

Lowwood Primary School**Ref No: 101-6537**

A successful rewards-based approach to developing a culture of good attendance and punctuality in a primary school with a high percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

Context:

Lowwood Primary School is situated in North Belfast with over 60% of the children entitled to free school meals. Although attendance historically had not been identified as a significant problem (being 93.5% in 2009/10) the school was aware that this masked underlying issues which needed to be targeted for improvement, namely a need to:

- create a whole school culture where attendance/punctuality is encouraged and valued;
- improve the levels of punctuality within school; and
- reduce the percentage of children in the school falling below 85% attendance (12.57% in 2009/10).

Intervention:

In order to embed fully a culture where punctuality/attendance is valued the school engaged with all its stakeholders to develop a strategy to promote positive change. The strategy was launched in September 2011 and the school communicated its vision for improved attendance at the parent-teacher meetings. The education welfare officer addressed the meetings, outlining the advisory and support role of the service. Parents were encouraged to 'buy into' the new culture and take responsibility for playing their part to ensure their children attended school regularly and punctually. The strategy of building a positive culture where punctuality/attendance was valued and supported was implemented through the following measures:

- Introduction of individual attendance/punctuality sticker cards. Children receive a sticker every Friday for attending all week and a sticker for being on time. Rewards are presented to children on a termly basis for completing their sticker chart. The school's attendance percentage in 2009/10 was 93.5% and it was targeted to increase to above 95%.
- A weekly class attendance cup is presented in assembly.
- Class attendance percentages are reported in the school's newsletter.
- Yearly attendance certificates are presented to pupils.
- Targeting attendance at the school's breakfast club to increase from one third of the school population (2009/10) to one half of the school population.
- Provision of additional support as appropriate to our most vulnerable families through external agencies including Save the Children, the FAST (Families and Schools Together) project and counselling services.

- Teachers keep attendance/punctuality logs for each class tracking lateness and absence and any subsequent action taken.
- Regular senior management meetings monitor attendance issues and take action through appropriate interventions.

Impact:

The most significant gain is that a 'real buzz' was generated in regard to the initiative. Parents see the value of improved attendance in terms of their children's concentration, achievements, attitude to work and wellbeing.

The children enjoyed completing their sticker charts and receiving a reward. Much positive anecdotal evidence gathered related to children insisting parents got them into school on time so they could 'get their sticker'.

The weekly whole school assembly when the class attendance cup was awarded allowed the benefits of good attendance to be communicated positively and attendance at the breakfast club reached the target of half the school enrolment..

The whole staff gained a better understanding of the needs of the most vulnerable families and are able to target appropriate intervention more effectively.

The statistical data supports the improvements observed and the culture of good punctuality/attendance is now more embedded in school life.

Year	Percentage Attendance	Percentage under 85%
2009/10	93.5	12.57
2010/11	94.4	8.33
2011/12	94.6	8.24
2012/13	94.7	7.56
2013/14	95.7	3.74