SECTION: LETTERS ARTICLE TYPE: LETTER AUDIENCE : 340,000 PAGE: 39 PRINTED SIZE: 90.00cm²
REGION: WA MARKET: Australia ASR: AUD 1,578 WORDS: 205 ITEM ID: 1248317810

14 OCT, 2026

Ask why they stay away

West Australian, Perth

Ask why they stay away

The West Australian's report on unexplained absences in WA public schools (*News*, 12/10) counts nearly two million half-days.

But "unexplained" only means no adult gave the school a reason.

To the child, there is always a reason.

The figures tell us what is happening. They do not tell us why — whether these students feel they belong, feel connected to an adult at school, or feel safe there.

The neuroscience is clear.

A stressed brain moves into fight, flight or freeze, and attention follows trust.

As cognitive neuroscientist Mark Williams puts it: "We tend to attend to people we like and who are on our side, people we trust."

The Australian Education Research Organisation has found that "perceptions of not belonging" are a cause of student absence.

If we keep doing what we have always done, we will keep getting the same results.

Let's give all Australian schools the real tools to see the why, and to see the whole student, not just a reported, lagged data point.

Behind every attendance number is a young person who deserves to be seen, safe, heard, connected and capable.

Every unexplained absence has an explanation.

Let's hear them sooner.

Nikki Bonus, founder and CEO, Life Skills GO, Sydney

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a licence.