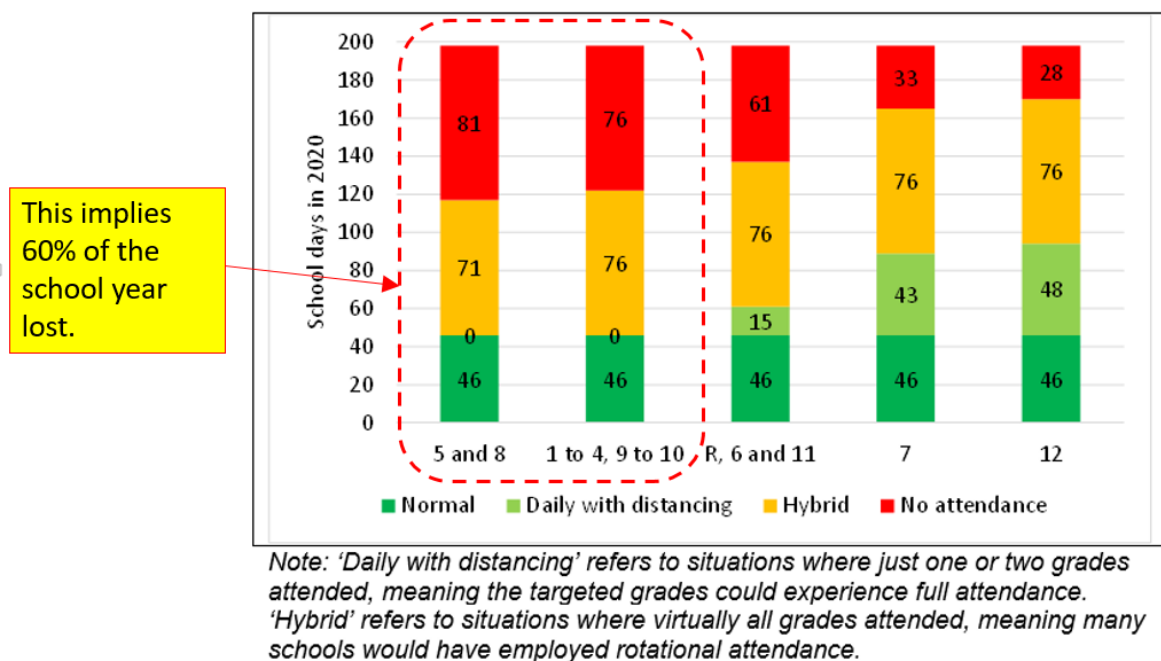


School closures and lost contact time

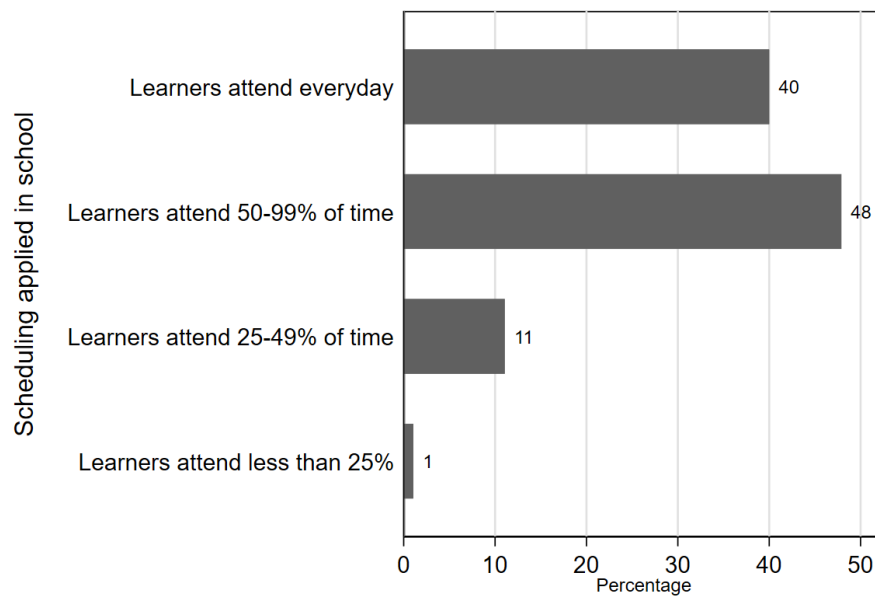
After schools closed on the 18th of March in response to the initial spread of COVID-19 in South Africa, a phased approach to reopening schools was adopted by the government. This meant that the amount of time that schools were closed varied across grades. Moreover, once schools were reopened they had to adhere to social distancing rules, which had the inevitable effect that most schools adopted some form of rotational timetabling. The overall effect of school closures and rotational timetabling meant that in some grades up to 60% of the 2020 school year was lost, as the figure below shows.

Figure 1: School days in 2020 by grade



After schools were reopened, contact teaching time was still compromised throughout 2020 and 2021 due to rotational timetabling systems. A large survey of no-fee primary school schools in the North West Province in term 3 of 2021 revealed that in 60% of the 190 schools visited, the school was on a rotational schedule. These findings are roughly in line with patterns observed in no-fee schools in Limpopo Province (Ardington & Henry, Funda Wande Limpopo Evaluation, 2021). A Department of Basic Education analysis of 2021 Term 3 administrative data on attendance suggested that approximately 22% of contact time in Term 3 of 2021 was lost nationally, but that in schools where rotational timetabling was still being implemented the amount of lost contact time was as much as 50%.

Figure 2: School attendance in 2021 in the North West Province



Source: School functionality survey, EGRS 1 wave 5 2021.
Responses for 190 schools.