

**Dunclug College****Ref No: 321-0208**

*A strategy combining the development of motivating curricular and career pathways, a Home-school link officer, a well-embedded tracking procedure, prompt contact with parents after 3 days absence, a staff mentoring system for poor attenders and extrinsic rewards.*

**Context:**

Dunclug College is a controlled, non-selective co-educational 11-18 school. Enrolment has increased significantly in the last eighteen months due to the closure of another local non-selective school as part of Area Planning; the integration, and motivation, of large numbers of new pupils, with significant needs and at a variety of stages, has been a priority. The percentage of FSME pupils has risen to around 40% and the school reports a variety in parental attitudes to the value of education. A minority of pupils come from a farming background; the proportion of seasonal absences has fallen in recent years. The school reports a rise in absences due to: bereavement and the consequent issues as more grandparents play a leading role in the pupils' lives; mental health issues; persistent health issues such as diabetes, which appear to the school to be on the increase; and condoned time out of school.

**Intervention:**

1. The consistent use of SIMS class and Lesson Monitor, including e-mail alerts when a register isn't completed. The school reports that the practice is well embedded and new staff are trained in its correct use.
2. A consistent focus by all staff and sharing of information; attendance is a standing item on the agendas for heads of year (HoY) and Form Teacher meetings. Form teachers contact parents on the third day of unexplained absence; one of the job-sharing school nurses is employed for the other half of the week as the 'Home-school Link Officer' and will follow up absences well before the 85% figure. This intervention is critical for preventing students dropping into poor attendance habits which, once ingrained, become difficult to address long-term. The Home-Link Officer is a key member of the pastoral team, attends Care Team meetings and regular meetings of the Pastoral Forum.
3. The HoYs for years 11 and 13, (key transition points), report that they receive very detailed information from the previous HoYs. They work hard with particular individuals to create career pathways and curricula which will motivate those pupils to attend and succeed.
4. The Head of Pastoral Care meets the Education Welfare Officer once a week to discuss individual cases. He also meets each Head of Year on a weekly basis, with Attendance matters occurring as a regular focus.
5. The pastoral structure within the school places a high priority on the integration of the pastoral and the academic. The focus is on learning so that good attendance and behaviour are expected, rather than taught, with expectations being high.
6. The school has a dedicated and fixed Head of Year and Assistant for each year group, enabling them to build expertise at that particular stage. Form Teachers also volunteer to act as Mentors for pupils who need support with various issues, including attendance.

7. Class merits are awarded for monthly attendance; prizes for full attendance are awarded at the Annual Prize-giving. Achievement of potential is promoted as the inevitable reward for good attendance – promoted through whole school, key stage and year assemblies, class conference time and within the pastoral curriculum.
8. The parents of every pupil meet his or her Form Teacher at the end of September as part of target-setting week; attendance will be discussed here, as well as the subject targets based on YELLIS, the previous year's attainment, the work in September and teacher judgment. Communication with parents is sustained and effective.

**Impact:**

1. Over the last three years, attendance has been at 94% (2013), 93% (2014) and 94.8% (2015) – consistently above the NI average for similar schools. With the progress made in the last school year, the current target is 96%. When challenged, pastoral staff say, *'If you don't aim high, you won't get the result you want.'*
2. For individual pupils in years 11 and 13, a carefully individually designed and chosen curriculum made a huge difference. (For one example, a pupil with low attendance in year 10 was guided towards a curriculum centred around a community sports qualification (equivalent to four GCSEs) and a clear pathway to a career in sports; as a consequence, he experienced high levels of success, was more motivated to attain the necessary qualifications in English and maths, and his attendance improved dramatically).

The school is monitoring carefully a situation where a shift from a single Education Welfare Officer (EWO) who works closely with the school, to a number of EWOs, depending on the pupil's postal address, to ensure that consistency and prompt action can be maintained.