

**Nettlefield Primary School****Ref No: 101-0267**

*A strategy in a school with a high percentage of newcomer children which combines a Parent Support Worker, the active engagement of governors, community agencies and care in ensuring supporting parents through their home language.*

**Context:**

Nettlefield Primary School and Nursery Unit is a controlled school in East Belfast with an increasing enrolment of 357 children. Thirty-two percent of the children have newcomer status and just over 75% are entitled to free school meals. The number of children absent from school during term time for a 'home country visit' impacts significantly on the attendance average which was 91% in 2014-15. Other significant impacts in the previous school year were an outbreak of chicken pox in the foundation stage and the low attendance of two children with significant medical difficulties. A number of families left without notification and returned to their home country; their children remained on the school register for six weeks before they could be removed.

**Intervention:**

The principal and governors work closely with the parents in an effort to raise awareness about the importance of regular attendance at school for all children. The school's parent support worker visits parents at home and provides practical assistance to enable them to get their children to school regularly. Her role is seen as advocate for the parents who may feel lost in the system. The principal and parent support worker are visible in the school playground every morning to engage with parents and are on first name terms with parents which has an impact of helping parents feel it is their school and they are welcome and supported there.

The principal has put in place a number of monitoring strategies for attendance including:

- fortnightly monitoring meetings between the principal and Education Welfare Officer;
- principal attendance at case conferences and Looked After Children conferences;
- more accurate reporting of absence by teaching staff which is monitored by clerical staff;
- regular reports by the principal to the governors;
- attendance rewards presented in assembly, with parents invited; and
- written reminders to parents of the need to restrict holidays to out-of-term times and prompt contact with parents if concerns arise.

The parents are also supported by the Trust Family Support Hub and the East Belfast Alternatives 'Hub in the Community'. The Hub in the Community is staffed by local people who work with the children in years 6 and 7, both in the school and through home visits. They provide a transition programme in the school and, as they are from the community, they talk to the children from experience and at their level. The school also works very closely with the Education Welfare Service, and the principal shares outcomes or information with relevant staff.

Attendance slips have been created to give parents with limited English or literacy a simple way of recording a written reason for absence for the school. Lateness slips are also available. A new parent booklet has been created for children who join the school after Year One. This includes a holiday list and where necessary an interpreter is brought in to ensure that parents understand.

**Impact:**

- Attendance figures are gradually rising – 92.2% so far in 2015-16.
- Focus on punctuality has also had a positive impact on children wanting to be in school and achieve rewards.
- Parents are willing to discuss with the principal any reluctance their children have to come to school.
- Prizes and reward charts are in place.
- Anecdotal parent comments: “This feels like *our* school”.
- Parents accompany their children to school: noticeably more parents in playground.
- New uniform and an attractive environment has resulted in a greater pride in the school.