

St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor**Ref No: 403-6148**

An example of addressing poor attendance in the early years through improved tracking and prompt follow-up with parents.

Context:

The school is situated in an area which has been designated as a Neighbourhood Renewal Area. Enrolment currently stands at 410. Approximately 20% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The annual attendance figure for the school has remained around 95%. The focus of the school has been to promote the importance of punctuality and attendance to parents of children in the early years. The school was concerned about the number of unauthorised absences and noticed that there was a higher percentage of absence in foundation stage classes.

Intervention:

The Pastoral Care co-ordinator has responsibility for co-ordinating attendance improvement strategies. These include:

- Discussions with teachers on reasons for absences. Parents are required to inform the school of the reason for a pupil's absence. If no reason is given the parents are contacted by phone to account for absence. If a child is off for an extended period for medical reasons a letter from the child's doctor is requested.
- There is a clear system and procedure in place to track attendance and so address concerns at an early stage.
- Meeting with the education welfare officer (EWO) on a six-weekly basis to discuss attendance figures and referrals.
- Parents are informed in writing when a child's attendance drops below 88%.
- Parents of children whose attendance does not improve are invited to the school to discuss ways to improve attendance.
- The EWO has addressed parents at the Year 1 Induction Day in June to explain the impact absenteeism has on a child's education.
- Attendance figures feature on the school end-of-year report accompanied by the DENI breakdown of 'days missed percentages' with a teacher's comment regarding percentage levels e.g. Excellent to Poor.

Impact:

There is a more consistent approach by teachers to recording absences and pupils arriving late. The number of unauthorised absences has decreased by 21% as reasons are sought for absences. Teachers take a more proactive role in contacting parents when no reason for absence is given using a school pro-forma. Children are given merits as part of the school's reward system for good attendance so there is a greater understanding in the school community that attendance is important and valued. Parents are now fully aware that the school tracks punctuality and attendance. Discussions with parents have shown that they are more aware of their children's attendance figures in real terms (percentage data is also given as number of days missed) and have a better understanding of the need for good attendance.

The school's Raising Standards Team (RST) has found a correlation between underachievement and school attendance and is monitoring standards to see if improved attendance leads to improved achievement. Targets were set by the RST with regard to children's achievement - monitored closely and progress reported to the SMT. Another positive impact for the school is that staff feel very well supported by the EWO. Attendance has improved among children in the Foundation Year classes. Our designated teacher as part of her PQH(NI) training tracked and analysed data from the Foundation Stage over a period of 18 months and found an initial increase of over 3% in attendance rates following interventions which we put in place.