illness was not the major contributing factor to absenteeism and withdrawal in this school. This infers that eating healthy food minimises students' illness, and consequently, students are able to come to school regularly.

Case Study 2

Illness, the inability to pay for school fees, family problems, lack of community and parental support, household and seasonal chores, peer pressure, outside influences, pregnancy, sexual abuse — especially on girls, males given priority of education over females, violence in the home, and involvement in household chores were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school.

To address gender equity and retention, this primary school became one of UNICEF's Child Friendly School (CFS) sites, which commenced in 2004. By 2007, when the retention action study commenced, the school had become a model school for other schools in the provinces. Under the CFS project, the Accelerating Girls' Education (AGE) project was the focus of the package. The school was involved in administering AGE and CFS programs. Under the AGE project, girls were not required to pay school fees. Instead, UNICEF provided textbooks and practical subject equipment towards their education.

The AGE project targeted girls who:

- had left school because of non-payment of fees;
- came from abused homes;
- were over-aged;
- were from broken homes;
- had single parents;
- lived with non-biological parents; and
- were in other difficult situations.

An agreement was signed with UNICEF that every girl in the school, including those who were identified, would be sponsored by the organisation in lieu of school fees.

Retention exercises for both males and females were monitored during the project. It was found that all females who completed Grade 8 continued on to lower secondary (Grades 9 and 10), and some progressed to upper secondary (Grades 11 and 12).

The strategies and work plans that were used in the project included training in basic life-skills, such as cooking, hygiene, arts, and sports, as well as school practical projects, such as rice growing, poultry and agriculture. The school's aim was to increase gender enrolment and retention by emphasising a one-to-one ratio of male to female.

However, the strategies that had been put in place had constraints. Shortfalls were experienced in terms of inadequate materials. At the same time, the surplus intake of students meant that the school had to spend more of its scarce school funds. It was highlighted that life-skills projects and programs were not utilised to the fullest because of the unavailability of equipment and funds for cooking and sewing.

For the retention study, the PC2 primary school site was first visited in early 2007. At the time of the visit, there was an agriculture team with members from overseas who had come to observe the agriculture projects. This was also a parents' work day at the school.

Despite the UNICEF initiative, discussions with teachers and parents showed that the inability to pay school fees was still a major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and

withdrawal from school. Male students were given first preference over females when decisions were made on school fees.

Case Study 3

The qualitative data show that illness, the inability to pay school fees, family problems, lack of community and parental support, peer pressure, outside influences, pregnancy, males given priority of education over females, violence in the home, and involvement in household and seasonal chores were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. This is again similar to other school sites. However, for this school, the major contributing factor to lateness and withdrawal from school was the inability to pay school fees.

There were strategies already in place to address absenteeism and lateness. This was in the form of punishment by cutting the grass around the school and working in the school gardens. Counselling was also a strategy that was used to assist students who wanted to withdraw from school or were regularly absent. The counsellor was the pastor/teacher who felt that he had more on his plate and needed some assistance. The researcher suggested that maybe a member from the students' community could assist with counselling. No response was received regarding this suggestion. It was later learned that the school and the BOM exist in isolation from the community. Board members are not called upon by the school administration to assist in such areas. The headteacher stated that board members were only concerned with their immediate families and not with the 'haus line' to ensure that children came to school regularly.

The school was closed in early November 2007 because it had exhausted its funds to continue running the school until the end of the school year. It was reported that the headteacher and some of the board members had misused the school funds.

These data show that, again, the contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were similar to those of other school sites. However, males being given priority of education over female students, violence in the community, and involvement in seasonal work were also contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. Punishment was a strategy used to address students' absenteeism and lateness. This infers that positive strategies were not explored to address students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. Minimal use of counselling was used to assist students who were intending to withdraw from school or those who were continuously absent from school. This was largely because the school counsellors had a heavy work load. The data infer that the teacher-counsellor was too overloaded, and therefore did not give student counselling services top priority. The data also show that the school had weak leadership, and that financial management was a serious issue. They also suggest that students' education is not valued in this school. The data also show that males dominate the teaching positions and student enrolment in this particular school.

Case Study 4

It was found that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were similar to those at the other school sites. The additional ones for this school were poor parental attitude towards education, education not valued by students, shaming students in front of other students and teachers, teachers' verbal and other abuse of students, teachers

drinking, smoking and chewing of betel nut, pregnancy, cultural commitments (feasting), and teachers' inability to adequately cope with bridging in lower primary school. The major contributing factor for students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school was the inability to pay school fees. It was also reported that more than one hundred school-aged children were not in school, and that the bridging issue in lower primary was a contributing factor to this.

To address the school fee issue, the research participants recommended that:

- the school BOM reduces school fees;
- parents who were unable to pay school fees be given casual employment around the school so that they could earn money to pay their children's school fees; and
- awareness to be conducted in the school community on the value of education.

Some form of counselling already existed in this school. The parents reported that if students were intending to leave school, then the school headteacher or teachers discussed the issue with the students. They encouraged them to continue to attend school. Other parents reported that teachers had direct discussions with them regarding their children's absenteeism. Teachers and parents encouraged students to stay in school and attend school regularly.

These data show that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were similar to those found at other school sites. The main differences were poor parental attitude towards education, shaming students in front of other students and teachers, teachers' verbal and other abuse of students, teachers involved in drinking, smoking, and chewing of betel nut, cultural commitments (feasting), and teachers' inability to adequately cope with bridging in lower primary school. The data also show that the school had existing strategies to address the inability to pay school fees and students' absenteeism. These strategies had strong community involvement. Some form of counselling was already being used to encourage students to stay in school. However, it is not certain whether these strategies improved students' absenteeism and retention in this school.

Case Study 5

The qualitative data show that the contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school were similar to those found at other school sites. The additional ones in this school were boring lessons, teachers' student favouritism, education not valued by students, teachers' verbal and other abuse of students, students not supported well when they live with relatives, difficulty with subject content, the view that Grades 8, 10, and 12 selections only supported top students, cultural commitments (feasting), and weak relationships between teachers and parents. It was reported that about fifteen school-aged children from each village in this school community were not attending school anymore. The major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were the inability to pay school fees, teacher absenteeism, peer pressure, and lack of parental support for children's schooling. Cultural obligations and involvement in household chores were also reported to be significant contributing factors.

The strategies already implemented to address the school fee issue were reduced school fees, the community to contribute, in kind, to the school, such as providing timber for school buildings, and the community to conduct fundraising activities to support the school so that school fees can be reduced. Other strategies which were implemented to address absenteeism were that the BOM and school encouraged parents to feed their children before sending them

to school, parents to accompany their children to school each day, and to conduct awareness on parental support for their children's education. Strategies in place to address teacher absenteeism were internal relief arrangements, teachers take the responsibility to inform the school administration on times they intended to be absent from school, and the school administration to report teachers who were frequently absent from school to the provincial education office. An awareness program concerning students' involvement in domestic chores and its interference with school attendance was planned by the school and BOM.

It was reported that the parents were working in clan or family groups to identify children who should have been in school, but were not. The clan group physically took them to school. The community referred to this system as a 'clan-to-clan system'. The community also had an established basket exchange system with another community to assist students who had difficulties with school fees. The school BOM had also given casual employment to parents so that they could work around and in the school for a fee, which was credited to their children's school fees. It was also reported that attempts were made by the teachers to discuss students' absenteeism and intention to withdraw from school with the parents and students.

These data show that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school were similar to that identified in the other school sites. However, for this school, the major contributing factors concerning students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were the inability to pay school fees, teacher' absenteeism, peer pressure, lack of parental support in their children's schooling, cultural obligations, and involvement in household chores. The data also show that community support for this school is strong and had established local strategies to improve students' school attendance and retention. These data also infer that the school has strong school leadership.

Case Study 6

The qualitative data show that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school were also similar to those identified at other school sites. The differences were illness used as an excuse to stay away from school, shaming in front of other students and teachers, pregnancy and early marriages, and cultural commitments (feasting).

It was reported that more than ten students had left school without completing their primary education. The major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were the inability to pay school fees, poor parental support for their children's education, peer pressure to get involved with drugs, alcohol, and smoking, participation in video shows during school days, and pregnancy and early marriage.

There were no strategies established by the school's BOM to address the students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. The BOM and parental involvement in the school seemed minimal. It was reported that the parents had attempted to talk to the school's BOM about school fee issues. However, because of the poor working relationship between the school, the BOM and parents, this issue had not been addressed constructively. The parents were of the view that the school's BOM and the school administration did not care about the children's education, and therefore they did not support the school. Student counselling seemed to be non-existent. It was reported that students' problems were hardly ever discussed with the parents or students. New strategies were attempted during the study to address the school fee issue. These strategies were that:

- low income-earning parents be given casual work around the school to earn money to help pay their children's school fees; and
- parents be assisted to find cleaning contracts with the town council so that they could earn money for their children's school fees.

It is not certain if these strategies were ever implemented.

These data show that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were similar to those identified at other school sites. However, for this school, the major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were the inability to pay school fees, participation in outside activities during school days, and pregnancy and early marriage. The data also show that the community support for this school is weak and therefore strategies had not been established to address factors which contributed to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. The data also suggest that this school had weak school leadership.

Case Study 7

There were no strategies established by the school's BOM to address the students' absenteeism and withdrawal. The parental involvement in the school seemed minimal. It was reported that the parents had attempted to talk to the school's BOM about school fee issues. However, because of the poor working relationship between the school, the BOM, and the parents, this issue was not addressed constructively. The parents' view was that the school's BOM and the school administration did not care about the children's education, and therefore did not support the school. Student counselling seemed to be non-existent. It was found that students' problems were rarely discussed with the parents or students.

Suggested Strategies to Improve Retention

Poor school retention and absenteeism need to be addressed adequately, if the schools are to achieve the goal of Universal Basic Education. Some schools already have effective strategies to address these issues. However, more effective strategies need to be identified to support the campaign to improve students' school retention and attendance. The provincial education officers were asked to suggest strategies to improve students' retention in both primary and secondary schools (Tables 40 and 41).

Table 40: PEOs' Suggested Strategies for Improving Basic Education

Strategy	Percentage
Strengthen parental support and guidance for students	15
School provide lunch and sporting activities in school	28
Support strategies to be/already established in and outside of school	43
No response	14

Table 41: PEOs' Suggested Strategies for Improving Secondary Education

Strategy	Percentage
Free education	32
Provision of adequate teaching and learning materials	18
Support strategies to be/already established in and outside of school	30
Improve counselling in schools	14
No response	6

The teachers were also asked to recommend strategies to improve students' retention in schools, (see Table 42).

Table 42: Teachers' Recommended Strategies

Strategy	Percentage
Students to be self-reliant	4
No repetition of grades	6
Develop strong relationships between teachers, parents and students	20
Encourage partnership with school and community	10
Students streamed to subjects of interest (Grades 6–8)	5
Introduce forms of entertainment in schools	6
Introduce strong child abuse victim protection	3
Free education/subsidised education	21
Better trained teachers	6
Make learning meaningful/worthwhile/interesting	9
Strengthen counselling in schools	6
Encourage parents to save up for school fees	3
Introduce corporal punishment	1

The teachers were of the strong view that free education or subsidised school fees, and the development of strong relationship among teachers, students, and parents would improve students' school retention. This view is strongly supported by other data in this study. Many parents have difficulties in earning enough money for their children's school fees because of family, social, and economic factors. The communities' strong involvement in the strategies that have been established to improve student attendance and retention in some of the school sites proved to be effective.

SECTION 3: ASSIST SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES TO IDENTIFY OTHER SUITABLE STRATEGIES

Action Research

The purpose of the action research was to show teachers how survey and interview data can be used to identify issues that affect their students, and to assist them to make informed decisions on how to address them. They were assisted on how to read the data in order to identify contributing factors to students' school absenteeism and withdrawal from school in their particular school, and to develop practical strategies to address them. The strategies had to be those that would work in their particular school communities. Case studies are presented here to show how individual schools dealt with students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school.

Case Study 1

In this school, the teachers identified factors that contributed to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. The quantitative data show that school fees and hunger were the two major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. However, the teachers did not agree with the students' assessment. They were of the view that the major contributing factors were poor parental support and poor community support. After much deliberation, the teachers were convinced that, while these were also contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school, the students' views should be considered as the basis for solving the issue because they were the ones most affected. Interview and discussion data from parents, teachers, and students revealed that other factors which contributed to absenteeism and withdrawal from school were family problems, household chores — especially for female students, violence and sexual abuse in the home, drug and alcohol abuse, peer pressure, and being poor. The participants stressed that this particular community was economically disadvantaged.

The following strategies were recommended to address the breakfast and lunch issues:

- conduct awareness in the school community to encourage parents to feed students before school and provide lunches;
- school to make food gardens to produce food, and parents would be asked, as volunteers, to cook and feed the children at lunch time; and
- the school administration to write to business houses seeking food donations for the students.

The teachers clarified the reasons for parents' inability to meet school fees and other essential needs for their children, as most of the students were from the settlement area around the school. This community had inadequate land to make food gardens. The majority of the parents were unemployed, or were low income earners. Large families had the most difficulties in catering for their daily needs. Consequently, students — especially females — were absent from school to look for food or get involved in activities to earn money in order to buy food.

The following strategies were already in place to address school fee issues. The school conducted awareness to encourage parents to save for their children's school fees. However, this strategy needs to be strengthened because parents have yet to be committed to saving for future needs. The school also provides casual employment for the most needy parents so that

they can earn enough money for their children's school fees. To further ensure students' school retention, the school allows students to continue their education up to Grade 8, even if they have not paid their school fees or have only paid a portion. However, the school withholds the students' Grade 8 Certificates until all school fees have been paid.

It was reported that this strategy was not effective in this particular community because the top students lend their certificates to others when they are seeking formal employment.

Despite the implementation of these strategies, the inability to pay school fees remains a major contributing factor to students' withdrawal from school. The teachers then recommended the following new strategies to address the issue:

- the school asks business houses to provide part-time employment for the senior students during the school holidays so that they can earn money for their school fees;
- identify the very disadvantaged families and apply for sponsorship for their children's school fees;
- the SRC and the school to produce and sell vegetables in order to earn money for the school so that students' fees can be reduced; and
- ensure that the 'Making a Living' subject develop a worthwhile project whereby students can learn skills that they can apply to earn an informal income in their home environment.

This school lacked strong leadership. The teachers were not working together as a team during the implementation of these strategies. It was also noted that respect among teachers was lacking. Meetings that were organised were not well-attended, and punctuality was generally poor. In-fighting and resentment were noted among the teachers throughout the study.

The food garden project that was started by the headteacher ceased after the drains were cleared and weedkiller was sprayed on the crop, which was destroyed. The canteen that was started by the Grade 5 teacher as part of the 'Making a Living' course also failed because teachers did not honour their debts. No records of the canteen operations were shown to the researcher when requests were made for them. The vegetable garden was never started because of the community's unwillingness to support the school in preparing the fields for the crops. Despite these challenges, the school market provided nutritious food cheaply for the students. The mothers sold fruit, peanuts, sago, cooked vegetables, fried flour, doughnuts, and ice-blocks. The researcher was informed that the parents were encouraged to sell nutritious food. However, only those who could afford lunches were able to buy food from the school market.

None of the new strategies that were recommended by the teachers were implemented well, primarily because of the lack of cooperation, commitment, and support from all staff. Some of the teachers showed reluctance to participate in the improvement program. They were persuaded by the view that 'improvement projects never work in this school'. General discord among the well-established and new teachers was evident during the study. Consequently, the new teachers' enthusiasm to improve students' school attendance and retention were discouraged by the lack of support and respect from their colleagues. The strategies generally lacked community involvement during the planning and implementation stages. As a consequence, the campaign for improvement in school retention and attendance was weakened. Consequently, the projects were abandoned.

The school's BOM and administration's differences also contributed to the negative attitude towards school improvement. Mutual agreement on school priorities was lacking. For example, weedkiller was purchased to control grass around the school, which is environmentally disastrous. The weedkiller was purchased without the headteacher's consent. She was of the view that grasscutting can be catered for during the school's work parade. Therefore, the purchase of the weedkiller was an unnecessary school expense.

The students' overall discipline was weak. It was noted during the visits that students were rowdy, and fighting among themselves was a common occurrence. Generally, students lacked respect for authority.

Bilingual teaching at the lower primary level was not supported by the teachers in this school. Therefore, they were unwilling to support this teaching strategy. It was claimed that students were not able to read and write English when they enrolled in Grade 3. No evidence was presented to the researcher to support this claim. As a consequence of this negative view, the implementation of bilingual instruction was non-existent.

These data show that hunger, the inability to pay school fees, the unavailability of reading materials, poor community support, poor parental support, and the lack of appropriate toilet facilities to cater for senior girls' needs, family problems, household chores, violence in the home, drug and alcohol abuse, and the general low economic environment were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. Hunger and the inability to pay school fees were the major contributing factors.

The improvement initiatives recommended by the teachers to address students' absenteeism and poor retention were not successful in this particular school, primarily because of a lack of strong leadership. Teachers were not working as a team to secure community support to assist in this campaign. This led to the lack of cooperation from all stakeholders to collectively address students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. The absence of team work and cooperation among all stakeholders were the major hindrances to the half-hearted attempts to implement the recommended strategies, and the unwillingness to devise ways to strengthen the existing strategies.

Case Study 2

The participation of this school in the study was limited to the questionnaires and teacher and student interviews. Participation in the action research was abandoned primarily because fifty percent of the teachers were reluctant to participate in the process. A split among the teachers was evident in the initial stages of the study. Teachers' 'social' groups were evident in this school which tended to prevent any team effort.

Generally, students did not have healthy meals at lunch time. Most ate two to three flour balls or doughnuts and an ice-block. Only a few had healthy meals. The food sold at the school market dictated what students ate at school. The school's BOM did not seem to have any influence on the type of food that was sold at the market. Illness was the biggest contributing factor to students' absenteeism, but the teachers could not agree on a strategy to address this issue. They could not come to a consensus that a simple initial solution was to encourage mothers to sell nutritious food at the school market — a strategy that was used effectively at two other primary school sites in this province.

These data show that the school lacks strong leadership. This was reflected in the lack of professional cooperation among the teachers. For example, the teaching staff could not reach a common consensus on the importance of a school library. They did not seem to have a united stand to address school retention and attendance issues. The major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were illness, drug abuse, and the inability to pay school fees.

Other contributing factors were poor parental support, family problems, sexual abuse — especially on girls, violence in the home, involvement in household chores, lack of food, and peer pressure. These data also infer that the absence of a staffroom is a contributing factor to the creation of the number of social groups and disunity among the teachers.

Case Study 3

Only four students withdrew from this school in 2007. Two females withdrew as a result of pregnancy, which were consequences of sexual abuse in their own homes. The two male students left for unknown reasons.

The inability to pay school fees was identified as the major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. Illness was also a contributing factor, but not as great as in the other two primary school sites. It was reported that the inability to pay school fees was not because of the lack of money. The lack of budgeting of informal and formal sector incomes and planning for future expenses were the major contributing factors. The community was able to make money from the sale of garden produce, betel nut, and coconut sales. The fish cannery also provided formal employment for the young people in this particular community. Further discussions revealed that family problems, sexual abuse — especially of girls, violence in the home, and involvement in household chores were also contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school.

Teachers and students had to work on strategies to improve the school fee issue. There were existing strategies in place to cater for this issue. However, absenteeism and withdrawal from school were still concerns. Therefore, additional strategies were identified during the study to support the existing ones. The existing strategies were:

- the school administration and the school's BOM allowed parents to pay off school fees in instalments; and
- genuinely poor families were identified and parents given casual employment around the school. Their wages were credited to the children's school fee debts.

The two additional strategies identified were:

- teachers to conduct awareness for parents on budgeting incomes and the importance of saving for school fees; and
- schools to write to business houses seeking part-time employment for students during weekends and school vacations to earn their school fees.

The students also participated in solving the school fee issue. The students, with the assistance of their class teachers, commenced a project that aimed to encourage students to make their own money through informal income-earning activities at home. The principal aim of this activity was to teach them how to budget their incomes in order to save for future expenses.

Grades 5 and 8 students identified a money-making venture in order to be self-reliant. Budgeting earnings was encouraged during the project. The banking of profits was also encouraged. The class teachers played a major role in assisting, guiding, and monitoring the progress of the project.

During the second visit, the researcher reported that parents were only supportive of the Grade 8 students participating in the project. The general view was that Grade 5 students were too young to accept financial responsibilities. The researcher also sighted the Grade 8 students' record of individual informal income-earning ventures. Ten students had raised more than K10. The researcher was requested to write a supporting letter to Bank South Pacific Ltd requesting its support for these students. The students intended to open individual accounts. This project was related to the 'Making a Living' subject offered at the upper primary level.

During the final visit, it was reported that the other Grade 8 class had been allowed to participate as a result of the students' growing interest in the project. The Grade 7 students were also interested and were advised to participate the following year. The Grade 8 students' participation was a trial. If the project proved successful, then, in 2008, all Grade 7 and Grade 8 students would participate in the project, as part of the 'Making a Living' course. Out of the fifty-five Grade 8 students, forty-five had opened an Achiever's Account with Bank South Pacific. The other ten could not open new accounts because errors were made when filling in the bank forms.

The teacher-in-charge of this project informed the researcher that she would sort out the accounts for the remaining ten students. The students were excited about this project. The majority informed the researcher that they intended to continue using these accounts after they graduated from primary school. The village people in this community were generally discouraged about banking because of the various documentation and identification that are required in order to open an account. Most of the villagers lack ID cards, drivers' licences, and passports. This hinders the will to open bank accounts. It is not certain whether banks accept other forms of identification, such as letters from pastors and village councillors.

This study was unable to assess whether parents and students were able to continue the project after the research ended. The researcher asked the head of the primary school standards office in the province whether they could monitor and continue to support the additional strategies that were initiated in 2007. The researcher was assured that such support would be catered for in the 2008 standards activities. This school worked with available resources in order to improve students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school.

Case Study 4

The survey data show that the inability to pay school fees, hunger, teachers' absenteeism, security, and transport problems were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. The teachers confirmed that students' absenteeism and school withdrawal were issues in this school. However, they were unaware of the contributing factors.

With the support from the principal, the staff made some effort to work together to solve the issues of transport and students' hunger. The following strategies were recommended to address the transport and hunger issues:

- conduct awareness in the school community on the transport issue;
- encourage parents to think of strategies to assist students with transport;
- encourage parents to carry out fundraising to raise money to hire PMVs to drop-off and pick-up students from school;
- encourage parents with PMVs to pick-up and drop-off students, and students to pay for this service; and
- encourage parents to provide breakfast and lunches for their children each day.

During discussion with the students on teachers' absenteeism, it was pointed out that teachers were generally present in the school. However, many did not teach during their allocated times. Teachers being absent from school was also an issue. The fact that the teachers were actually present in school, but made no attempt to teach during the allocated periods upset the students, especially those who were often hungry and had to commute long distances to school each day. This issue was particularly acute in Term 1 because of the absence of a master school timetable. Teachers and class captains were given individual timetables each day. The individual timetabling strategy resulted in daily lesson clashes. It was reported that teacher absenteeism was still an issue, even after a master timetable was in place.

The students participated in solving the transport and school fee issues. Two classes participated in this exercise. Grades 9 and 10 students were given the task of identifying viable money-making ventures to raise funds so that they would learn to be self-reliant. The teachers were requested to encourage the students to discuss the value of self-reliance.

It was reported that most of the students' communities depended on informal, income-generating activities to survive. The students were encouraged to identify an informal income venture in which they could participate. They were also encouraged to budget their profits in order to pay for their transport fares and save for future expenses. They were encouraged to bank any access profits. The class teachers were asked to guide and monitor the progress of the project and evaluate the whole process.

The Grade 9 students were successful in their project. Their teacher reported that, during the project, her students were able to come to school every day because they were able to make sufficient profit to pay for transport fares. It is hoped that the students will receive continuous support with their income-earning ventures so that they can attend school every day.

The Grade 10 class was not successful with its project because the students were not interested. Furthermore, their teacher was not enthusiastic about the project from the start, so he did not make the effort to encourage the students to participate.

The researcher was informed at the beginning of the study that this school lacked strong leadership. The overall uncoordinated running of the school, some teachers' lack of commitment to teaching, the rundown classrooms and ablution facilities, and the presence of undisciplined students supported this assessment. The principal was never present during meetings that were organised with the teachers, even though he was informed of them. Most of the teachers were not working as a team.

However, the language teachers worked well as a team and had regular meetings. This department was dominated by experienced, committed, female teachers who contributed to the strong leadership in this department. The researcher was invited to share in the language

team's fortnightly morning tea sessions and witnessed some of their departmental discussions. The Grade 9 teacher who participated in the action research component was a member of this team. Teachers were reported to be still continuously absent from classes at the end of the study. The teachers' attitude on punctuality and commitment to teaching was still an issue.

These data show that the inability to pay school fees, hunger, illness, transport problems, security, teacher absenteeism, and peer pressure were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from this school. Involvement in household chores, violence in the home, sexual abuse — especially of female students, the inability to pay school fees, and transport problems were the major contributing factors. The data also show that even though this school lacked strong leadership and had elements of discord among the teaching staff, committed teachers were able to make a difference in improving support for students. In this particular case, a well-run subject department existed, and one teacher was able to assist her class to improve their school attendance. She was able to assist her students to take ownership of their problem and identified practical strategies to solve it.

Case Study 5

Contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from this school were illness, the inability to pay school fees, family problems, lack of community and parental support, peer pressure, outside influences, sexual abuse— especially of girls, violence in the home, and involvement in household chores. For this particular school, withdrawal did not seem to be a major problem. However, absenteeism was a great concern. Many of the students did not have problems with school fees because most of the students' parents had formal employment.

The major contributing factors to absenteeism in this particular school were involvement in social activities. Activities such as church rallies, drugs, and late night video shows contributed to absenteeism. During lunch hour, students left the school premises and many did not return for afternoon classes. They got involved in outside activities instead. Some parents also took their children on trips and failed to inform the school of such intentions. However, a small portion of the student population did have problems with school fees.

Team work among the teachers was weak. One of the researchers had, before undertaking this study, previously visited this school, and noted discord among the teachers where the teaching staff did not meet regularly, and worked in isolation.

Possible strategies to address the issues of absenteeism and school fee problems were discussed with the teaching staff during the first visit. The introduction of sporting activities to encourage students to stay in school and for the school to work with the community to secure better community support was discussed.

The headteacher of PB1 Primary School presented a plan that had strategies to address the issues which were discussed in the first visit. The strategies were incorporated into the School Learning Improvement Plan (SLIP).

Also, the headteacher introduced fortnightly meetings with the students. The purpose of these meetings was to encourage students and teachers to communicate better in order to facilitate a better working relationship between students and teachers. The teachers had also

begun to have regular meetings to discuss issues affecting the school. It was also noted that the school's BOM chairperson was present in the school during the visits to the school. This was generally not the case in previous years. The headteacher confirmed that the school administration and the BOM now worked well as a team. During the second visit, the students and teachers were now working well together. Also, team work amongst the teachers had been strengthened.

A feeling of ease among the teachers was noted in staff meetings during the second visit. Similar ease was noted among the teachers and students during a meeting with the students. The students seemed much happier during the second visit. To further strengthen community support for the school, the headteacher went on air on the provincial radio to communicate to parents the issues that were affecting the school. The consequence of such awareness had encouraged the community to better support the school. This was evident during the parents and staff meeting held during the second visit. Parents' attendance was good. The parents and teachers had also noted a positive change in the students' attitude towards school.

While absenteeism was still an issue, other positive changes had taken place in the school. There were plans to build a basketball court in the school to encourage students to stay in school and improve attendance. A marked improvement in students' discipline, general behaviour, and dress was noted. The students were much rowdier and their appearance was generally more sloppy during the first visit.

There were activities in the SLIP program which catered for remedial assistance for students, especially those with learning difficulties. This was aimed at encouraging such students to stay in school.

These data show that, even though school absenteeism and withdrawal were still issues, progress had been made in addressing them. The students were more disciplined by the end of the study, and school attendance had begun to improve. Progress had also been noted in community support for the school. The community had worked together to rebuild a classroom. Parents were assisted to find means to pay off outstanding school fees. The teachers were also working together as a team, and community support was beginning to emerge.

Gender equity in enrolment had been achieved in this particular school. However, the school library issue had not been sorted out and the sporting facilities had not been established by the end of the study. Data from other schools show that these facilities are enjoyed by students, and that they encourage students' school attendance. The toilets needed to be improved to cater for senior female students' needs in order to improve their school attendance.

Case Study 6

The school already had strategies to address students' absenteeism. The school already had a school counsellor who was supposed to assist students who were regularly absent. However, it seemed that this service was not effective. For example, it was reported that the school counsellor spoke with the students and advised them to come back after three weeks. However, the students did not come back for other sessions after the first visit. This implies that the school counsellor had insufficient knowledge, skills, and experience in counselling.

She could not reach the students, and had not established the contributing factors to the individual students' absenteeism.

During a focus group discussion with senior students, it was found that drug abuse, sexual abuse in the home, hunger, inability to pay school fees, household and seasonal chores, and inadequate support for senior girls in the school were some of the factors contributing to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school.

The teachers recommended the following new strategies during the study:

- teachers explore working with the community to encourage students, especially the older ones, to attend school regularly; and
- develop the school into a friendly environment to encourage students to come and stay in school. For example, the school planned to strengthen sporting activities to encourage students to stay in school. It also planned to organise educational video shows, encourage library use and indoor games, and introduce clubs for various activities of students' interest to be done in place of sports during the rainy seasons.

Unfortunately, most of these initiatives had not been implemented by the end of the study.

Case Study 7

Illness, the inability to pay school fees, difficulties with school subjects, family problems, lack of community and parental support, peer pressure, outside influences, pregnancy, sexual abuse — especially of girls, violence in the home, and involvement in household and seasonal chores were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. For the action research component, the quantitative data were presented to the staff. The major contributing factors were the inability to pay school fees and difficulties with school subjects.

The staff confirmed these as the major contributing factors. They also added that students' absenteeism was an issue in this school. The staff recommended the following strategies to address students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school:

- offering the school produce crops for sale;
- start poultry and piggery projects; and
- parents be allowed to pay school fees, in kind.

These strategies were discussed during the first visit. During the second visit, the canteen was being renovated for possible operation sometime in the future. The gardening project commenced, but the school did not sell any surplus vegetable produced because the crops were stolen by members of the communities who live near the school. The chicken project had not commenced, but it would in the near future. It was reported that parents who were unable to raise money for their children's school fees had been encouraged to pay school fees, in kind. However, only a few parents had taken advantage of this offer.

For example, three students' school fees were paid for with piglets — the price for the boar piglet was K200 and the sow piglet was K300. The parents then paid the balance for the school fees. These animals were then raised in the school piggery and sold for a higher price. Some parents brought sago to the school which was bought for the school mess, and so the parents used the money to pay their children's school fees. The principal reported that transporting food, firewood, or livestock to school hindered the full potential of this strategy

because the roads were in appalling condition. Boat fares were expensive and the roads that link the school and some of the communities were not accessible most of the time. The school had planned to travel to the communities to collect in-kind payments from parents in future when the road links were fixed and well-maintained.

School fees for the students who were affected by logging were paid by the landowner company. The money paid into the landowner company is from the premium paid to landowners by the logging company. Some students' school fees were paid in full, if they were landowners, while others were given varying school fee subsidies. The list presented in Table 43 was sent to the school in 2007 to confirm that the students were at PB4 High School so that payments could be made to the school (see Table 43).

Table 43: 2007 School Fee Benefits

Gender	TFI %	Grade
F	40	10
F	40	10
M	30	10
M	100	9
F	100	10
M	100	(the school does not have this student's name in the school record)
F	80	11 (in another secondary school)
F	80	10
M	80	12 (in another secondary school)
M	60	8
F	40	10
M	40	10
M	100	9
M	100	9
M	100	9
F	100	9
M	80	10
M	80	9
M	80	10
F	60	10
F	80	10
F	50	10
F	50	9
F	50	9 (withdrew from school when school was closed for health reasons. Did not return when school reopened)
F	80	9
F	80	9
M	80	9
F	80	9
M	80	10
M	50	9

Gender	TFI %	Grade
M	50	9
M	25	10 (transferred – discipline problem student)
M	30	9
M	30	10
M	30	9
F	30	10
M	30	9
F	30	10
M	30	10 (in another secondary school)
F	30	9
F	30	9
M	30	10
M	30	9
F	30	10
M	30	10
M	30	10
M	30	9

Table 43: 2007 School Fee Benefits (continued)

The students from different areas work well together in the school. Therefore, students did not withdraw because of ethnic clashes. Drug abuse was an issue, but has not yet become a pressing issue. Alcohol was also not an issue for students in this school. However, pregnancy was an issue for the girls in this school. Four girls became pregnant in 2007, two of them because of sexual abuse in the home. The principal stated that these girls could return to school but would have to transfer to another school because of the stigma associated with student pregnancy. Peer pressure to skip school is not a major issue in this school. However, hunger and teachers' absenteeism were pressing issues. Lack of community support was also an issue.

These other strategies were explored to improve students' retention and absenteeism:

- explore various scholarships that may be available to support poor students;
- explore various scholarships that may be available to support top students;
- encourage students to seek caretaking jobs over the Christmas vacation to earn their school fees; and
- encourage day students to bring their lunches to school each morning, or enough money to buy food from the mess so that they do not leave the school grounds during lunch hour.

Despite the implementation of the strategies, not all students had paid their school fees by the end of the study. The 44 percent upfront fees that needed to be paid before students were allowed to continue had not been paid. This did not mean that the strategies in place were not working. Other factors, such as the lack of capacity for parents to earn money for school fees, parents not valuing education, lack of confidence in the school administration and BOM, and saving for future expenses have not yet become a culture and cultural perception of males and females being educated hindered progress. These were all external school

factors that had a strong bearing on internal school factors which affected students' retention and attendance.

These data show that illness, the inability to pay school fees, family problems, peer pressure, drug abuse, pregnancy, sexual abuse, involvement in household chores, poor school environment, outside influences, and difficulties with learning were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. For this school, the inability to pay school fees and difficulties with learning were the major contributing factors.

The school had existing strategies, and new ones were put in place to address these issues. However, the forces of external factors hindered progress. The school infrastructure was in need of urgent maintenance. The school environment affected the teachers' and students' morale, which, in some way, affected the campaign for general improvement of absenteeism and withdrawal from school.

Case Study 8

The teachers reported that the contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were illness, the inability to pay school fees, weak community support, teacher absenteeism, peer pressure, outside influences, security, involvement in household and seasonal chores, violence in the home, family problems, distance travelled to school, and the school environment. The inability to pay school fees and teachers' absenteeism were the major contributing factors for students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school.

To address these issues, the teachers and the schools' BOM recommended the implementation of strategies such as organise awareness on the value of children's education, and the need to make children come to school regularly. The target would be those communities or disadvantaged groups whose children were not attending school regularly. It was suggested that an awareness committee for this task which would have representation from the teachers, the school administration, the school's BOM, and a good model parent whose child (or children) attended school regularly, and school fees be paid in instalments and all fees to be paid by Term 4. Further, the school administration and the BOM to initiate school rules regarding:

- children's attendance at school;
- children's and teachers' absenteeism;
- non-payment of school fees; and
- other disciplinary problems.

The newly elected BOM did not seem to know what their responsibilities were. The BOM was changed each year, whenever the community decided to do so. According to the headteacher, the previous BOM members would come to school to get money to pay for school materials, but instead, spent most of this on themselves. Lack of strong leadership was an issue. Therefore, the headteacher did not take up the misuse of school funding with the proper authorities at the provincial level.

During the second visit, no strategies had been put in place to address parents' inability to pay school fees, and teachers' and students' absenteeism by the school management and the BOM. A young former graduate, who was a Grade 7 and Grade 8 teacher initiated agricultural projects — corn/peanut gardens and a sizable fish pond — with the assistance of

the students and the school to address the school fee issue. This was commendable. However, the community did not support the initiative, and the fish and corn were stolen by members of the community.

These data show that illness, the inability to pay for school fees, weak community support, teachers' absenteeism, peer pressure, outside influences, security, involvement in household chores, violence in the homes, family problems, distance travelled to school, and the school environment are contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. This is very similar to schools in the other provinces. However, for this school, the major contributing factors were the inability to pay school fees and teachers' absenteeism. The school had attempted to address these issues, but given the leadership in this school and an unstable school BOM, the campaign for this was weak. The school was unable to muster the community support it needed to effectively address the major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school.

Case Study 9

The school already allowed parents to address students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school; by paying school fees in instalments. However, parents were still unable to pay their school fee debts. According to the deputy headteacher, the implementation of the privilege card was a solution for this. The privilege card was designed to deal with school fee payments, especially for those parents who were unable to pay school fees. The school's BOM had some methods of discouraging absenteeism, and lateness, but the research was unable to find additional information on this. The parents and BOM members were responsible for ensuring that students attended school regularly and that school fees were paid.

The school ensured that the food which was sold at school was affordable, therefore the price for food range from 10t to 50t. Goods that were sold included ripe bananas, ice-blocks, karuka nuts, and buns. The school also had face-to-face discussions with parents who had difficulties in paying their children's school fees, and found avenues to assist them. The school BOM assisted in this process. It identified parents who had special skills that could be utilised by the school, and those parents were given casual employment so that they could pay their children's fees. The school administration also ensured that students and teachers were treated with respect at all times. Discipline for unacceptable behaviour was done in private, and with respect for the offender. The privilege card was used to encourage students to stay in school. Each child had a card with his or her name and information on the amount of school fees to be paid. This card ensured that the school provided textbooks for the children and any other equipment that were needed. It is anticipated that the future will provide useful support for such a card.

The data show that most of the contributing factors concerning students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school are similar to the other school sites. However, for this school, the inability to pay school fees was the major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. The school was implementing the AGE and CFS programs. The school had existing strategies to improve students' school attendance and retention. However, the duration of the study limited the possibility of assessing the effectiveness of the strategies.

Case Study 10

The contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school were similar to those at other school sites. The additional ones for this school were poor parental attitude towards education, education not valued by students, shaming students in front of other students and teachers, teachers' verbal and other abuse of students, teachers drinking, smoking and chewing of betel nut, pregnancy, cultural commitments (feasting), and teachers' inability to cope well with bridging in lower primary. The major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school was the inability to pay school fees. It was also reported that more than one hundred school-aged children were not in school and that the bridging issue in lower primary was a contributing factor to this.

To address the school fee issue, the research participants recommended that the schools' BOM reduce school fees. Parents who were unable to pay school fees were to be given casual employment around the school so that they could earn money to pay their children's school fees. Also, awareness was to be conducted in the school community concerning the value of education. Some form of counselling already existed in this school. The parents reported that if students were intending to leave school, the schools' headteacher or teachers discussed the issue with the students. They encouraged them to continue to attend school. Other parents reported that teachers had direct discussions with them regarding their children's absenteeism. Teachers and parents encouraged students to stay in school and attend school regularly.

These data show that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were similar to those found at other school sites. The main differences were poor parental attitude towards education, shaming students in front of other students and teachers, teachers' verbal and other abuse of students, teachers involved in drinking, smoking and chewing of betel nut, cultural commitments (feasting), and teachers' inability to cope well with bridging in lower primary. The data also show that the school had existing strategies to address the inability to pay school fees and students' absenteeism. These strategies had strong community involvement. Some form of counselling was already being used to encourage students to stay in school. However, it is not certain whether these strategies improved students' absenteeism and retention in this school.

Case Study 11

The contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school were similar to those found at other school sites. The additional ones in this school were boring lessons, teachers' student favouritism, education not valued by students, teachers' verbal and other abuse of students, students not supported well when they live with relatives, difficulty with subject content, the view that Grade 8, 10 and 12 selections only support top students, cultural commitments (feasting), and weak relationship between teachers and parents.

It was reported that approximately fifteen school-aged children from each village in this school community were not attending school anymore. The major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and school withdrawal in this school were the inability to pay school fees, teachers' absenteeism, peer pressure, and lack of parental support for children's schooling. Cultural obligations and involvement in household chores were reported to also be significant contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school.

The strategies already implemented to address the school fee issue were reduced school fees, the community's contribution in kind, to the school, such as providing timber for school buildings; and the community's fundraising activities to support the school so that school fees can be reduced. Other strategies that were implemented to address absenteeism were that the school's BOM and the school encouraged parents to feed their children before sending them to school, parents accompanied their children to school each day, and the conduct of awareness concerning parental support for their children's education.

Strategies in place to address teachers' absenteeism were internal relief arrangements, teachers take the responsibility to inform the school administration on times when they intended to be absent from school, and the school administration reported teachers who were frequently absent from school, to the provincial education office. An awareness program concerning students' involvement in domestic chores and its interference with school attendance was planned by the school and BOM.

It was reported that the parents were working in clan or family groups to identify children who should have been in school, but were not. The clan group physically took the children to school. The community referred to this system as a 'clan-to-clan system'. The community also had an established basket exchange system with another community to assist students who had difficulties with school fees. The school's BOM had also given casual employment to parents so that they could work around and in the school for a fee, which was credited to their children's school fees. It was also reported that attempts were made by the teachers to discuss students' absenteeism and their intention to withdraw from school, with the parents and students.

These data show that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school were similar to that identified at other school sites. However, for this school, the major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were the inability to pay school fees, teachers' absenteeism, peer pressure, and lack of parental support in their children's schooling, cultural obligations, and involvement in household chores. The data also show that community support for this school is strong, and had established local strategies to improve students' school attendance and retention. These data also infer that the school had strong school leadership.

Case Study 12

The major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school at this school site were the inability to pay school fees, poor parental support for their children's education, peer pressure to get involved with drugs, alcohol, and smoking, participation in video shows during school days, pregnancy, and early marriage.

New strategies were attempted during the study to address the school fee issue. These strategies were that:

- low income-earning parents be given casual work around the school to earn money to pay for their children's school fees; and
- parents assisted to find cleaning contracts with the town council so that they could earn money for their children's school fees.

It is not confirmed whether these strategies were ever implemented.

These data show that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school in this school were similar to those identified at other school sites. However, for this school, the major contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were the inability to pay school fees, participation in outside activities during school days, pregnancy, and early marriage. The data also show that the community support for this school is weak, and therefore strategies had not been established to address factors which contributed to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. The data also suggest that this school had weak school leadership.

CONCLUSION

This study found that contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school were similar at all school sites. Although contributing factors varied at the site schools, the data show that the inability to pay school fees was the highest common major contributing factor to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. The major contributing factors for parents' inability to pay their children's school fees were low income earners, the only form of income was subsistence farming, the inability to raise funds because of low economic environments, parents had other children in school, unemployment, and only one parent was earning a formal income.

Hunger, illness, teachers' absenteeism, and family problems were also major contributing factors. Other contributing factors were peer pressure, difficulty with subject content, students and parents do not value formal schooling, bullying, drug and alcohol abuse, outside influences, pregnancy, various forms of child abuse, student involvement in household and seasonal chores, and cultural activities.

These findings supports the 2002 retention study and other NRI studies which also found that these were contributing factors to students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school. Family problems which lead to poor parental support for the students' education, violence in the home, school fee problems, and all forms of child abuse in the home affected some students at all the school sites.

Students' absenteeism was a common concern at all school sites, although the degree of the problem varied. These findings support the 2002 retention study which also identified absenteeism as a concern at all school sites in that study. The major contributing factors to students' absenteeism were hunger, illness, inadequate learning resources in schools, teachers' absenteeism, and difficulties in paying school fees. Other contributing factors were involvement in household, seasonal, and cultural activities, students do not value formal schooling, lessons were not interesting, poor parental support, drug abuse, rainy seasons, and transport, water, security, and family problems.

Most of the school sites had existing strategies that were used to address the various factors which affected their particular students' school attendance and retention. Some of the strategies that were used were common at all school sites. For example, paying school fees in instalments, schools' casual employment for poor parents to earn school fees, and in-kind support for schools when parents were unable to pay for school fees. However, these existing strategies did not adequately support the schools.

For example, the in-kind support from the parents, which was used to lower school fees, was not fully utilised by the schools and the parents because schools needed money to function efficiently. Paying in instalments did not work well because many parents did not pay their children's school fee debts. The effectiveness of other strategies that were used by the schools varied as well. Some did not work, many were partly successful, and a few were successful. The varying successes were largely influenced by external contributing factors, such as community support and hindrances, and local environments.

Reading was a motivating factor for students' school attendance. School libraries can support this interest. However, the school libraries at most of the school sites were understocked, lacked new and up-to-date books, and were not well-organised to encourage

students to use them. Some schools did not have school libraries. Students' library use was minimal or non-existent in the schools that had them. Investment in school libraries did not seem to be a priority at all site schools. Other NRI studies have noted that libraries in primary schools are not well-developed in most provinces. It seemed that libraries as a teaching resource to further support both students' and teachers' literacy, research skills, and independent learning had not been fully realised by many school administrations, especially at the primary level. Library facilities need to be better developed so that teachers' and students' are adequately supported in terms of learning resources.

The study also identified sporting activities as another motivating factor for students' school punctuality, attendance, and retention. Sporting activities also contributed to the development of students' discipline and responsibility at one of the school sites. Most of the primary school sites lacked sporting facilities. Other studies have also identified sporting facilities as generally lacking in primary schools. Sporting facilities are a vital component in students' education and development and should have equal financial support and teachers' commitment as other school programs.

School counselling services are a vital component in any educational institution. Counselling services are generally used to support students, if they need them. Such services can be used to support problem students to encourage their school attendance and retention when they are absent for various reasons, or are intending to withdraw from school. The study found that these students' counselling services were minimal at all the school sites. Teachers generally referred 'problem students' who had the intention of withdrawing from school to the headteachers. Some teachers spoke with the students' parents about their children's absenteeism and their intention to withdraw from school, while some did not take any action. Apart from this, no other counselling support for students was in existence.

The greatest contributing factor to female absenteeism was the lack of appropriate senior female ablution facilities. All primary school sites lacked such facilities.

Some school sites had achieved gender equity in terms of teachers' appointments and students' enrolments. Some schools had more males, while others had more females. Most of the school sites had male headteachers. At the high school sites, the teaching staff was dominated by males. The appointment of mostly male headteachers may have some bearing on the dearth of decisions to support female students' welfare in the schools.

The success of the action research and the strategies used to address poor students' school attendance and retention depended very much on effective school leadership, good school management, accountability of school finances, strong commitment from all stakeholders, and strong community involvement in addressing the issues that affected the students' school attendance and retention. The schools that lacked such strategies had serious problems in relation to teachers' and students' school attendance and retention.

The action research was successful at school sites that had strong leadership, committed teachers, sound teacher cooperation and team work, and good community support. Those who were involved made the effort to implement the identified strategies to address students' absenteeism and withdrawal from school work for the school and students. The action research did not work well in schools that had weak leadership, uncooperative teachers, and poor community support.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRES

TEACHER'S FORM

I am: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	Age: <input type="checkbox"/> 17-20 years <input type="checkbox"/> 21-25 years <input type="checkbox"/> 26-35 years <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 years <input type="checkbox"/> more than 46 years									
I am teaching at	It is a level school									
The school is: <input type="checkbox"/> an urban school <input type="checkbox"/> a semi-rural school <input type="checkbox"/> a rural school	All teachers in this school have a house. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No									
Tick one or the other: <input type="checkbox"/> I have enough school resources to teach the curriculum effectively. <input type="checkbox"/> I do not have enough school resources to teach the curriculum effectively	Is there a strong relationship between this school and the local community? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Give examples of this relationship.									
In the past ten years, I have taught in: <input type="checkbox"/> the same school <input type="checkbox"/> up to three schools <input type="checkbox"/> more than three schools	My highest teaching qualification is: (include number of years training)									
How many children from the class(es) that you teach, have left school since the beginning of this year? <table border="1" data-bbox="193 1227 699 1368"> <thead> <tr> <th>Class</th> <th>No. of Males</th> <th>No. of Females</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Class	No. of Males	No. of Females							If I thought that one of my students was going to leave school, I would: <input type="checkbox"/> discuss it with the student <input type="checkbox"/> alert the headteacher <input type="checkbox"/> discuss it with the parents of the students <input type="checkbox"/> take no action
Class	No. of Males	No. of Females								
Why do some male students have poor attendance records?	Why do some female students have poor attendance records?									
What do you think are the three main reasons for male students leaving school?	What do you think are the three main reasons for female students leaving school?									
In your experience, are male or female students more likely to leave school after they have reached a particular grade or after they reached a particular age?	What strategies do you suggest could be put in place to overcome poor attendance and student withdrawals from schools?									

STUDENT'S FORM

I am.....years of age this year	I am: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
The name of my school is/was	It is inProvince
It is: <input type="checkbox"/> an urban school <input type="checkbox"/> a semi-rural school <input type="checkbox"/> a rural school	I travel to school by: <input type="checkbox"/> walking <input type="checkbox"/> PMV <input type="checkbox"/> school bus <input type="checkbox"/> motor vehicle <input type="checkbox"/> other means
How long does it take to get to school each day? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> up to 15 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> up to 30 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> up to 1 hour <input type="checkbox"/> more than one hour	Are you late getting to school each day? <input type="checkbox"/> hardly ever <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> every day <input type="checkbox"/> never
Do you go to school: <input type="checkbox"/> every day <input type="checkbox"/> most days <input type="checkbox"/> but miss a lot of days	Do you have to pay money to get to school each day? (Write down the amount for one-way travel.)
Is it difficult to find this amount of money each day?	Write down what you actually ate this morning before you came to school.
Write down what you usually eat at lunchtime at school.	Which of your subjects will you use most after you leave school?
Which of your subjects will help you least after you leave school?	
My teachers are: <input type="checkbox"/> always helpful <input type="checkbox"/> helpful some of the time <input type="checkbox"/> never helpful	The language that I use most often in the classroom is: <input type="checkbox"/> Tokples <input type="checkbox"/> Tok Pisin <input type="checkbox"/> Motu <input type="checkbox"/> English
The language that I use least in the classroom is: <input type="checkbox"/> Tokples <input type="checkbox"/> Tok Pisin <input type="checkbox"/> Motu <input type="checkbox"/> English	The language that I use most often at home: <input type="checkbox"/> Tokples <input type="checkbox"/> Tok Pisin <input type="checkbox"/> Motu <input type="checkbox"/> English
My parents come to my school: <input type="checkbox"/> more than for times each year <input type="checkbox"/> two or three times a year <input type="checkbox"/> once a year <input type="checkbox"/> never come to my school	My parents come to school: <input type="checkbox"/> to collect the term assessment reports <input type="checkbox"/> to help with school projects and activities <input type="checkbox"/> to parents meetings <input type="checkbox"/> when I make trouble at school

STUDENT'S FORM (cont'd)

My mother talks to me about school: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	My father talks to me about school: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
What does your mother talk you to you about school?	What does your father talk to you about school?
My father finds it difficult to pay my school fees: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes Why?	Who do you think has major responsibilities to you concerning school? <input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> board of Management <input type="checkbox"/> parents <input type="checkbox"/> community <input type="checkbox"/> teachers <input type="checkbox"/> others <input type="checkbox"/> student
Why do you go to school?	Why do male students drop out of school?
List five things that you like about school:	Why do female students drop out of school?
What are the reasons why you do not go to school some days?	Have you ever wanted to drop out of school? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no If yes, write down what happened.
What organisation(s) is responsible to make sure that boys come to school? <input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> parents <input type="checkbox"/> school board <input type="checkbox"/> community <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify:) Why do you think so?	What organisation(s) is responsible to make sure that girls come to school? <input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> parents <input type="checkbox"/> school board <input type="checkbox"/> community <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify:) Why do you think so?
If I did well in school, it would be because I tried hard. <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially disagree/agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking: <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially disagree/agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree

WITHDRAWN STUDENT'S FORM

I am.....years of age this year	I am: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
The name of my last school is	It is inProvince
It is: <input type="checkbox"/> an urban school <input type="checkbox"/> a semi-rural school <input type="checkbox"/> a rural School	I travelled to school by: <input type="checkbox"/> walking <input type="checkbox"/> motor vehicle <input type="checkbox"/> PMV <input type="checkbox"/> school bus <input type="checkbox"/> other means
How long did it take to get school each day? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> up to 15 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> up to 30 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> up to 1 hour <input type="checkbox"/> more than one hour	Were you late getting to school each day? <input type="checkbox"/> hardly ever <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> every day
Did you go to school: <input type="checkbox"/> every day <input type="checkbox"/> most days <input type="checkbox"/> but missed a lot of days	Did you have to pay money to get to school each day. (Write down the amount for one-way travel.)
Was it difficult to find this amount of money each day?	Write down what you actually ate each morning before you went to school.
Write down what you usually ate at lunchtime at school.	Which of your subjects have you most used since you left school?
Which of your subjects has helped you least since you left school?	
My teachers were: <input type="checkbox"/> always helpful <input type="checkbox"/> helpful some of the time <input type="checkbox"/> never helpful	The language that I used most often in the classroom was: <input type="checkbox"/> Tokples <input type="checkbox"/> Motu <input type="checkbox"/> Tok Pisin <input type="checkbox"/> English
The language that I used least often in the classroom was: <input type="checkbox"/> Tokples <input type="checkbox"/> Tok Pisin <input type="checkbox"/> Motu <input type="checkbox"/> English	The language that I use most often at home: ... Tokples ... Tok Pisin ... Motu ... English
Now that I've left school, I use English: <input type="checkbox"/> most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> quite often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely <input type="checkbox"/> never	My parents came to school: <input type="checkbox"/> more than four times each year <input type="checkbox"/> two or three times a year <input type="checkbox"/> once a year <input type="checkbox"/> never

WITHDRAWN STUDENT'S FORM (cont'd)

<p>My parents came to school:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> to collect the term assessment reports <input type="checkbox"/> to help with school projects and activities <input type="checkbox"/> to parents' meetings <input type="checkbox"/> when I made trouble at school	<p>My mother talked to me about school:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> everyday <input type="checkbox"/> once or twice a week <input type="checkbox"/> once or twice a month <input type="checkbox"/> hardly ever <input type="checkbox"/> never
<p>My father talked to me about school:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> every day <input type="checkbox"/> once or twice a week <input type="checkbox"/> once or twice a month <input type="checkbox"/> hardly ever <input type="checkbox"/> never	<p>What did your mother talk to your about?</p>
<p>What did your father talk to you about?</p>	<p>How many people are there in your family? How many of these are still in school?</p>
<p>Why did you go to school?</p>	<p>Why did you leave school?</p>
<p>Was it a mistake to leave school? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no</p>	<p>What could have been done to keep you at school?</p>
<p>Who do you think has had the major responsibility for keeping students at school?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> board of management <input type="checkbox"/> parents <input type="checkbox"/> community <input type="checkbox"/> teachers <input type="checkbox"/> others <input type="checkbox"/> student	<p>What are you doing now?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> subsistence farmer <input type="checkbox"/> spin around <input type="checkbox"/> work with my parents <input type="checkbox"/> have a paid job <input type="checkbox"/> do part-time work when possible <input type="checkbox"/> other
<p>Do you think you would like to finish your education later on, somewhere else in a school? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no</p>	
<p>List three main things that you liked about school:</p> <p>1..... 2..... 3.....</p>	<p>List three main things that you didn't like about school:</p> <p>1..... 2..... 3.....</p>
<p>Should a person be responsible for his or her actions?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree/disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<p>Why do students drop out of school?</p>

