

Belfast Model School For Girls**Ref No. 121-0021**

An example of a comprehensive revision to policy and practice following a significant evaluation of a previous five-year strategy.

Please note that this case study refers to charts numbers 1-6 and other resources which are available on www.etini.gov.uk – Case Studies

Context:

The Belfast Model School for Girls is a non-selective post-primary school, situated in North Belfast, with the motto 'Achievement for All'. In new accommodation since 2010 with 914 girls, a large proportion of whom live in areas of significant socio-economic deprivation, it was designated as a 'Full Service School' and attracts additional resources to support five pillars of activity – one of which is attendance.

A newly-appointed principal took up post in May 2015 and set out a clear message of high expectations of the pupils, in a culture of nurture and individualised support (see strategy map).

Baseline data in May 2015 revealed key development points: (See appendix A)

Chart 1 – Sets out the need to improve overall attendance in three steps:

- To that of the same category of schools with free school meal entitlement;
- To the average for non-grammar schools;
- To consistently beyond the non-grammar school average.

Chart 2 – sets out the need to reduce the overall number of students who are persistently absent (<85%).

Chart 3 & 4 – Re-examines school protocols for authorised and unauthorised absence.

Chart 5 – Shows the resolution of the annual issue of Year 11 attendance.

Initially staff expressed concerns about: the extent of term time holidays; 'odd days' of casual absence; a lack of insight by pupils into the impact of their sporadic attendance on attainment and the number of medical / dental appointments in the school day, particularly so 'emergency' appointments.

Intervention:

In the period 2010-2015 the school's approach had been:

- a focus on the communication of the importance of attendance to staff, parents and pupils;
- a focus on the celebration and rewarding excellent attendance;
- year group leaders monitoring their year group;
- form tutors required to make all absence-related phone-calls home;

- the work of an Attendance Coordinator to undertake needs-led intervention with children.

Impact:

Over that period, the integrated approach yielded an improvement, of around only one percentage point (see Chart 6).

An evaluation within the school in May 2015 revealed:

- a lack of understanding of overlapping staff roles;
- a significant burden of attendance administration and monitoring; and
- a low capacity for effective action and intervention.

Revised strategy:

A revised strategy (structure shown in appendix A) was implemented, based on three clear objectives:

- a tighter structure with a better awareness of staff responsibilities;
- systems that support more prompt intervention; and
- the right staff skill-sets for personalised intervention.

The strategy is delivered through a number of tactics:

- Attendance is a key target as part of the 2015-18 School Development Plan (D);
- A revised policy on attendance and punctuality (A);
- Clarity of messages for parents relating to non-attendance (C, O);
- Greater involvement of school governors – a governor with responsibility for attendance sits on an attendance strategy group (M);
- Introduction of pupil ‘traffic light’ system (HI);
- A structured approach to intervention (A);
- Clarity on roles and responsibilities (A, E);
- A dedicated administrator to contact parents on the first day of absence and support year group leaders, form tutors and the attendance strategy group to execute their roles efficiently (E);
- Less form tutor administration and a focus on promotion of good attendance, mentoring and supporting pupils relating to their attendance;
- Greater emphasis on the communication of current *and projected* attendance to parents and pupils (J,K & L);

- Needs-led, individualised approach to dealing with falling attendance (G);
- A greater involvement of senior staff in the highest priority cases of poor attendance (A, G, C).

Close work with external partners forms a significant part of the school's strategy as a Full-Service School. Additional funding means that the school can employ a full time attendance coordinator and part-time family link coordinator. These roles utilise fully all available external agencies to support families that require additional levels of support. The school works closely with the Greater Shankhill Partnership's Integrated Services Team. Case studies (N) demonstrate the impact of this partnership work.

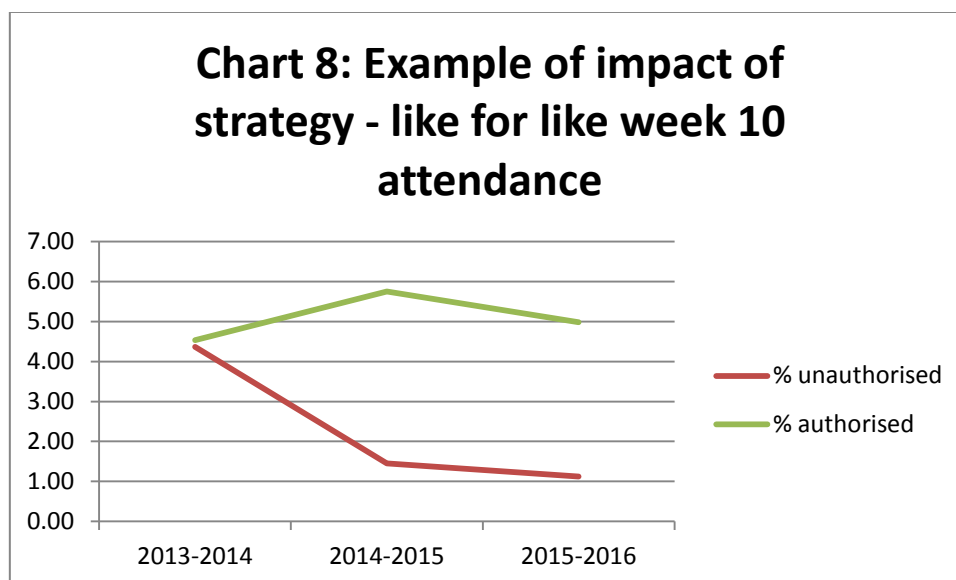
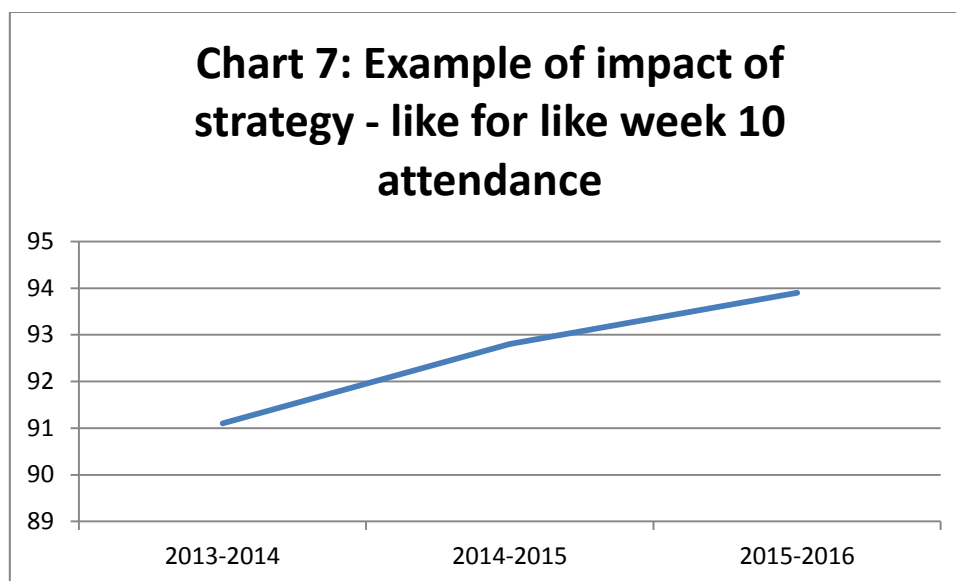
Chart 6 shows that the previous five-year approach had a sustained 1 percentage point impact on attendance at the school. It is too early to give any indication about the sustained impact for the revised approach however all indications (see above) are positive at this stage and the school will constantly monitor this process to ensure future effectiveness.

APPENDICES

Impact of approaches

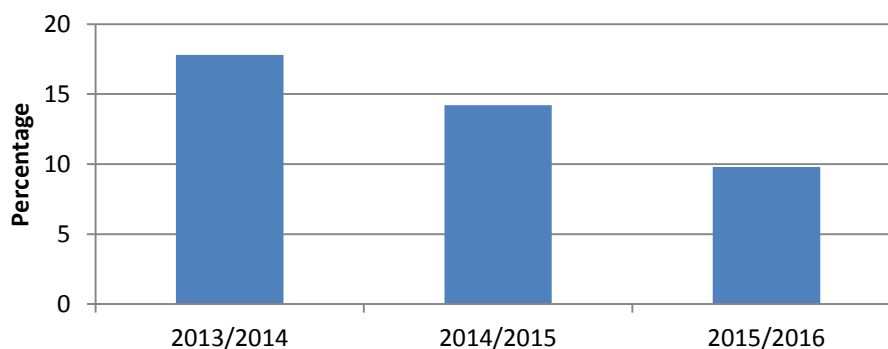
In addition to the information in Chart 6, the revised approach for 2015/16 is benchmarked weekly against 'like for like' weeks in 2013/14 % 2014/15.

Chart 7 shows how attendance at week 10 is at its highest in the last 3 year with corresponding falls in absence (chart 8). The proportion of authorised absence in chart 8 is falling quicker than unauthorised absence as the school re-address the balance between the two.



In terms of the key target on attendance (the reduction of persistent absenteeism), the like-for-like data in Chart 9 is also very positive.

Chart 9: Percentage of students who are <85% attendance at week 11 2013-2016

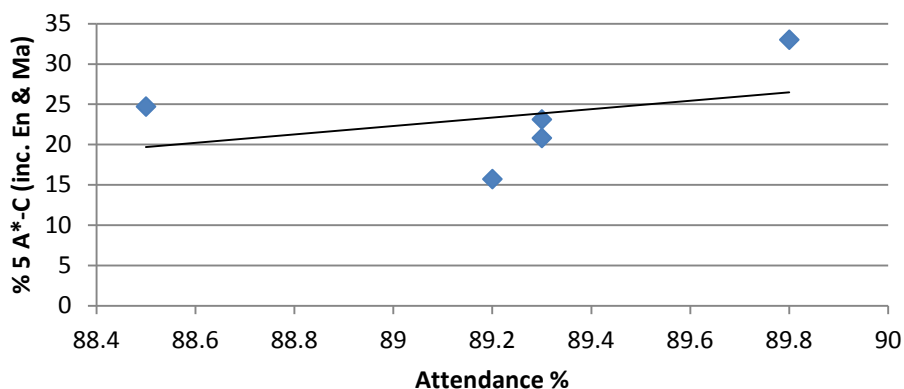


Documents supplied (PQ) demonstrate the impact of the revised, personalised strategy on a child by child basis.

Improvements in learning outcomes

The link between our work to improve attendance and improved outcomes at 5 A*-C (including English & Maths) is demonstrated in Chart 10.

Chart 10: Scattergraph of 5 A*-C (inc. En & Ma) and Attendance



Improvements in staff welfare and effectiveness

Less administration for staff enables the form tutor to focus on the promotion of good attendance and the counselling and support of children with poor attendance.

A clearer system of monitoring and intervention for students means all staff can be more effective.

As a result of improvements in results, staff self-esteem rises.

Less absenteeism reduces the need to support pupils with 'catch-up' work.

Senior staff leading on students with poor attendance results in form tutors feeling more supported.