

St Brigid's College, Derry**Ref No: 223 0225**

An holistic approach in a post primary school, leading to improvement in chronically low attendance, better attainment at GCSE level and a reduction in suspension rates.

Context:

St Brigid's College is a maintained co-educational 11-18 all-ability school. It has a free school meal entitlement of 65%, rising to almost 80% in some individual year groups. In the twenty years prior to 2014-2015, the school had failed to achieve an annual whole-school attendance of 90%. On the appointment of new leadership in 2013, the school identified a target of an annual attendance rate of 90% as one of the key milestones in its new phase of development.

Intervention:

The school decided to focus on improving the basic aspects associated with attendance in a team-based approach engaging the support of pupils and parents and challenging authorities in order to remove barriers to good attendance. The most effective elements of the school's action plan were:

- An initial focus on Year 12 cohort in 2013-2014; the practice and experience gained was translated into a whole-school agenda in 2014-2015.
- Clarification and development of the roles and responsibilities of the attendance co-ordinator, the form teachers, the heads of year, the special needs coordinator, and the heads of key stages to provide a more collaborative and cohesive approach to improving attendance via an agreed action-based approach.
- Improved communication with parents, such as using monthly information updates to share information on the annual attendance target and telephoning the parents of absent pupils in the morning and/or evening.
- Using extrinsic recognition and rewards at form class and whole-school level.
- Organisation of the school timetable and school events to protect attendance at critical points of the year, such as holiday periods.
- Communication with parents who removed children from school during term time for unauthorised holidays.
- Whole-school evaluation of annual attendance involving teaching and teaching support staff.
- Targets set for the next academic year based on base-line data.
- Better links between school pastoral team and education welfare service.
- Securing support from the Education Authority Traveller Support Officer.
- A culture based on pupils taking responsibility and reward for associated improvement, as well as high standards, in attendance and other key pastoral matters.

Impact:

The leadership of the school is now aware of the barriers to good attendance and is putting effective strategies in place to address poor attendance. There is now a team-based culture of promoting and sustaining good attendance with clear lines of accountability at pupil, parent and staff level.

In 2014-2015 the school achieved its target of reaching at least 90% attendance and this was also a year of record GCSE results in the school at grades A* - C, A* - E, and A* - G and a reduction of 40% in the number of days of pupil suspensions.