

St Patrick's Primary School, Newry**Ref No: 503 1158**

A strategy involving the award of the 'Welcoming School' accreditation, in a context with a culturally varied home population.

Context:

St Patrick's Primary School has a school enrolment of 433, which includes 53 children in the nursery unit. The school has been serving the Meadow/Armagh Road area of Newry for 55 years. Many of the pupils live in neighbourhood renewal areas and there is a significant amount of urban deprivation; the free school meal entitlement is 54%. There are 12 children from Traveller backgrounds, 28 newcomer children who live in homes where there is no use of the English language and 99 children on the Code of Practice, 18 of which are at stage 5 with a statement of special needs.

The school reports that many of the parents feel disconnected from the school. There is a history of late arrivals and poor attendance.

Intervention:

Three years ago, St Patrick's was one of the first schools to appoint a parental engagement co-ordinator (PEC), funded by Newry Cluster Extended Schools. One of the strategies was to formulate a committee called the *Friends of St Patrick* to develop informal but successful connections to the school. There are 20 parents on the committee, which has achieved charity status. The aim is for the group to be even more representative of the school population.

- The school devised materials/packs to make new nursery and P1 parents and carers to feel at ease. All parents and carers are invited into their child's class assembly and to the many school shows staged during the year. St Patrick's achieved Welcoming Schools accreditation 3 years ago.
- Awards for 100% attendance were introduced.
- The school works closely with the Traveller Education Support Service to enrich the relationship with this group of parents and pupils.
- The school provides two homework clubs for newcomer children.
- Communication with parents of newcomers is enhanced by use of the interpreter/translator from a linked post-primary school.
- On the first day of absence, contact with home is made by the school secretary. A record is maintained of unanswered calls.
- Teachers have responsibility in their classrooms for recording attendance and lateness. The school administrator puts the data into the SIMS system. The education welfare officer is responsible for addressing concerns of attendance below 85% and principal/vice-principal have the responsibility of speaking to parents in school or making home visits.

Impact:

In the school's Welcoming Schools accreditation award it was noted that, '*communication with parents is consistent and varied through the use of an up-to-date website, letters, invitations and information booklets. All communication is colourful and inviting and the language used is welcoming. Parents are involved in school life.*'

The school monitors closely the attendance data and has had success with specific interventions with newcomer families and reluctant attenders. The impact in terms of learning outcomes is simply that attendance at school means better access to the curriculum.

Year	Whole school Percentage Attendance	Traveller Percentage Attendance	Newcomer Percentage Attendance
2009/10	92%	83%	84.6%
2014/15	93%	89%	91.2%