

Cedar Integrated Primary School**Ref No: 406 6588**

An approach which emphasises the value of close monitoring of attendance data, even in a school with relatively higher levels of attendance, and which employs both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Context:

Cedar Integrated Primary School and Nursery is just outside Crossgar, County Down, with children coming from the village and the wider rural area. The school noticed a decline in attendance, particularly in 2010/2011 when attendance fell to 94.8%, just below the Northern Ireland average.

Intervention:

- During the previous four years, staff had given consistent information to parents in relation to the importance of attendance, both at welcome meetings and through reminders in the school newsletter.
- The Department of Education leaflet on promoting good attendance to highlight the link between the number of learning days which are lost through children's absence is circulated with the annual school reports and has been very effective in raising a new level of awareness among parents on the importance of good attendance.
- The school promotes a welcoming, friendly, inclusive ethos, provides interesting and stimulating lessons and communicates high expectations.
- All of the children may experience praise and recognition through, for example, reward systems, cups and trophies, Eco warriors and the student council.
- As a consequence, the children are happy, want to come to school and don't want to miss out.
- The annual summer report for each child reports clearly their attendance for each school year.
- The teaching staff are very aware of the link between attendance and a child's educational attainment; during parent consultations, they draw attention to individual patterns of punctuality and attendance, how it impacts on learning.
- Details of school holidays are given regularly to parents, with a reminder that holidays should be booked when the children are off school and not during term time.
- Attendance is monitored robustly on a weekly basis by a clerical officer and the principal.
- Parents are required to submit a note stating the reason for absence, regardless of whether or not they had phoned the school at the time.

- There is a close link with the Education and Welfare Officer (EWO) who meets the school principal each half term and monitors closely the children's attendance, particularly those whose attendance has fallen below 85%. The school has adapted the EWO proformas to inform parents of the percentage attendance of their child when it drops below 85%.
- Governors are well-informed about attendance through regular reports on children's attendance at each meeting.

During the last six years, three members of staff completed their Professional Qualification in Headship. During the course, it became apparent that the school was not recording unauthorised holidays correctly. Training for the school secretary and the principal, coupled with an annual update for all staff on the correct codes to apply for registering attendance, including the correct application of codes for unauthorised holidays, has ensured that there is a consistent, robust approach to recording children's absence. In order to improve procedures, all staff needed to ensure that they record accurately the different appointments for children going home early, for example, due to illness and medical appointments.

Impact:

Sending a letter to parents when a reason for a child's absence was not provided, and ensuring that parents return the reply slip attached to the letter, has ensured greater accountability within the school. Teachers are recording correctly unauthorised absences, particularly family holidays, correctly so accurate information is available to the school in relation to children's attendance patterns.

The annual attendance for Cedar Integrated Primary School, despite some variation, has increased overall.

2010/11	94.8%
2011/12	95.8%
2012/13	95%
2013/14	96.25%
2014/15	95.5%

Continued tracking focuses on the children who have attendance of 95% or less as there is emerging evidence that this is impacting on the children's standardised test scores, particularly in numeracy.

Going forward, the challenge for the school is to maintain a level of attendance which is above the NI average. Staff aim to be more consistent in relation to the recording children leaving school early to attend medical appointments, illness, attendance at sporting events and so on. The principal and the staff are conscious of learning being lost during the day as a result. Consequently, the leaders have set a challenging target of 96%, which has been articulated clearly to parents.