

Cliftonville Integrated Primary School**Ref No: 105-6483**

A strategy combining a lead taken by a designated classroom assistant, greatly improved communications and discussions with parents, a close focus on more effective differentiated teaching and careful monitoring and data analysis to adjust strategies.

Context:

- Inner city school in North Belfast, one of the poorest wards in NI, and granted Integrated status in September 2008;
- 2008-09 average attendance was 89.6%;
- A growing school – enrolment in 2009 was 183; September 2015 enrolment figure is 330, including the nursery class; 64% of pupils were entitled to free school meals and 115 were on the Special Needs Register, including 9 statemented children and six on the Child Protection Register.

The school identified the dual challenge of convincing parents of the value of education and motivating children to attend school, especially those that are homeless.

Intervention:

The strategies which have proved most effective:

- In September 2011 a Designated Classroom Assistant (DCA), was appointed with a specific job remit to assist the Principal with administration of attendance and punctuality matters and maintains daily records of children's lateness.
- The principal and vice-principal visited other schools to see good practice.
- A greater emphasis on differentiated learning to enable pupils' tasks to match their abilities so that children were succeeding in school and wanted to attend.
- An increase in communication about importance of attendance between the principal, DCA, Education Welfare Officer (EWO), social workers, the school's counsellor, key workers in hostels, teaching and non-teaching staff, children and parents.
- Attendance and punctuality is often on the agenda for monthly staff meetings with the teachers and classroom assistants.
- Attendance and punctuality is highlighted by senior management, throughout the entire school community, as being vitally important for the wellbeing and academic progress of children.
- Parents are followed up rigorously if they fail to respond to an initial letter from the principal.
- At times there are heated, lengthy and uncomfortable conversations between the principal and parents with a focus on convincing parents of the high correlation between good attendance, improved academic achievement, happiness, ability to make and maintain friendships and have good relationships with staff.

- The school works closely with an understanding EWO with an intrinsic interest and with social workers who to help families to improve punctuality and attendance.
- Good attendance celebrated both for individual children and classes.

Strategies were adjusted in the recording of morning lateness arrangements, and adjustments to the rewards/prizes and to letters to parents. Classroom assistants are on a rota system to assist the DCA to monitor lateness increasingly involved in the mornings.

Impact:

- An increase in the annual average attendance from 89.6% in 2009 to 94.1% in 2014-15 due to the tracked attendance of individual children and children and parents being more convinced of the importance of education.
- A lower percentage of children late in the mornings and fewer children picked up late from school in the afternoons.
- A greater number of children committed to after school clubs and activities.
- Increasing numbers of children with attendance of 95% or above. Internal data generated within the school can quantify this.
- Higher academic pupil achievements as seen in better numeracy and literacy scores and a greater number of children transferring to grammar school. Internal data generated within the school can quantify this.
- An increased number of parents attend parent/teacher consultations, special events in school and afternoon curriculum sessions.
- Staff welfare and morale also improved because of the better stability in enrolment and staffing, increased number of educational visits and through the intrinsic motivation of the children's successes arising from the more effective practice.

Sustaining the Impact:

Strategies that have worked to bring about improvement were maintained tenaciously, refined and sustained, but were less successful last year than the year before. Data was analysed to identify the reasons for a drop in attendance so that they could be addressed to ensure improvement is achieved promptly.

In particular, it proved important not to be complacent and to keep staff, children and parents on board with the importance of good attendance and punctuality; in maintaining differentiated learning and the high level of 'fun' activities, such as educational visits, to help children experience self-improvement and make learning interesting so that children do not want to miss school.