

Holy Child Primary and Nursery School

Ref No: 203-0381

A strategy combining the promotion of the value of education and close monitoring and action on absence.

Context:

Holy Child Primary School is a Catholic Primary school situated in the Creggan, an area of high social deprivation, with a free school meal entitlement figure of 85% in October 2015. The current enrolment is 256 pupils including 53 pupils in the Nursery Unit. The staff includes 12 teachers and 15 non-teaching support staff. Inspiring educational aspiration is an on-going but essential challenge for the school and increasing parental engagement and pupil attendance are two key objectives in meeting this challenge.

Intervention:

The school adopted a two pronged approach in its strategy to meet its target on attendance: promoting the value of good attendance and monitoring attendance patterns and habits.

Promotional work includes:

- Monthly class attendance stars and month on month attendance league board.
- Bronze, Silver and Gold individual pupil attendance awards plus most improved when applicable.
- Newsletter updates to parents and displays within school.
- Feedback to parents at all parent teacher meetings and on annual report. Principal comment always made when attendance is under 90%.
- Ensuring pre- and after- school activities that support parents and encourage attendance for example, Breakfast Club/Library/ICT in the morning and wide range of extra-curricular including the Kids Club 3-5pm daily (Extended Schools Funding).
- Attendance is always an agenda item at Nursery/P1 meetings.
- Ensuring classroom activities at end of term are attractive enough to promote full attendance on these days.
- Consulting with pupils about school life to ensure it's a happy place to be.
- Primary Attendance Matters programme in the Spring Term.

Monitoring Work includes:

- Monthly meeting with Education Welfare Officer (EWO) plus regular phone calls and emails.
- Letters to and meetings with parents when child's attendance is under 85% (Meetings are most effective as they are more personal and build a relationship with the parent).

- Teachers email the principal on days when children are absent, prompting an immediate response, generally a phone call but on occasions can lead to a home visit.
- Prompt referral to the EWO if improvement is not achieved.
- Informal conversations between Principal and target pupils at least once a month to encourage attendance by praise.

Impact:

Standards overall in the school have improved as evidenced in improvements in an ETI follow-up inspection report, November 2013 which stated that the quality of education provided is very good and that the school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

The improvement in standards is demonstrated by the reduction in underachievement:

	Literacy Underachievement	Numeracy Underachievement
May 2011	26%	36%
May 2015	19%	27 %

Other notable improvements are:

- Greater awareness of all staff of children/families with attendance patterns of concern.
- Better communication of concerns to the principal.
- Increased pupil motivation to win certificates or homework passes for best class of the month.
- Extra-curricular activities before and after school have provided essential family support for many who would otherwise be susceptible to poor attendance due to stresses in the home.
- Disseminating the attendance procedures regularly to parents and consistency of approach in the implementation has resulted in less hostility to the intervention process – it is understood and accepted by parents.
- Improved attendance rates on final day of term due to special events programme.
- A significant number of pupil success stories showing an improvement for individuals: for example, under 85% up by a minimum of 10% and even up to 100% at the end of an academic year.