

Currie Primary School**Ref No: 101-0063**

An holistic approach in a primary school in a demanding social context.

Context:

Currie Primary is in Duncairn in North Belfast (ranked in the top 10% of socially deprived wards) on the interface between Tiger's Bay and Newington. The percentage of children entitled to free school meals has increased to 82% over the past few years; the percentage of children with additional needs has grown to almost 60%. The school currently has 173 pupils within the main school and 24 within the Sunshine Playgroup. In line with the school motto 'Light a Light for the Future' the staff focus on developing positive and supportive working relationships with families and set out to provide an 'oasis' for children in a challenging community context through a calm, nurturing and collaborative ethos through which all are able to feel ownership of 'our' school.

Intervention:

Over the past four years the profile of good attendance has been raised through a number of strategies:

- Sharing information with parents through newsletters, online, by text service, workshops, the distribution of the *Attendance Matters* publication and one-to-one consultations. Raising parents' awareness of the importance of attendance and the impact of absence has improved the communication of reasons for absence, increased the reluctance of pupils to miss school and significantly reduced 'birthday-related' absences.
- The appointment of a school attendance officer has been very successful in supporting teacher monitoring and promoting of good attendance. A staff workshop led by the officer with the school secretary improved absence recording by staff.
- The attendance officer developed an action plan within the school development plan with specific targets of 93% which are shared with all stakeholders and the children.
- Competitions are run between classes and across the school with monthly "100%" and random 'spot-sticker' mornings. The children respond better to shorter term rewards than the annual "100%" prize. Prizes each term ensure attendance remains a focus.
- School displays and reminders of the importance of both good attendance and punctuality are displayed and regularly refreshed to avoid familiarity.
- Parents and families are welcomed and supported through a nurturing ethos and open door policy. Through positive working relationship parents can expect non-judgemental help which has improved attendance significantly.
- Children who arrive late are welcomed, and any anxiety supported, rather than making them face consequences. Lateness is addressed supportively with parents later.

- An extensive programme with our partner school, Holy Family, supports parents, helps to build their capacity, self esteem, confidence, ultimately prepares them to return to study or work and also promotes cross community relations. The programme includes: workshops, ParentingNI courses, Barnardos, PIPS & Incredible Years, Top Tips, Fingerprint Learning, Ulster University courses and DNLHP programmes.
- The school works close with an extensive network of support agencies. The FAST programme, which is funded by Save the Children, extends the school community, develops relationships and provides opportunities to support families. It comprises three staff members, three parents and three local community-worker partners and gives parents confidence to attend school events.
- Sharing good practice, ideas and contacts with other schools through the North Belfast Principals' Group is a recent development.
- The schools provides a nurture group (Sunshine Room) which has had a significant impact on attendance for those children who find it difficult to come to school. A teddy bear in the school foyer is used to provide comfort for young children who are anxious walking into school. Other children access the Sunshine Room before school begins and have supervised access to the Quiet Room and Calming Corners. Parents have also accessed this resource to alleviate separation anxiety.

Impact:

Monthly monitoring has improved attendance with an increase of 3% over the past four years: the school sustains 92%. Parents are aware that the school has high expectations; children and parents work together to reach the school target. Parents must meet the principal or submit a written request for a leave of absence; this has contributed to a reduction in casual days off. The introduction of an absence note has resulted in reluctance to 'stay off' and an increase in the accuracy of recording. Regular meetings with the education welfare officer ensure that parents are aware that poor attendance is not tolerated and action will be taken.

Increase in overall school attendance links to evidence of sustained improvement in learning outcomes which are shared with parents. A pastoral workshop is repeated every autumn to focus on attendance, safeguarding and medical issues. Sharing high expectations for attendance has had a significant impact on overall attendance: parents are reminded of the impact of missing only a few days during the school year. Staff attendance remains very high and teachers and senior leaders provide positive role models to both pupils and parents.