

An holistic approach in a Dixon Plan school in which an attendance officer, close staff engagement and the modelling of good staff attendance are key features.

Context:

Lurgan College is a 14-19 controlled Senior High School (selective grammar) which forms part of the Craigavon two-tier system of junior and senior post-primary schools. The school draws the majority of its pupils from Lurgan Junior High, with which the college has a close liaison. The school's enrolment is currently 455 pupils with 17 pupils on the special needs register and a free school meal entitlement of 9%. Improving and sustaining pupil attendance rates is an ongoing priority.

Intervention:

The school recognises the strong correlation between attendance and underachievement and put a number of strategies in place to improve pupil attendance. The main focus of the plan is the appointment of a teacher with specific responsibility for following up attendance issues. As attendance officer, the teacher is a key member of the pastoral care team and the learning guidance team, supplemented by the establishment of a focus group which implements the following strategies:

- Communication with all staff regarding the high expectations for attendance and punctuality.
- The importance of good attendance is reinforced at school events such as assembly, open night and parents' evenings.
- In Personal Development lessons, the pupils are shown a presentation highlighting the correlation between attendance and exam performance. Guest speakers from industry and local business stress the importance of good attendance for future employment.
- Developing a consistent approach to recording late arrivals.
- Attendance is one of the factors addressed by the learning guidance team when interviewing underachievers.
- The attendance officer is alerted after three consecutive days of absence.
- Pupils whose attendance gives cause for concern are spoken to by the head of year and the attendance officer.
- A letter is sent parents who remove pupils out of school for unauthorised holidays.
- Pupils are referred to education welfare service when attendance falls below 85%.

- A reward system is in place to celebrate good attendance.
- Staff monitor punctuality every morning; a pattern of lateness results in lunchtime detention.
- Staff are excellent role models for attendance; the staff attendance rate is well above the average for other schools in the same former board area.

Impact:

Attendance has improved during the past four years and is above the NI average for some individual year groups. There has also been an improvement in the past four years in the GCSE results. The school is committed to reviewing strategies and adding new initiatives to further drive up standards in attendance and punctuality.