

Japan city to use robots to tackle rising school truancy

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A Japanese city plans to use robots to enable pupils to attend classes virtually, as truancy rates surge due to anxiety and bullying, officials said Wednesday.

Children will be able to use devices at home to remotely maneuver robots that represent them at school, allowing them to take part in classes and discussions with schoolmates, the southern city of Kumamoto said.

Like other countries, Japan has seen a rise in children not attending school following the COVID-19 pandemic, with reasons for being absent ranging from difficulty fitting in to bullying, according to a government probe.

The one-meter (three-foot) tall robots will be self-propelling, with [pupils](#) able to move them within the [school grounds](#) and even participate in events, reports said.

"Communicating through these robots is not completely real-life, but can at least give a certain sense of reality to kids who are still unsure and afraid of interacting with others," Maki Yoshizato, a Kumamoto city official, told AFP.

"We hope this undertaking will help alleviate their psychological fears."

Across Japan, the number of truant pupils at elementary and middle school levels hit an all-time high of 244,940 in [fiscal year](#) 2021, according to the latest education ministry survey.

The robots initiative, which Kumamoto hopes to roll out as early as November, pending budget approval, comes after the tech-savvy city launched virtual classrooms in the "metaverse" to tackle truancy.

"It is extremely important to give pupils unable to go to [school](#) more

options to study," Kumamoto Mayor Kazufumi Onishi told reporters last month.

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