RESEARCH INTO IMPROVING ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOLS SERVING DEPRIVED AREAS - APPENDICES PART I

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Education & Training

RESEARCH REPORT

Northern Ireland **Statistics & Research** agency

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C4EO for the sector from the sector

Client

Department of Education

Project

Research into Improving Attendance in Schools Serving Deprived Areas

APPENDICES – PART I

Division

Consultancy

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ATTENDANCE STATISTICS

Referrals to Education Welfare Service – 2002/03 to 2010/11

A review of pupil referrals to the Education Welfare Service[1] for the school years from 2002/03 to 2010/011 shows that:

The overall number of referrals declined from 11,744 to 3,938 (a reduction of 66%).

Overall, Key Stages 3 and 4 (Years 8 to 12) accounted for around 70-75% whilst Key Stages 1 and 2 (Years 1 to 7) comprised around 25% - 30%.

Initially the overall majority of referrals (approximately 40%) were in Years 11 to 12 (2002/03-2003/04); however in 2004/05-2010/11 the majority (around 40%) were in Years 8 to 10.The distribution of referrals is not consistently dominated by one Education and Library Board (ELB). Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) have the highest proportion of referrals for five of the nine time periods studied. Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) have the highest proportion for 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, although there is only a marginal difference between the two boards (in 2009-2010 there were 17 more referrals and in 2010-2011 15 more referrals by SELB in comparison with BELB).

Referrals from all of the ELBs decreased in the time period, however BELB referrals as a proportion of the whole increased by 6.9% (from 18% in 2002/03 to 24.9% in 2010/11) and SELB referrals by 4.7% (from 20.6% in 2002/03 to 25.3% in 2010/11).

Figure 1: Referrals to the Education Welfare Service (2002-03 to 2010-11) by ELB
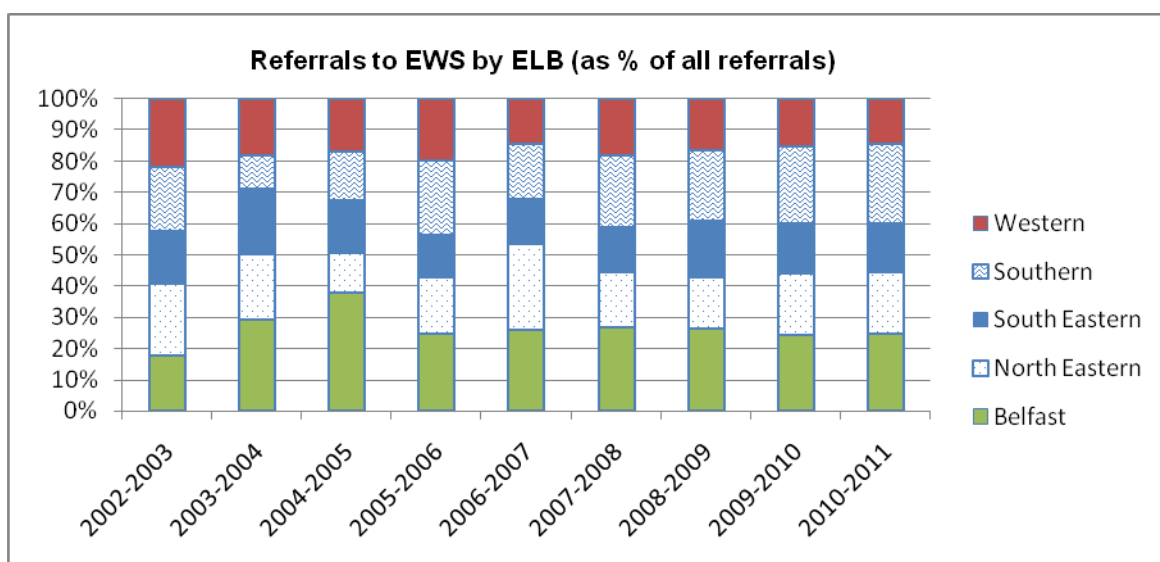
Source: Based on DE statistics

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[1] Statistics accessed from : www.deni.gov.uk/index/21-pupils-parents-pg/21-pupils_parents-school_attendance_pg-2.htm

Table 1: Number of Pupils referred to the Education Welfare Service (2002-03 to 2010-11)

	Education and Library Board	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
No. of referrals	Belfast	2116	2359	2142	1105	1332	1157	1104	1020	982
	Western	2553	1451	956	885	737	775	692	632	574
	North Eastern	2680	1677	724	816	1401	750	704	821	776
	South Eastern	1972	1699	947	606	731	608	756	676	609
	Southern	2423	855	864	1055	882	985	940	1037	997
	Total	**11744**	**8041**	**5633**	**4467**	**5083**	**4275**	**4196**	**4186**	**3938**
Referrals as % of all	Belfast	18.0%	29.3%	38.0%	24.7%	26.2%	27.1%	26.3%	24.4%	24.9%
	Western	21.7%	18.0%	17.0%	19.8%	14.5%	18.1%	16.5%	15.1%	14.6%
	North Eastern	22.8%	20.9%	12.9%	18.3%	27.6%	17.5%	16.8%	19.6%	19.7%
	South Eastern	16.8%	21.1%	16.8%	13.6%	14.4%	14.2%	18.0%	16.1%	15.5%
	Southern	20.6%	10.6%	15.3%	23.6%	17.4%	23.0%	22.4%	24.8%	25.3%
	Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: DE

Summary Attendance Statistics 2007/08 to 2010/11

Attendance and non-attendance rates for primary and post primary schools remained relatively stable. Between 2007/08 and 2010/2011 primary attendance increased by 0.1% (from 94.8% to 94.9% of total half days) while post primary attendance increased by 0.4% (from 92.2% to 92.6% of total half days).

Considering non-attendance, the rate of **authorised absence was relatively unchanged**. Primary schools saw a small decrease of 0.4% (from 4.1% to 3.7% of total half days) and post primary 0.6% (from 5.2% to 4.6% of total half days), while the rate of unauthorised absence increased by 0.3% (to 1.4%) and 0.2% (to 2.8%) respectively in relation to percentage of total half days.

The most **common reason for authorised** absence in all schools was illness, which between 2007/08 and 2010/11 accounted for between 58.9% and 66.6% of all absent half days in primary schools and between 47.7% and 54.8% in post primary schools. In terms of total half days, illness accounts for between 3.0% and 3.5% in primary schools and between 3.5% and 4.3% in post primary schools.

The most **common reason for unauthorised absence** did change from 2007/08 to 2010/2011. In 2007/08 'other' represented 0.8% of total half days in primary schools and 2.1% in post-primary. By 2011 this had decreased to 0.2% and 0.5% respectively. Concurrently, 'no reason yet provided' increased from 0.1% of total half days in primary schools and 0.3% in post-primary schools to 0.8% and 2.1% respectively. This is primarily due to coding changes, as historically 'no reason yet provided' was a temporary code which was later changed to 'other', however since 2009 schools were no longer asked to transfer the figures and so this may have contributed to the increase and decrease in these categories.

Detailed Statistics – Primary Schools

Overall

In primary schools in 2007/08 5.2% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 4.1% authorised and 1.1% unauthorised absence. This decreased to 5.1% in 2008/09, consisting of

3.9% authorised and 1.2% unauthorised absence. In 2009/10 this figure increased to 5.3% of all half days, with 4% authorised and 1.3% unauthorised absence.

The **most common reason for absence** in primary schools was illness, which is an authorised absence and accounted for 3.5% of the total half days in 2007/08, 3.3% in 2008/09 and 3.4% in 2009/10.

Controlled integrated primary schools had the **highest levels of average overall absence** (5.6% of the total half days in 2007/08 and 5.9% in 2008/09 and 2009/10), while voluntary schools had the lowest (3.2% of the total half days in each year).

The **highest overage overall absence for primary schools** was recorded by the Belfast Education and Library Board (6.2% of the total days in 2007/08; 6.3% in 2008/09 and 6.2% in 2009/10). The North Eastern Education and Library Board reported the lowest average overall absence (4.7% of the total half days missed in 2007/08; 4.5% in 2008/09 and 4.7% in 2009/10).

Overall absence was higher for **urban primary schools** (5.7% of the total half days in 2007/08; 5.6% in 2008/09 and 5.7% in 2009/10) than for **rural primary schools** (4.4% of the total half days in 2007/08; 4.2% in 2008/09 and 4.5% in 2009/10).

Average overall absence rates were similar for **boys** (5.2% of the total half days in 2007/08 and 2008/09 and 5.3% in 2009/10) and **girls** (5.2% in 2007/08; 5.1% in 2008/09 and 5.2% in 2009/10).

The **highest average overall absence** occurred in Year 1 (5.9% of the total half days were missed in 2007/08; 5.7% in 2008/09 and 5.9% in 2009/10)

Traveller children had a **higher average overall absence rate than any other ethnic group**, missing 29.9% of the total half days in 2007/08; 32% in 2008/09 and 29% in 2009/10. This compares with 7.2% for children from a minority ethnic background in 2007/08; 7.5% in 2008/09 and 7.4% in 2009/10. White children had a lower overall absence rate at 4.1% in 2007/08; 4.9% in 2008/09 and 5.1% in 2009/10.

Percentage of enrolments at primary school by average number of days overall absence 2007-2010

Of all pupils enrolled in primary schools the consistently **highest percentage of children** were absent for between 0.5-5 days (35.7% in 2007/08; 36.8% in 2008/09; 34.8% 2009/10).

The **percentage of pupils with no absence** only changed slightly from 6.7% in 2007/08 to 7.4% in 2008/09 before decreasing to 6.5% in 2009/10.

The **percentage of pupils enrolled who were absent for more than 25 days** also remained relatively stable (6.2% in 2007/08; 5.8% 2008/09; 6.1% 2009/10).

Percentage of enrolments at primary school by overall absence rates 2007-2010

In the years 2007/08 the **majority of pupils** (51.4%) had an absence rate of 0.1% to 4% of total half days.

In the years 2008/09 and 2009/10 more than half of pupils enrolled at primary schools (56.7% and 55.3% respectively) had an absence rate of between 0.01% and 5.00% of the total half days.

The number of pupils with an absence rate of more than 15% was reasonably low throughout 2007-10 (5.2% in 2007/08; 5.3% in 2008/09; 5.5% in 2009/10).

Characteristics of primary school pupils enrolled with absence levels of more than 15% in 2007-2010

Around half (50.1% in 2007/08; 48.6% in 2008/09; 48.7% in 200/10) were from **Catholic maintained schools.**

Over one-fifth (23.5% in 2007/08; 24.5% in 2008/09; 22.4% in 2009/10) were from the **Belfast Education and Library Board.**

The largest proportion of pupils (18.6% in 2007/08; 19% in 2008/09; 18.6% in 2009/10) were in **Year 1**.

Attendance at primary school by free school meal entitlement 2007-2010

Overall absences generally increased in line with the percentage of pupils enrolled who were eligible for free school meals. In **schools where less than 10% of pupils enrolled were eligible for free school meals**, the average overall absence figures were lower (4% of total days in 2007/08; 3.9% 2008/09; 4% 2009/10). In comparison, **schools where more than 50% of pupils enrolled were eligible for school meals** had higher absence figures (8.3% in 2007/08; 8.5% in 2008/09; 8.4% in 2009/10). Since the level of free school meal entitlement is indicative of levels of deprivation, the data suggests that absence tends to be higher in more disadvantaged areas.

Levels of unauthorised absence also increased in line with the number of pupils enrolled who were eligible for school meals. In schools where less than 10% were eligible there was an average 0.1% increase in unauthorised absence in the years 2007-10 (from 0.6% per total half days to 0.7%), while in comparison schools where more than 50% were eligible there was an average 0.5% increase (from 2.5% per total half days to 3%).

Attendance at primary schools in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas 2008-2010

At 7.4%, the **overall absence rate** for pupils living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas is 2.8% (2008/09) and 2.5% (2009/10) higher than for pupils who did not live in an NRA (4.6% of the total half days and 4.9% respectively).

The percentage of pupils recorded as having **unauthorised absence** increased in the years 2007-10 regardless of whether they lived in an NRA or not, however the highest increase of 0.3% (from 2.2% of the total half days in 2008/09 to 2.5% in 2009/10) was attributed to those who did, compared to 0.1% for those who did not (from 1% in 2008/09 to 1.1% in 2009/10).

Detailed Statistics – Post Primary Schools

Overall

In post primary schools in 2007/08, 7.8% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 5.2% authorised and 2.6% unauthorised absence. This decreased to 7.7% in 2008/09, consisting of 5.1% authorised and 2.5% unauthorised absence. In 2009/10 the percentage of absence overall remained the same (with authorised absence of 5.2% and unauthorised absence of 2.6%).

The **most common reason for absence** in post primary schools was illness, which is an authorised absence and accounted for 4.3% of the total half days in 2007/08 and 4.2% in 2008/09 and 2009/10.

Secondary schools had the **highest levels of overall absence** (9.7% of the total half days in 2007/08 and 9.4% in 2008/09 and 2009/10) while grammar schools were considerably lower (4.7% of the total half days in 2007/08; 4.8% in 2008/09 and 4.9% in 2009/10).

Controlled integrated schools had the **greatest levels of overall absence** (11% of the total half days in 2007/08; 10.6% in 2008/09 and 10.8% in 2009/10) while voluntary schools had the lowest (4.7% of the total half days in 2007/08 and 4.9% in 2008/09 and 2009/10).

The **highest overall absence** for post primary schools was recorded by the South Eastern Education and Library Board (8.4% of the total half days in 2007/08, 8.1% in 2008/09 and 8.3% in 2009/10). The North Eastern and Southern Education and Library Board reported the lowest average overall absence in 2007/08 (7.6% of the total half days), while in 2008/09 and 2009/10 this was achieved by the North Eastern Education and Library Board alone (7.2% and 7.4% of the total half days respectively).

Average overall absence rates were similar for **boys** (7.9% in 2007/08 and 7.8% in 2008/09 and 2009/10) and **girls** (7.7% in 2007/08; 7.5% in 2008/09 and 7.6% in 2009/10).

Average absence levels increased steadily between Year 8 and Year 11 (from 5.7% to 9.3% of the total half days in 2007/08; from 5.6% to 9.1% in 2008/09 and from 5.8% to 9.1% in 2009/10). This decreased in Year 12 to 8.6% in 2007/08; 8.3% in 2008/09 and 8.2% in 2009/10.

Traveller children had a higher overall absence rate than any other **ethnic group**, missing 45.2% of their total half days in 2007/08; 47.1% in 2008/09 and 46.7% in 2009/10. This compares with 7.7% for white children in 2007/08; 7.6% in 2008/09 and 7.7% in 2009/10. Children from a minority ethnic background had the lower overall absence rate at 7.1% of the total half days in 2007/08; 7.2% in 2008/09 and 7.1% in 2009/10.

Percentage of enrolments at post primary school by average number of days absent 2007-2010

The percentage of pupils enrolled in Year 8 to Year 12 at post primary schools with **no absence** decreased by 0.7% in the years 2007-2010 (from 5.4% of enrolments in 2007/08 to 4.7% in 2009/10).

Most pupils enrolled were **absent for between 0.5 and 5 days** (27.9% of enrolments in 2007/08; 27% in 2008/09 and 26.3% in 2009/10).

The percentage of pupils who were **absent for more than 25 days** decreased by 0.7% in the years 2007-2010 (from 14.9% in 2007/08 to 14.2% in 2009/10).

Absence from post primary school by overall absence rates 2007-2010

The **most common overall absence rate** for pupils at post primary school was 0.1% to 4% in 2007/08 which accounted for 41.5% of enrolments.

In 2008/09 and 2009/10 the **most common overall absence rate** for pupils at post primary school was 0.01% to 5.00% which equated to 45.3% and 44.7% of enrolments respectively.

The percentage of enrolments which were **absent for over 15 days** increased by 0.1% from 12.6% in 2007/08 to 12.7% in 2009/10.

Characteristics of post primary pupils enrolled with absence levels of more than 15% in 2007-2010

Analysis of pupils with more than a 15% overall absence rate highlights that almost nine out of ten attended **secondary schools** (89.7% of pupils in 2007/08; 88.1% in 2008/09 and 87.9% in 2009/10.

In **2007/08 there were slightly more females** (52.3%) than males (47.7%) with a more than 15% overall absence rate. However this **changed in subsequent years when males achieved the higher percentage** (52.2% in 2008/09 and 51.8% in 2009/10).

The **largest proportion of pupils was in Year 11** (27.5% in 2007/08; 27.1% in 2008/09 and 26.7% in 2009/10).

Attendance at post primary school by free school meal entitlement 2007-2010

The figures indicate that generally absence levels increased in line with the percentage of pupils enrolled who were eligible for free school meals. In **schools where less than 10% of pupils enrolled were eligible for free school meals**; the average overall absence level was 4.8% of the total half days in 2007/08; 4.9% in 2008/09 and 2009/10. This compares with 13.3% of the total half days in 2007/08; 12.2% in 2008/09 and 12% in 2009/10 for **schools where more than 50% of the pupils enrolled were eligible for free school meals**. Since the level of free school meal eligibility is indicative of levels of deprivation, the data suggest that absence tends to be higher in more disadvantaged areas.

Rates of **unauthorised absence** mirror this theory. In schools where more than 50% of the pupils enrolled were eligible for free school meals the average rate of unauthorised absence per total half days was 6.8% (7.5% in 2007/08; 6.6% in 2008/09; 6.2% in 2009/10). This compares with 0.8% (0.8% 2007/08; 2008/09; 2009/10) of the total half days in schools where less than 10% of pupils enrolled were eligible for free school meals.

Attendance at post primary schools in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas 2008-2010

The **overall absence rate** for pupils living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas was higher than for pupils who did not. Those living in a NRA recorded an absence rate of 11.1% of the total half days in 2008/09 and 10.8% in 2009/10. This compares to 7% and 7.1% of total half days for those who did not in the same time periods.

Levels of **unauthorised absence** replicated this trend. In NRAs unauthorised absence was 4.5% of the total half days in 2008/09 and 4.4% in 2009/10. This rate was at least half in other areas (2.1% in 2008/09 and 2.2% in 2009/10). This suggests a direct link between a pupil's living environment and school attendance.

Comparison with England, Scotland and Wales 2007-2011

Between 2007/08 and 2010/2011 the **overall absence rates recorded in Northern Ireland** was just over 5% of the total half days in primary schools (5.2% in 2007/08; 5.1% in 2008/09; 5.3% in 2009/10 and 5.1% in 2010/11), and over 7% of the total half days in post-primary schools (7.8% in 2007/10; 7.7% in 2008/09 and 2009/10 and 7.4% in 2010/11).

Initially, overall absence rates in primary schools in Northern Ireland were marginally lower than in England (5.2% of the total half days in 2007/08 and 5.1% in 2008/09 compared with 5.4% and

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5.5% respectively in in England). By 2009/10 and 2010/11 absence levels for both had decreased and were equal (5.3% of the total half days in 2009/10 and 5.1% in 2010/11, with the latter being the lowest percentage for that year).

In contrast, the overall absence rate for post primary schools in Northern Ireland during 2007-2011 (7.7%) was higher than in England (7%). While both reduced their overall absence figures (Northern Ireland from 7.8% of the total half days in 2007 to 7.4% in 2011 and England from 7.3% to 6.5%) England was able to do this at a faster pace and consequently the gap between the two widened (from 0.5% in 2007/08 to 0.9% in 2010/11).

The overall absence rate for primary schools in Scotland increased during this time period (from 4.9% of the total half days in 2007 to 5.2% in 2011). The overall rate for post primary schools decreased from 8.9% in 2007/08 to 8.8% in 2009/10, and remained at this level up to and including 2010/11 (the highest percentage that year). Thus by 2011 the overall absence levels in primary schools in Scotland had overtaken Northern Ireland and the absence rate in post primary schools remained considerably higher.

In Wales the absence rates in the primary and post primary sector were consistently higher than in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, the level of overall absence in post primary schools in Wales only being surpassed by Scotland (by 0.2%) in 2010/11.

Table 2: Absence – NI Comparison with England, Scotland and Wales, 2010/11

	% of total days			
	Primary Schools		**Post Primary Schools**	
Country	**Unauthorised absence**	**Overall absence**	**Unauthorised absence**	**Overall absence**
Northern Ireland	1.4	5.1	2.8	7.4
England	0.7	5.1	1.4	6.5
Scotland	1.2	5.2	2.7	8.8
Wales	0.9	6.7	1.5	8.6
Source: Department of Education and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: Statistical First Release 2010/11: Summary Statistics				

Comparison with Ireland

(Based on information from: Special Report - Department of Education and Skills (Comptroller and Auditor General, September 2010))

School attendance is compulsory in Ireland from six to sixteen years of age or until completion of three years post-primary education, whichever is the later (or if not attending school, children must register as being in receipt of certain minimum education. In alternative cases, children may be educated in a place other than a recognised school (e.g. in the home or in a private school)).

School attendance levels have remained relatively stable over the period 2003/04 to 2008/09. In 2008/09, the average number of days missed per student was:

11.5 days out of a school year of 183 days at primary level; and
13 days out of a school year of 167 days at post-primary level.

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Table 3 outlines the level of absence in schools in Ireland, based on the following:

Average student days lost (i.e. pupil absence as a proportion of total school days in the year);
Proportion of students missing 20 days or more.

In the primary school sector, average student days lost and the proportion of students missing 20 days or more has decreased marginally, whereas the post-primary school sector has experienced a slight increase in both of these measures.

Table 3: Irish School Absence Rates

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Average pupil days lost						
Primary	6.3%	6.2%	6.3%	6.2%	6.5%	6.3%
Post-Primary	8.1%	7.9%	7.5%	7.6%	7.7%	7.9%
% of Pupils missing more than 20 days						
Primary	11.7%	11.1%	11.5%	10.9%	12.0%	11.8%
Post-Primary	17.2%	17.2%	16.0%	17.8%	16.9%	17.3%

Source: 2003/04 – 2007/08: Analysis of School Attendance data in primary and post-primary Schools 2006/07 and 2007/08, Educational Research Centre; 2008/09: Analysis by Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Table 4 reflects international absence rates for both mainstream and special schools for 2007/08. Non-attendance rates at primary level are higher in Ireland (5.7%) when compared to the UK (4.9%-5.3%), with the exception of Wales (6.7%). At post-primary level, only England has a lower non-attendance rate than that recorded in Ireland. The percentage of pupils missing more than 20 days in Ireland (16.9%) compares more favourably than that of Northern Ireland (21%) and Wales (20.5%) but less favourably than that of England (13.4%).

Table 4: International Absence rates 2007/08 Mainstream Schools

	Ireland	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales
Average pupil days lost					
Primary	5.7%	5.2%	5.3%	4.9%	6.7%
Post-Primary	7.7%	7.8%	7.3%	8.9%	9.1%
% of Pupils missing more than 20 days					
Primary	a*	10.4%	6.5%	-	16.9%
Post-Primary	16.9%	21.0%	13.4%	-	20.5%

Source:
- Department of Education (Table 3 in Attendance at Grant-aided Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools 2007/08, Department of Education, which gives the percentage of total half days lost) and
- Educational Research Centre, Analysis of School Attendance Data in Primary and Post-Primary schools, 2006-2008.
Note: a The percentage of Irish primary school students missing 20 days or more was not recalculated to take account of students in special schools.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this section, we present information from a review of literature related to the three research objectives.

The first section relates to the north of Ireland – in order to provide context and an overview of current approaches to managing attendance.

In the remaining sections, we set out information relevant to the three research objectives and drawing on literature from the following countries:

- England
- Scotland and Wales
- Ireland
- USA
- Australia
- New Zealand

The documents reviewed include broad / high level strategies as well as specific interventions and reviews/ evaluations of both of these. There are also descriptions of specific examples of programmes and initiatives which have been introduced to address attendance – some of these are focused on schools and children; others target parents. At the beginning of each section, we introduce each piece of research with a short summary of what it covers – and highlighting links to deprivation / disadvantage where relevant.

North of Ireland

1.1.1   People and Place - A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (DSD, 2003)

This strategy is concerned with tackling deprivation in urban areas; one of its aims is linked to improving attendance.

In June 2003, Government published this strategy document with the aim of tackling **deprivation** in urban neighbourhoods. The strategy derived from a consultation carried out in 2001/02 which stated the need for a more organised, co-ordinated and long-term approach to neighbourhood renewal projects.

Targets have been set for the Neighbourhood Renewal that complements those being used for each responsible Department. The focus of the targets is mainly on employability/employment and improving the standard of education, health and housing within the specific area. The Neighbourhood Renewal removes the differentials on these social needs to show the impact of the strategy and demonstrate the improvement in quality of life.

Targets outlined by the Neighbourhood Renewal programme included several domains such as Community, Economic, Social and Physical Renewal. Within the Social Renewal targets education attainment and the attitudes towards this are highlighted. The indicators used to analyse these targets include the attendance rates for each of the schools in each Neighbourhood Renewal Area. The

strategy **aimed to increase attendance rates in secondary schools serving most deprived neighbourhoods to the secondary school average**. There are no numeric targets specified for attendance.

Improving Pupil Attendance at School (NIAO, 2004)

Introduction

This report is concerned with interventions to improve attendance in general; these are applicable in areas of deprivation as well as elsewhere.

The Improving Pupil Attendance at School report (NIAO, 2004) examines what is being done to improve pupils' attendance at school. More specifically it examines what information is available on pupil attendance and the effectiveness of action being taken to promote improvements in this area. The report is based on information from Departmental and Board officials as well as surveys conducted with schools in order to establish the levels of pupil absence. **The survey results showed that on any one day 21,400 primary and post-primary school pupils will not be at school, with 4,900 having no valid reason for their absence. With around £1,600 of funding for each primary school pupil and £2,600 of funding for each post-primary school pupil, almost £12million of resources are being provided for these absent pupils each year (2004).**

Every school has a link Education and Welfare Officer (EWO) employed by the relevant Education and Library Board whose aim is to reduce unnecessary absences from school by offering support and help to pupils, parents and schools. A school will make a referral to Education Welfare Service when pupils' attendance is a cause for concern or when attendance drops below 85%.

The EWO can suggest things that parents can do to help improve matters, can offer to go to the school with parents to talk to the staff about any problems and what needs done or can attend the school on their behalf to try and find answers to their child's problems. The EWO can put parents in touch with other agencies that may be able to offer further advice and help. If the problem is of a practical nature, the EWO can also offer advice about free school meals, uniform grants and transport to school.

The report discusses a wide range of measures to deal with absence in schools – these are briefly described in the following sections.

Role of School in Attendance

The NIAO report notes the role of the **Education Welfare Service (EWS)** in assisting schools in monitoring and promoting attendance by having a clear and detailed service level agreement for the support given and designating an Education Welfare Officer to work in partnership with the school authorities to promote regular attendance. The EWS works closely with schools, parents and pupils to try and sort out attendance issues and have evolved further with the introduction of the Education Supervision Orders (ESO) which places children who are not being educated properly under the supervision of the local education and library board.

The table below shows the number of pupils referred to the Education Welfare Service, 2000-2003

Table 5: Number of Pupils referred to the Education Welfare Service (2000-2003)

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	% Increase over Period
Primary: KS1	843	1,207	1,435	70.2
Primary: KS2	1,330	1,421	1,577	18.6
Post-Primary: KS3	3,864	3,944	3,965	2.6
Post-Primary: KS4	4,308	4,519	4,767	10.7
TOTAL	**10,345**	**11,091**	**11,744**	**13.5**

Source: Improving Pupil Attendance at School (NIAO, 2004)

The report discusses a wide range of measures to deal with absence in schools which the Education Welfare System is involved in.

The **Primary Attendance Matters (PAM) Pilot Project** helps develop a whole school approach to promoting the benefits of regular attendance at school. The programme was piloted by 13 primary schools across the north of Ireland in 2003 and the schools involved were supported by EWS staff to review their current attendance procedures and practices. The feedback from the PAM pilot was positive and improvements in attendance were recorded. All of the schools that were involved witnessed improvements in attendance ranging from 0.2% and 11.8%.[2]

The key objectives of the Primary Attendance Matters programme were outlined as follows[3]:

- To improve whole school attendance
- To reduce unauthorised absences
- To help schools develop policies and procedures that will enable them to intervene at an early stage before poor attendance patterns become established
- To provide resources to enable the integration of attendance matters across the curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2
- To promote the concept of good attendance and punctuality with the whole school community, including pupils, parents and Governors
- To consider practical ways in which the school and Education Welfare Officer can work effectively together
- To promote a better understanding of the legislation relating to school attendance.

Note: A small number of schools currently work with their local education and library board (ELB) to undertake the Primary Attendance Matters programme which aims to show primary aged pupils the benefits of school and to reward them for good attendance. If a child's attendance gives the school

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[2] Primary Attendance Matters (PAM): Education System in Northern Ireland, NEWB
[3] Education Welfare Service: Primary Attendance Matters (PAM), North Eastern Education and Library Board, 2006

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reason for concern (the trigger point for this is normally when attendance drops below 85 per cent) the child will be referred to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) in the ELB.[4]

Primary Attendance Matters Project – NEELB[5]

The Primary Attendance Matters (PAM) resource pack was developed on a five Board basis and following its launch in Portadown in February 2003 had been piloted across the north of Ireland by Education Welfare Officers and selected schools. Consisting of a photocopiable resource book and supportive CD Rom, the resource pack was designed to be incorporated into a school's curriculum whilst undergoing a launch process supported by Education Welfare Service staff. Originally primary schools across the NEELB were invited to express their interest in participating in the project and were prioritised according to their average attendance statistics. Following a review of this approach in 2007 a pilot initiative was designed that aimed to support five identified selected primary schools in the Northern area of the NEELB, and to establish a formal link between the PAM initiative and a Transition Support initiative piloted in the Central area of the NEELB.

The Northern Primary Attendance Matters (PAM) and Transition pilot project aimed to establish a formal link between two existing projects in the NEELB. 5 core Primary schools were identified on the basis of their attendance statistics and interest in taking part in the initiative, and over the 3 year period a further 13 schools received additional support. The number of beneficiaries who received direct PAM support is as follows:

- 07/08 –Totals who received direct PAM support: 566 pupils (P1-P7), 46 staff, 42 parents, 2 Board of Governors. Total workshops delivered – 34;
- 08/09 –Totals who received direct PAM support: 286 pupils (P1-P7), 19 staff, 158 parents. Total workshops delivered – 23; and
- 09/10 – Totals who received direct PAM support: 457 pupils (P1-P7), 30 staff, 48 parents. Total workshops delivered – 36.

Key findings from these NEELB schools participating in PAM are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: PAM – NEELB Examples

School	2008-09	Key Findings 2009-10	Overall Findings 2006-10	
			Attendance Level	**Unauthorised absence**
Holy Family Primary	Attendance: 95.1%. 38 pupils achieved 100% attendance (52%). 61 pupils achieved > 85% attendance (84%). **Increase of 2% average attendance over same period during worst winter**	11 Jan – 5 Feb P1 Attendance and Punctuality monitoring Average attendance: 95.5% 40 pupils achieved 100% attendance (59%) 64 pupils > 85% (94%).	% rate of those under 85% has increased by 0.6% and referral rate has increased from 06 by 1.3%.	20% decrease from 07/08 in those with unauthorised absences of which 57% of those that could be referred are being referred compared to 35% in 07/08.

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[4] http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/school-attendance-absence-and-your-child
5 Information provided by EWS, NEELB

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| School | 2008-09 | Key Findings 2009-10 | Overall Findings 2006-10 | |
			Attendance Level	Unauthorised absence
Killowen Primary	Average attendance: 95.1% 106 pupils achieved 100% attendance (63%). Other comparable whole school stats: Jan 09 = 93.4% Dec 09 = 92.8% Mar 10 = 93.7% **Increase of 0.3% average attendance during worst winter**	11 Jan – 5 Feb Average Attendance: 95.4% 100 pupils achieved 100% attendance (59%)	% rate of those under 85% reduced by 3.5% and referral rate has increased from 06 by 48.2%.	100% of those with unauthorised absences have being referred since 07/08.
Leaney Primary	n/a	n/a	% rate of those under 85% reduced by 1.3% and referral rate has increased from 06 by 29.4%.	16.6% decrease from 07/08 in those with unauthorised absences of which 100% of those that could be referred are being referred compared to 36% in 07/08.
Ballymoney Model	n/a	n/a	% rate of those under 85% has reduced by 1.8% and referral rate has increased from 06 by 22.8%.	100% of those with unauthorised absences were referred this year compared to 50% in 07/08.
St Patrick's & St Brigids		**1 – 31 March** P7 Attendance and Punctuality = 93%. 32 pupils achieved 100% attendance (53%) **1 – 28 Feb** Average attendance: 89%. 20 pupils achieved 100% attendance (33%)	% rate of those under 85% has reduced by 2.5% and referral rate has increased from 06 by 33.3%.	16.7% decrease from 07/08 in those with unauthorised absences of which over 100% of those that could be referred are being referred compared to 80% in 07/08.

Source: NEELB

Connected with the PAM programme is the **Sustaining Engagement At Learning (SEAL) Programme**[6]**:** This was designed to tackle under-achievement and absenteeism in the school system. It targeted young people at risk of under-achieving or dropping out of the education system. Its aims are:

- to tackle educational under achievement in schools; and
- to improve attendance at school and prevent early school leaving.

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[6] Information on SEAL programme accessed from:
www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-about-the-dept/12-about-the-department-europeanfunding-pg/12-about-the-department-european-funding-bsp-introduction-pg/12-about-the-department-european-funding-bsp-measure2-4-pg.htm
The SEAL programme was funded under BSP Measure 2.4

The Education and Library Boards EWS are responsible for operation of the programme. Progress will be measured on:

- In 50% of referred cases to establish a pattern of attendance at school which meets the accepted minimum;
- In 30% of referred cases to achieve an improvement in attendance;
- Approximately 11,000 pupils across all education sectors will be referred to EWS annually, with each pupil receiving individual support; and
- Twenty schools in the primary sector will be targeted each year for work on a whole school basis as part of the Primary Attendance Matters Programme (PAMP). As PAMP develops the impact on attendance will be measured.

A number of the schools surveyed in the report had introduced a "**first day calling**" procedure which involves school administrative staff ringing parents on the first day of a pupil's absence. Parents receive the advantage of being alerted when their child is absent in case they are unaware. All the schools using this process have found it a success however it has the disadvantage of being resource intensive in terms of staff time.

All of the schools surveyed in the report **rewarded individuals and classes** for good or improved attendance at school. In most schools attendance was included as part of a merit system which also included punctuality and good behaviour where rewards were presented on a monthly, termly and annual basis such as certificates, trips out of school or gift vouchers. A lot of the schools also offered out of school activities as a means of encouraging pupils to see school as somewhere fun and a good place to be.

The **Getting Ahead Through Education (GATE) project** is aimed at pupils with exceptionally poor attendance records at school. Education Welfare Officers work with these pupils after school hours. Emphasis is on modifying behaviour through leisure activities. Attendance at the project centre is normally 100%. The programme also works alongside the voluntary agency EXTERN which is engaged in similar work but with particular focus on pupils who have been expelled for disruptive behaviour

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

A new trial called Edutxt has been implemented by the Education Welfare Service in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area. It is an internet based application which allows schools to **contact parents or carers using text messages**. Parents and carers can be contacted discreetly on their mobile phone when their child is absent. The message will be tailored to the individual circumstances to ensure that there is a reason for the child's absence.

Courses and activities run on school premises were also offered to parents as a way of encouraging them to come to school and meet the staff. The survey conducted in the report showed that this created positive and long term relationships with parents who would normally not have been engaged with the school.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its Effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

The report refers to the use of **School Liaison Groups** with schools providing a forum where different agencies, such as EWS, social work coordinator for education, the school nurse and a designated teacher can come together to share experiences and agree a common action. One of the key aspects of these meetings is intervention of pupil absences.

The **Social Skills Project** is another example of interfacing between schools involving external support services. The report states that the Belfast Board considers the project to be an excellent exemplar of practice, in which an Education Welfare Officer and a teacher from the Link Centre collaborate with a post-primary school to raise the attendance level of a year nine class where difficulties had been encountered.

A **multi-agency theme** to attendance procedures is continually being developed as no single group or organisation can have all the solutions. Examples of inter-agency working include the **School Age Mothers' Programme** and a regional **Anti-Bullying Consortium**.   Both of these agencies have indirect implications for school absenteeism. The School Age Mother's Programme provides support to young women who are pregnant or parenting to complete compulsory education and to remain in education beyond compulsory leaving age if they so wish. A multi-agency approach is used to provide a mixture of personal, social and conventional education tailored to meet the needs of young women.

The Anti-Bullying Consortium recognises that tackling bullying requires sustained efforts and that schools need to support in maintaining an effective approach. The report emphasises that multi-agency working can be very worthwhile in addressing the many factors involved in pupil non-attendance.

Out of the Box – Alternative Education Provision in Northern Ireland (DE Research Report No. 45, 2007 by Rosemary Kilpatrick, Claire McCartan, Penny McKeown with Tony Gallagher)

This report is concerned with education provision outside mainstream provision; this caters for disaffected young people who are likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Increasing attention is being paid to young people who could potentially, or who are already, being excluded from school. As a result these young people will not only be excluded from school, but from society as a whole. The aim of the research undertaken for 'Out of the Box' was to examine the **Alternative Education Provision** experiences of young people in terms of their engagement with learning, re-integration into mainstream provision and their transition into the labour market.

Previous research focusing on similar target groups indicates that, amongst other things, these young people are highly likely to be alienated from mainstream education, come from disadvantaged and sometimes dysfunctional family backgrounds and have poor literacy and social skills.

The study considered three types of AEP projects – these typically catered for those young people who are out of school either by their own volition or as a result of the formal exclusion process or did not wish to pursue a purely academic route but rather a more vocational and work-related route.

Whilst this provision offers an alternative to those who are not in mainstream education, the study found that AEP is not without its challenges for young people:

There is a stigma attached to students attending AEP in community-based and training organisation/school partnership projects.

There are some examples of where schools and projects have worked together effectively to support a students learning or specific area of interest.

A typical young person engaged in community-based AEP lives with a lone parent, has a negative view of the mainstream education system and often has been subjected to a raft of social related problems which may include mental ill-health.

Young people in AEP are not receiving their full entitlement to education.

The focus of reintegration of the most disaffected students is geared towards post-16.

The study highlights the complexity of the issues around creating effective provision for young people who opt out of, or are excluded from school before the compulsory leaving age. It found that:

Schools do not appear to be informed of or equipped to deal with the range of problems some young people are presenting in post-primary education resulting in some students feeling pushed out and deliberately excluded.

Many young people leaving AEP do not have any additional support to assist them to reintegrate into education or vocational training. This may result in further isolation.

Students are often disappointed with the quality of qualifications obtained while on AEP which they believe are not rated by employers

The study concludes with three main areas for discussion:

Issues relating to the compulsory schooling of disengaged young people;

Issues relating to providing additional support for AEP providers; and,

Issues arising from post-16 experiences.

With regards to compulsory schooling, the report makes some points which are relevant for schools in considering how to promote attendance:

Complexity of issues facing young people (including mental health, family breakdown) and that schools require support and knowledge to support students through such issues.

Need for earlier intervention and more prevention work

AEP teaching methods applied in the mainstream (since students respond positively to the teaching style, method and learning environment).

Young people's participation in the referral process – students should be given clear information on the range of qualifications available on AEP.

A Survey of Vulnerable Children and Young People (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2008)

This report is concerned with pastoral support in schools to address the needs of vulnerable children and young people. Factors such as unemployment, poverty, crime, domestic violence and abuse, are dominant in the background of these children and young people who experience serious difficulties in school and beyond.

Introduction

This Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) report presents results of a survey (undertaken in 2006-07) focusing on **vulnerable children and young people** across 12 primary schools and 25 post primary schools. Each of the surveyed schools was selected due to it having a particularly strong **pastoral support system**.

The focus of the survey was on vulnerable children and young people, who for the purposes of the survey were identified as non-attenders, those with multiple suspensions, those expelled, looked after children (LAC), those in the Juvenile Justice System and those in AEP. Within the context of this survey the term "vulnerable" is used to include children and young people who are identified as having a number of "risk" factors which may jeopardise their emotional health and well-being, manifest themselves in unacceptable behaviour patterns and influence their motivation to learn and achieve.

The main aim of the survey was to identify the extent to which children and young people 'at risk' are supported to remain in, and engage purposefully with education.

The report indicates that schools are dealing with more and more cases of children and young people with complex emotional and mental health related issues.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

The survey found that schools are providing sufficient support for vulnerable children and young people through **comprehensive pastoral care, personal development programmes and the promotion of a whole-school culture of inclusive practice**. An example of this is the curriculum which includes the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and personal development being delivered by supportive, caring and support staff. Other practical examples of schools promoting a positive pastoral ethos of care included:

Overall leadership based on vision and commitment which addresses issues facing teachers in classrooms through the context of the wider community;

Intervention support strategies for those most vulnerable of pupils which are well embedded in the school's pastoral system;

Active listening to the voices and words of children and young people

Effective counselling systems, supported by professionally qualified and experienced external counsellors;

Additional study support;

Pupil Mentoring;

Clear guidance on course work; and

Effective use of the Education Welfare Service.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The survey revealed that many parents of vulnerable children and young people have poor experiences of schools themselves relating to weak literacy skills and confidence. Parents such as these tend not to liaise well with the school meaning that the schools need to do more to help these parents support their children. However efforts by schools to engage with parents and carers were often thwarted by poor attendance at **workshops or parenting courses**.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its Effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

The findings of the survey also indicate improvements in inter-agency working. An example is the development of the **Multi-Agency Support Teams** where key school staff can meet regularly with education welfare officers, educational psychologists, social workers and paediatricians, to identify ways to help keep the children and families engaged with school and education. The majority of the primary schools surveyed were also found to have effective partnership agreements with post-primary schools and shared common values and procedures and communicated consistently to ensure consistency within the transition process.

Evaluation of Full Service School Project organised under the Renewing Communities Programme (DE / FGS McClure Watters, 2008)

This project is based in two schools in North Belfast with widespread social deprivation in their catchment areas. A variety of measures – including some focused on attendance – have been successfully implemented in the schools.

Introduction

The Full Service Extended School Project is based in the Boys Model School and the Model School for Girls in North Belfast. It seeks to ensure that pupils are "ready to learn" by putting in place a wide range of interventions aimed at tackling barriers to learning. The context for the project includes:

- Addressing low educational attainment and the implications of this on employment and life chances;
- Recognising widespread social deprivation in the catchment areas of the selected schools and the requirement for increased support and interventions;
- Capitalising on opportunities created through funding and activities supported by the Extended Schools Programme;
- Opportunities to pilot the Full Service School approach to determine benefits and identify lessons that will impact on future Government policy. This will include methods of working (including multi-agency approaches) as well as specific activities and initiatives offered and the impact these may have on attainment and the wider community.

A range of objectives were initially set out for the Full Service School Demonstration Project; these included:

- To provide a full service school which will integrate services by bringing together professionals from a range of services for the provision of education, family support, health and other community services;
- To raise performance in the Full Service Schools and in linked primary schools.
- To provide a range of services and activities, to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community;
- To encourage collaboration and partnership with neighbouring schools and statutory and voluntary sector organisations operating in the local community; and
- To increase the level of attainment of pupils.
- To raise educational attainment;

To improve parental involvement;

To provide a comprehensive range of services on a single site, including access to health services, adult learning, community activities and study support;

To increase attendance and to promote inclusion;

To establish / maintain partnerships with Neighbourhood Renewal, outside agencies, feeder primary schools and other schools in the area;

To provide 8 am to 6 pm wrap around provision for 48 weeks of the year.

In both schools, a wide range of interventions has been introduced; these include specific attendance projects – these are described in the following sections.

Boys Model – Attendance Project

One of the key targets set out in the Boy's Model School is to 'Enjoy and Achieve.' A component of this is attendance. During 2007-2008 the project aimed to improve the overall attendance by 3% by targeting those pupils who have an attendance under 90%. 2006-07 data provides an early indication of impact of FSES, although it had only been implemented since January 2007. In 2005/06 the attendance level of the entire school was 86.8%. This stayed the same the following year and then increased to 86.9% in 2007/08.

A key intervention in this area is the appointment of an **Attendance Co-ordinator** (November 2007). Her role is to encourage regular attendance by involving parents and other appropriate professional agencies with the aim of raising attendance levels and attainment. A key part of the role is relationship building with pupils and parents through regular phone calls, home visits and working closely with other members of the Full Service Team. A major challenge is seeking to address 'condoned' absence.

The Attendance Co-ordinator typically works with a range of boys from various years, generally referred by Year Heads. She makes regular reports to FSES Coordinator, and liaises with the School Counsellor (if appropriate). Occasionally there is a need to refer a pupil with poor attendance to an external agency – this is done in liaison with the FSES Co-ordinator. There have been numerous individual success stories since the Attendance Co-ordinator was appointed.

Boys' attendance ranged from 33.6% to 92.1%; with the majority (31 boys or 74% of those referred) with attendance of 70% or more. At the beginning of January, the range of attendance was still wide: 32.2% to 94.6% and a comparison of attendance between when individuals were referred and the beginning of January showed that:

18 boys have improved their attendance by between 0.5% and 8%;

19 boys have shown a deterioration in attendance by between -0.3% and -6.98% (this excludes 2 outliers where attendance reduced by 27.6% and 15.1% respectively);

5 boys had only recently been referred so it is too soon to calculate a change.

By the beginning of January 2008, the Attendance Co-ordinator had been working with 42 boys across Years 8 to 14; over 60% of these due to poor attendance as identified by school attendance records. The remainder had been referred for a variety of reasons including bullying, referral from a parent and had a number of other referrals.

Girls Model – Attendance Project

A key intervention in this area is the appointment of a **Family Attendance Co-ordinator** (April 2007). The focus of her role is to encourage regular attendance by involving parents and other appropriate professional agencies with the aim of raising attendance levels and attainment. A key part of the role is relationship building with pupils and parents through regular phone calls, home visits and working closely with the Family Link Co-coordinator. A major challenge is seeking to address 'condoned' absence.

The Attendance Co-ordinator typically works with 15 girls at a time, generally referred by Year Heads – her focus is on those where attendance is 80-90% (to prevent further deterioration); lower than this triggers involvement of the EWO. The Attendance Co-ordinator makes regular reports to FSES Coordinator, Vice Principal (Pastoral Care) and School Counsellor (if appropriate). There are also monthly multi-disciplinary meetings with Attendance Co-ordinator, Family link Co-ordinator and School Counsellor to share information and avoid duplication. Occasionally there is a need to refer a pupil with poor attendance to an external agency – this is done in liaison with the FSES Co-ordinator and also the Teacher in Charge of Attendance particularly with regard to referrals to EWO. There have been numerous individual success stories since Attendance Co-ordinator was appointed.

The improvement in attendance for the Model School for Girls is easily visible in the selection of case studies. In one case study the Model School witnessed the attendance of one girl, who had previously refused to go to school, rising from 18% to 58% within two months. Another example showed the attendance of one girl rising by 20% in three months to eventually equate to 90%.

By December 2007, the Attendance Co-ordinator had worked with over 60 girls and cites several examples of significant improvement for individuals increasing from: 18% to 58% in 1 month; from 43% by 20% in 3 months and now at 90%; 58% to 80%; 67% to 91% and 18% to 37% after 3 months.

The Breakfast Club (average 70-75 attending September 2006-June 2007) is one of the strategies used by the Attendance Co-ordinator in encouraging pupils to come to school as this is their meeting place in the morning and it helps to create a good start to the day.

Processes and Systems Used by both Projects

Poor attenders are generally identified from school attendance records (these are not the 'worst' cases – which would require intervention of the EWO) and Year Heads generally make referrals to the Attendance Officer. The Attendance Officers work with a group of pupils who have not yet fallen into the category of poorest attenders – so the role is preventative in nature. The Attendance Officer keeps records of pupils who are being worked with and this information is shared with other members of the Full Service Team in schools.

Benefits of Dedicated Resource to Tackle Poor Attendance

The issue of attendance is fundamental in seeking to improve any aspect of school life: if pupils are not in school then none of the other interventions can be of benefit. The employment of a non-teaching member of staff is not a particularly 'extreme' intervention; however it has a number of distinct advantages.

The role is preventative – and provides a solution to reversing poor attendance before it spirals into a more serious situation. The focus is on addressing issues before they deteriorate further and require the involvement of EWO.

As a member of the school staff and therefore part of the school 'fabric', the Attendance Officer is accepted by the school community as having an important role to play in ensuring that pupils are in school. The Attendance Officer is in school every day whereas the EWO would not be.

As a non-teaching member of staff, the Attendance Officer is more widely accepted by pupils and perceived to be easier to approach.

As a non-teaching member of staff, the Attendance Officer is more widely accepted by families and in many cases, is able to get involved in situations / make home visits where teachers would not. The perception is that the Attendance Officer is less 'threatening' than a teacher.

Extended Schools Programme

The Department of Education's (DE) Extended Schools programme provides a dedicated funding stream to eligible schools; it is targeted at reducing differentials and improving the life chances of children and young people particularly from deprived areas. In 2011/12, around £10 million of extended schools funding was made available to over 450 eligible schools to provide for a range of activities to help meet the needs of the pupils in the school and the wider community. Some of these activities contribute to improvements in attendance.

1.1.1.1 An Evaluation of Extended Schools (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2009)

The Extended Schools programme was launched in 2006 as a key component of the "Our Children, Our Young People, Our Pledge" strategy. This package aims to improve the life chances for young people and reduce underachievement through the delivery of support and services, ensuring the development of their education and health. The aim of the programme is to make all schools the "hubs of their local community, offering a range of activities before, during and beyond the traditional school day, engaging with their local community, connecting local people with local services."

There are strategic goals in key areas affecting children and young people; the strategy also takes into account the role of parents and families. It also examines the scope for achieving a more joined up approach within Government to children's issues. The strategy is a ten year programme that has been designed to run from 2006 until 2016. All the programmes funded through this programme report under five high level outcomes:

Being Healthy;
Enjoying Learning and Achieving;
Living in Safety and with Stability;
Enjoying Economic and Environmental Well-Being; and
Contributing Positively to Community and Society.

In 2009 the funding for the ES programme transferred from OFMDFM to the Department of Education through School Improvement funding. Funding levels for the programme have been maintained at similar levels for each year. In 2011/12, 450 schools received ES funding of around £9.7m.

Extended schools provide for a range of services or activities outside of the normal school day to help meet the needs of nursery, primary, secondary and special school children, their parents, families and local community. These include activities, classes and support for learning.

There is no single model of an extended school but extended services are designed primarily to raise standards of achievement and allow children to realise their full potential in an environment where education is valued.

1.1.1.2   Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

ES action plans are closely linked to the school development plan which focuses on key areas of improvement such as attendance, motivation, behaviour, underachievement, numeracy and literacy. In some schools, there is less emphasis on raising standards or school improvement.

A Learning Mentor Centre is a successful aspect of the pastoral development plan in one school. It contributed to a reduction in pupil suspensions from 80 in 2006/7 to 31 in 2007/8 (by 60%). Such provision within the school, rather than through an external alternative educational provision, is believed to be better for the pupils and parents because pupils can enter the centre for short periods of time with a programme specifically designed to meet individual needs of the pupil with swift and effective re-integration.

1.1.1.3   Interface between Schools and External Support Services and their Effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

Different kinds of clustering partnerships have been developed in the majority of schools. These arrangements provide value for money and engagement with voluntary and statutory organisations. In the best practice, schools report that links with other groups and agencies has resulted in more 'joined up' approach to education (of which promoting attendance is one part) in their local area.

The multi-agency approach supports the pastoral dimension of schools by providing a deeper understanding of relationships with the parents and the range of external support available to meet the individual needs of the pupils. For example, primary schools work with local SureStart personnel to enhance links with parents in promoting learning for the children.

1.1.1.4   Impact of Extended Schools on Improving Attendance

The new Northern Ireland Extended Schools Information System (NIESIS) programme requested and enabled schools to analyse the impact of the Extended Schools programme against four Quality Indicators: Reducing Underachievement, Fostering Health, Well Being and Social Inclusion, Improving Life Chances and Developing the Integrated Delivery of Support and Services. One of the measures under "Reducing Underachievement" is Improving Attendance. Extracts from the ELB Extended Schools Annual Reports provide evidence of the positive impact of ES on attendance.

BELB Extended Schools Annual Report 2009/10

The Annual Report outlines the evidence to suggest that the Extended Schools programme has impacted on the attendance rates of students:

At least one piece of quantitative data – 47%

A range of quantitative data – 22%
Anecdotal Evidence – 21%
Little evidence of impact – 3%
Not currently a priority – 7%

A large percentage of schools reported that they have consolidated many of their existing successful programmes, are targeting support to those pupils most in need, and have increased the numbers of children attending programmes which will impact most on their achievement (e.g. homework clubs, revision classes, summer schemes and school attendance clubs and a range of family learning and support programmes)

NEELB Extended Schools Annual Report 2009/10

Many schools have highlighted that attendance has improved as a result of Extended Schools. The impact of Extended Schools on attendance rates are outlined in the annual report as the following:

At least one piece of quantitative data – 41%
A range of quantitative data – 7%
Anecdotal Evidence – 32%
Little evidence of impact – 7%
Not currently a priority – 13%

A random selection of school responses are noted below:

'Our attendance rate has been increasing gradually over the past few years 2007/08 – 92.2%, 2008/09 – 93.1%, 2009/10 – 93.8%.'

'Some pupils (approximately 10%) who have played truant from school now attend school more regularly as a result of being involved in one or more Extended Schools activity.'

According to research by NHSSB/NEELB it was identified that consistently over the last 4 years, 3 wards have shown no improvement in attendance. This has been communicated to Extended Schools in these areas, so that it can be part of a legitimate baseline upon which an intervention strategy can be formulated to increase attendance above 85% in these wards.

SEELB Extended Schools Annual Report 2009/10

71% of SEELB schools provided evidence of impact in improving attendance however about one fifth of schools did not consider attendance to be a priority for their Extended Schools programme. The Annual Report rates the impact of the Extended Schools programme on reducing under achievement and improving attendance rates as 3.74 out of 5. Examples of schools that have witnessed these improvements are described below[7]:

The Breakfast Club at Newtownards Model Primary experienced a big increase in attendance as 2009/10 progressed. A 100% rise in average attendance from 20 to 40 by the end of the year is attributed to a range of stimulating games and resources available for pupils. Each pupil

receives a healthy and nutritious breakfast which is a key part of the schools Health and Nutrition Policy. As well as the general benefits noted for pupils, the Breakfast Club has also helped individual pupils – one pupil, for example, had a record of poor behaviour but after being given responsibility for looking after the pool table, his teacher reported a positive impact on his general attitude and behaviour.

In St Luke's Primary School, Twinbrook annual attendance figures have increased by 1.4% and 2.2% respectively for the last two years. The school has noted that children who would normally have poor attendance are coming to school in order to avail of before and after school activities.

In September 2009 Knockbreda High School, employed a Pupil and Family Support Officer to work with pupils and parents to improve school attendance. Within a short period the attendance rates for the 50 pupils in the target group improved.

SELB Extended Schools Annual Report 2009/10

64% of schools comment very positively with 32% collating a range of quantitative data. When schools had not directly targeted attendance in their Action Plans, in some cases they did not score this statement as they may not have considered Extended Schools to have had an overall impact. In terms of responses to the statement, "Our Extended Schools' programme has contributed to improved attendance rates", the following were received:

At least one piece of quantitative data - 22%
A range of quantitative data - 10%
Anecdotal Evidence- 32%
Little evidence of impact -13%
Not currently a priority - 23%

A random selection of school responses are noted below:

The number of children whose percentage attendance is less than 85% has been reduced from 70 in October to 47 pupils in April.

% attendance 08/09: 94.8%; attendance 09/10: 95.4. Improved attendance through: healthier lifestyles and greater desire to attend because of the breakfast club, after school activities and attractive learning environment.

Since the beginning of the academic year we have seen a noted improvement in the attendance rates at both the homework club and at school. Numbers have increased at homework club by approximately 20% and attendance of children that were previously struggling before joining homework club has also increased.

Our attendance rates for the year 2008/2009 were 89.5%. The percentage up until March 31st 2010 was 92.2%, a rise of 2.7%. The clubs on offer encourage pupils whose attendance may have been problematic to come to school on the days of the clubs.

Attendance was above national average for first time in number of years.

WELB Extended Schools Annual Report 2009/10

The majority of the 144 participating schools have reported benefits in attendance, behaviour, self-esteem, and confidence; many have provided accredited courses for both children and adults which have given a great sense of achievement; and all activities and services provided have strengthened links with the community.

The annual report highlights that 59% of those schools participating felt that there was "Strong Evidence" that the Extended Schools Programme was reducing under-achievement. 39% said there was "Some Evidence" meaning that just 2% felt there was little evidence to suggest the programme impacting under achievement. No data was provided with regard to impact on attendance specifically.

An Evaluation of the Early Progress of the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry/Bright Futures Programme (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2010)

The Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry / Bright Futures Programme interventions are based in areas of social deprivation. The main aim is to address under-achievement and the expectation that associated indicators such as attendance would improve.

Introduction

In 2006, the Department of Education were urged to emphasise the under-achievement in socially deprived communities in Belfast. In order to tackle the issue, the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) established the "Achieving Belfast" programme in 2007/08. The DE felt that similar issues existed in both the North West and so the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) developed "Achieving Derry – Bright Futures." The Department also created a Working Group to ensure that the programmes are correctly co-ordinated and maintain a standard that the DE find acceptable.

Schools targeted by the Programme

Different approaches to the models of intervention were taken by the BELB and the WELB:

- The BELB identified the lowest achieving schools through a selection process which took into account the educational attainment and the area from where the students came from. If the pupils had an attainment record below the Belfast average at KS2, KS3 and KS4 and they were from an area of disadvantage then they were selected.
- The WELB worked with all schools within Derry City along with partners in health and social services, neighbourhood renewal and the local community and voluntary sectors. The schools were asked to identify and meet the needs of pupils who were most at risk of underachieving and then adopted an approach, similar to that of "Achieving Belfast," that met the requirements of these pupils.

What the Programme entails

The evaluation focused on the five strands contained in the terms of reference prepared by DE as part of the commissioning process, namely:

- the appropriateness of the approaches and actions taken by the BELB and WELB, particularly in relation to their capacity to lead to improvements in standards of literacy and numeracy among individual pupils in the schools involved;
- the extent to which the various actions link with, and are supported by, other actions taken forward by each Board;
- the commitment of, and impact upon, schools participating in the programmes, including their level of awareness as to what the programme entails and the impact on the school's arrangements for self-evaluation, development planning and target-setting;

the commitment of the Boards to the aims of the programmes and their capacity to ensure that the programmes are delivered effectively, their engagement with Principals, the community and other relevant statutory and voluntary organisations, in developing the programme; and

the relevance and robustness of the monitoring arrangements devised for the programme, including the baseline and agreed common performance indicators, and the identification of any potential gaps.

Importance of Attendance

The DE expects there to be clear indications from the outset with the programmes are having an impact on the achievement, standards and other associated indicators of success. These may include improved pupil attendance and reductions in teacher absenteeism and pupil suspensions/expulsion. Emphasis will therefore need to be placed from the start on a reliable evidence-based tool that will assist in delivering the longer term improvements and help as a baseline evaluation for both programmes.

The "Achieving Derry – Bright Futures" programme sent letters out to all schools in the Derry City Council area which explained the reason for the programme and the outcomes expected. This improved the awareness of the rationale and aims of the AD-BF programme with schools and helped promote it as a method that could improve literacy. The programme also allowed schools to set targets for the upcoming year. Despite this the WELB acknowledged that improvements still needed to be made with regards to embedding their programme into the schools' action plans and to set more targets relating to pupil attendance and teacher absenteeism.

Study into how the Education System can improve the Attendance of Looked After Children at Post-Primary School (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, DE Research Report No. 55, 2011)

This research sought to understand how the education system can improve attendance at post primary school of Looked After Children. Whilst not solely focused on areas of social deprivation, the approaches identified as being effective in improving attendance will have relevance in these areas.

The research undertaken showed that there was no single factor affecting the attendance of Looked After Children as there are a number of underlying influences. These include:

Peer Pressure – Often leads to suspension/expulsion

Behavioural Issues

Underlying Personal and Social Issues - e.g. loss of a parent or underlying drug/alcohol problem

Personal factors – e.g. self-esteem, social skills and peer relations

Contact with birth parents – A stable foster care environment often leads to higher rates of attendance amongst Looked After Children. Contact with birth parents often has a negative effect on attendance.

Socio-economic circumstances – Using Free School Meals (FSM) as an indicator for school deprivation, schools where 10% of the pupils receive free school meals, the absentee rate is approximately 3%. In schools with more than 50% of pupils receiving school meals the absentee rate rises to 8.5%.

Age when a child enters the care system – Children who enter the care system before the age of 12, and have a more settled home environment, outperform those who enter it after the age of 12.

The research showed that both attendance and attainment rates are lower for Looked-After Children than all other children in NI. However none of the studies could link the attendance of Looked-After Children at school to their attainment.

According to the research conducted there are a number of **approaches which schools and other schools have reported effective in reducing absenteeism**. These include:

Positive feedback;

Reduced hours/phased return initiatives;

Additional cult support;

Mentoring;

Counselling;

Joined-up working between Looked After Children stakeholders; and

Staff training on Looked After Children.

A Scoping Study of those Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Northern Ireland (DEL, 2010)

This study explores whether a cross-departmental strategy could achieve better outcomes for young people not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). These can generally be divided into those with and without barriers to engagement – for example poor attendance signifying a barrier to engaging in education. Those in the hardest to reach NEET group suffer from multiple disadvantage including economic disadvantage as well as a wide variety of other factors[8]. Whilst not solely focused on areas of social deprivation, the approaches identified as being effective in improving attendance will have relevance in these areas.

Introduction

The report outlines the findings of a study of those young people not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The aims of the study were to research data on 16-19 year olds who fell into the NEET category, identify the relevant actions that were in place and then recommend whether a cross-departmental strategy could achieve better outcomes for the group in the future.

Policies and initiatives have been introduced by the government and the voluntary and community sector to address the particular needs of those prevalent groups in the NEET population. Statutory and non-statutory authorities have a wide range of actions in place to tackle any barriers that may lead to disengagement.

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[8] in care; have left care; on the edge of care; have had a negative experience of education; have suffered from bullying at school; have problems with literacy and numeracy; are carers; are parents; have experienced drug and alcohol abuse; have a physical disability/learning disability; have committed a crime; have a mental illness; with economic disadvantage; are homeless.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

A key characteristic noted in the report which separated the NEET group as being different to their peers was the lack of educational qualifications. A lack of qualifications may impact on young people's perception of school, resulting in them not wanting to re-engage with education or training in the future. The lack of engagement between young people and their education is represented by their poor attendance at school.

DE statistics on 'Attendance at Grand Aided Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools'[9] show that levels of absence are higher at post-primary schools than primary schools. The study shows that absence levels increase in line with free school meal entitlement. In post primary schools where less than 10% of pupils enrolled were eligible for free school meals, the average overall absence rate was 4.8% of the total half days; this compares with 13.3% of the total half days for schools with more than 50% of enrolled pupils eligible for free school meals. This is indicative of levels of deprivation showing a positive correlation between disadvantage and absence.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The study reports that an unhappy or unproductive school life can manifest itself in various ways. If the school identifies these problems early on, such as high absenteeism, the negative implications may be reduced. Every school has a link to an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) whose aim is to reduce unnecessary absences from school by offering help and support to pupils, their parents and families to the school.

An earlier model published by the DE in 1998 called 'Promoting and Sustaining Good Behaviour: A Discipline Strategy for Schools[10,] set out a model of interventions for children with challenging behaviour in order to keep them in mainstream education. The results of this model showed that, for a small number of pupils, their behaviour or lack of enthusiasm presented a requirement for education outside of the mainstream framework. Two types of provisions catering for the needs of these pupils were created, one of which involved community organised and managed projects funded through a variety of short term initiatives.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and their Effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

As well as work being carried out within the school, The Prince's Trust, in partnership with local schools, has aimed to improve attendance and motivation through the XL programme. It is aimed at 14-16 year olds in their last two years of compulsory education and is targeted at those who are disengaged and underachieving and at risk of being excluded from school. The programme is delivered in school time but is activity based, and delivers a range of personal development

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[9] Attendance at Grand Aided Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools 2010/2011: Summary Statistics, DE
[10] Promoting and Sustaining Good Behaviour: A Discipline Strategy for Schools, School Improvement: The Northern Ireland Programme, DE,1998

programmes which improve skills, develop confidence and direct young people towards education, training and employment.

Pupils' Emotional Health and Wellbeing (PEHAW): A Review of Audit Tools and a Survey of Practice in Northern Ireland Post-Primary Schools (DE, 2011)

This review considers a range of programmes in schools which seek to support pupils' emotional health and wellbeing. Non-attendance featured in a list of barriers to promoting pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing in school. Whilst the programmes considered may contribute indirectly to attendance, one in particular – SEAL – has a particular focus on attendance.

A survey of schools conducted as part of the review highlighted that only 5% of schools have a specific attendance policy in place.

Introduction

In September 2007, the Department of Education began to work in partnership all of the key stakeholders and parties from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors to develop a '**Pupils Emotional Health and Wellbeing (PEHAW) Programme**.' This programme will focus on positive prevention by building skills in children and young people such as coping with problems while also complementing the personal development strand of the curriculum.

This report includes findings of an independent review of current practice in relation to promoting pupils' emotional health and wellbeing in post-primary schools and a review of existing audit tools that schools can use to self-evaluate their whole-school practice in relation to this area. This will inform the development of the PEHAW Programme.

Emotional Health and Well-being Programmes in Schools - ICSS

Since the beginning of September 2007, **independent counselling services in schools (ICSS)** have been available to all grant aided post primary schools that feel the need to use it. Funded by the Department of Education, the sessions provide access to independent and confidential counselling for young people who may have referred themselves or been referred by the school or parent.

The aim of the ICSS is to build on existing pastoral support by contributing to the best possible start in life for pupils through the promotion of emotional health and wellbeing and reducing stress. The programme complements the PEHAW Programme and conforms to the best practice and professional standards for school based counselling.

Independent counselling services in schools help develop the talking and listening skills of young people while also providing them with a safe place to express their thoughts and feelings on any particular issue in their life. This may allow the pupil to gain a greater understanding of their situation and discover new ways of coping with it.

Emotional Health and Well-being Programmes in Schools - SEAL

The review refers to a number of other programmes which are being used in the north of Ireland similar to the PEHAW programme, one of these is the **Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning**

(SEAL). The SEAL programme, according to Humphrey et al (2010:5), is "a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpins effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and wellbeing of all who learn and work in schools."[11]

The SEAL programme is designed to help develop social and emotional skills that can be applied in daily life. It has several underpinning principles including: **a focus on standards, behaviour and attendance**; a climate conducive to the development of emotional and social skills with time, space, staff support and insight to practice these; a focus on staff wellbeing; a focus on parental engagement; availability of additional help for those who might need it. As opposed to a structured 'step-by-step' guide offering a particular model, Humphrey et al. (2010: 7) describe SEAL as a 'loose enabling framework for school improvement'. SEAL is currently being implemented in around 90% of primary schools and 70% of secondary schools.

The main evidence to date of the effectiveness of SEAL relates to the recent national (GB) evaluation of the programme in post-primary schools. This noted significant variation regarding the implementation of SEAL. In terms of impact on pupil outcomes the findings were disappointing in that SEAL, as implemented in the schools in the study 'failed to impact significantly upon pupils' social and emotional skills, general mental health difficulties, pro-social behaviour or behaviour problems' (Humphrey et al., 2010: 2). Furthermore 'analysis of school climate scores indicated significant reductions in pupils' trust and respect for teachers, liking for school, and feelings of classroom and school supportiveness during SEAL implementation. Additionally, qualitative data around perceptions of impact indicated a feeling that SEAL had not produced the expected changes across schools' (Humphrey et al. 2010: 3).

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[11] Humphrey, N., Lendrum, A. And Wigelsworth, M. (2010) Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) Programme in Secondary Schools: National Evaluation. Research Report DFE-RR049. Manchester: School of Education, University of Manchester.

England

Parents' and Carers' Attitudes towards School Attendance (DE, 2003)

This study is concerned with the attitudes of parents and carers towards school attendance. It highlights that many parents/carers of poor attenders are also faced with multiple problems relating to deprivation (e.g. housing, debt and health issues).

Summary

This report presents the findings of a study of parents'/carers' attitudes towards pupil attendance at school. The study was carried out by TNS Social Research between September 2003 and June 2004. The main aim of this study was to examine the attitudes of parents/carers towards pupil attendance, with particular emphasis on determining how the attitudes of parents/carers whose children are persistent poor attenders differ from those of parents/carers whose children have rarely or never missed school. The study also examined the views of parents/carers towards the support they received to improve their child's attendance. An additional aim was to examine how the parents/carers of children who are poor attenders can most effectively be persuaded to meet their responsibilities in ensuring their child's regular attendance at school.

This report presents the findings of a study of parents'/carers' attitudes towards pupil attendance at school, and comprised the following phases:

A review of the existing literature on parents'/carers' attitudes towards pupil attendance and truancy

A telephone survey of 2,000 parents/carers, exploring their views on the value of education and attitudes towards attendance

Interviews with 22 parents/carers whose children are or have been poor attenders and/or have truanted, across seven Local Education Authorities (LEAs).

Most parents/carers surveyed in the report recognised that school attendance was an important issue and one which they should be concerned about. The majority of parents/carers (96%) agreed that regular attendance at school is equally important for primary and secondary school age pupils. Parents/carers do, on the whole, see the onus of responsibility for their child's attendance being on themselves (98%). Around a quarter (24%) see that some of this responsibility is shared with the school.

Role of the School in Promoting Regular Attendance

Parents/carers accepted that it is their responsibility to ensure their child attends school, but felt it would be helpful if their child's school was able to monitor attendance more closely. Suggestions included an **'attendance register'** which would be taken at the start of every lesson, and a **dedicated liaison officer** who would telephone the parent if their child was absent. Both of these suggestions are already in operation in many schools in England. Clearly, there are financial costs associated with extending the implementation of these, but the report recommends that schools aim to provide speedy

contact with parents/carers when a child is absent, in order to prevent the absence becoming long-term.

Many parents/carers in this study expressed satisfaction with the opportunities for their children to **pursue more vocational courses at school**. There were a number of examples whereby the school and the EWO had been able to arrange changes to individual children's timetables to encourage attendance. Often parents/carers said they were unaware that this was a possibility and therefore did not discuss possible changes with the schools. The report recommends that schools routinely review the curriculum requirements of poor attenders. **Parenting classes** may also be useful in cases where parents/carers have low self-esteem and self-worth and feel powerless to do anything about their child's poor attendance. The report suggests that activities are provided through schools to engage parents/carers in developing their parenting skills, self-esteem and confidence.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

Analysis of the qualitative interviews with parents of poor attenders indicated that the reasons given by parents/carers for their child's poor attendance were very varied. In most cases the parents/carers provided multiple reasons which they considered had contributed to their child's poor attendance. Many parents/carers also described how they were tackling multiple problems (such as housing, debt and health issues). A number of the parents/carers had experienced difficulties related to school attendance with their child over a period of months and some over a period of years, and as a result the issues and problems that contributed to poor attendance sometimes changed over time. Parents/carers often described their situation as complex and difficult to tackle effectively.

Some parents/carers mentioned that although they had tried to ensure their child attended school and had been proactive in contacting their child's school about the issue, they had not received the necessary support from either the school or other agencies when it was needed. A few parents/carers suggested that schools should play a bigger part in ensuring children attend. A number of parents/carers suggested that an attendance book, and a dedicated liaison officer in each school, who is solely responsible for attendance, would also be valuable.

Graph showing percentage of respondents reporting attendance patterns: parents/carers' attendance record at school compared to their children's attendance in the last 12 months.
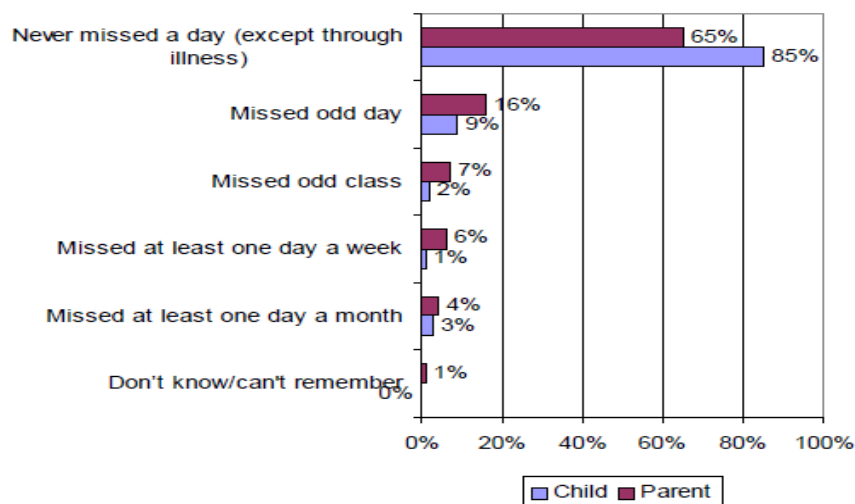
Parents/carers often appeared to lack information about poor attendance and possible approaches to helping improve their child's attendance. The report recommends that the DfES considers the means by which parents/carers could have access to this type of information from a range of sources (EWOs, School Liaison Officers, Publications, Telephone Helplines and the Internet, for example). It was clear from the research that in some cases, parents/carers were initially unaware of what support services exist or how they could find out about them.

Bullying was given as a reason for poor attendance by some parents/carers, and in other cases, parents/carers suspected that their child was being bullied but hiding this behind other reasons for non-attendance. Tied into the need for better communications, the report suggests that the DfES continues to place emphasis on the need for schools to make their bullying policy and procedures clear to all parents and pupils.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its Effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

Parents/carers often described how they were tackling multiple problems (such as housing, debt and health issues). While the Education Welfare Service (EWS) provides a very useful service, which the parents/carers in this study valued, it is possible that in some cases, **earlier involvement of multiple-agencies** may have been beneficial. This is particularly relevant in cases where the real causes of non-attendance are hidden behind a reason deemed 'acceptable', either by the parent/carer or the child. In some schools they have successfully brought together staff from a variety of different agencies to work together with families. Similarly, the DfES is already involved in a number of initiatives to extend this approach, such as through work on Behaviour and Education Support teams (BESTs), Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) and Extended Schools.

It was clear from the interviews with **parents/carers that they valued a "joined-up" approach that involved themselves, EWOs and schools working together**. In many cases, it was only when all three parties became involved in a joint plan that progress on attendance started to be made. Recent moves to encourage the use of parental contracts with parents of poor attenders and which identify an agreed set of actions that each of the stakeholders will follow, seem to be a very positive step forward, and one that the vast majority of parents/carers would support.

Absence from School: A Study of its Causes and Effects in Seven LEAs (The SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow, 2005)

This study is concerned with the causes and effects of poor attendance. It highlights strategies and interventions to promote good attendance.

Introduction

This report presents the results from a 12-month study on the attendance of pupils at school. The views and opinions of pupils, parents and teachers on the topic of absenteeism are included - these cover the role that each of them plays and the actions to be taken to improve the levels of attendance. Information was gathered from 13 primary schools and 14 secondary schools in seven LEAs in various parts of England. Examples of some of the findings included:

- All LEAs and teachers believed that attendance was important because it was related to attainment, disruptive behaviour and children's safety.
- Several LEAs thought that schools were over ready to accept the reasons given for absence and also authorised too many absences because they were under pressure to reduce unauthorised absence.
- Most parents thought it was very important for children to attend school regularly. They associated regular attendance with children doing well in schoolwork.

In the report, five key methods of promoting good attendance were identified – these are briefly described under the 3 sub-headings below.

Role of the School in Promoting Regular Attendance

Group competitions

Of the 27 schools that took part in the research, 13 used group competitions in an attempt to boost the levels of attendance at school. Examples of these included 'attendance challenges' in which classes competed against each other for the best attendance record and the least late arrivals. Rewards were given to those classes who won and recognition of the class's achievement occurred at weekly assemblies.

Individual awards

23 of the 27 primary and secondary schools used individual awards for those who achieved attendance rate over 90%. Examples of rewards included badges, certificates, vouchers and sweets. In one example the pupil that achieved the highest level of attendance each year could choose a prize or a school trip. In two of the schools included in the research, winning pupils were given membership to an 'over 95% club' allowing those who achieved an attendance rate of 95% or over were entitled to privileges such as non-uniform days and day trips.

Improved school ethos and facilities

Introducing **more attractive facilities such as activity clubs and breakfast clubs** for pupils are also methods used by schools to encourage poor attenders to come to school and give children a better start to the day.

Three secondary school head teachers from the report emphasised the need to **treat pupils more like adults and give them a greater say and control** in the activities of the school. Some schools in the report had re-introduced school uniforms in an effort to raise school ethos while others **reduced the size of classes** to allow teachers to interact with the pupils more and improve their teaching. This also helped **build relationships between staff and pupils**, which was another factor in improving school attendance.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

Building good relationships with parents

Improving relationships with parents is also believed to be a key factor in contributing towards reduced absenteeism. Four primary school head teachers felt this was particularly important in helping to get to know parents who had difficult lives to gain a greater understanding of the types of problems they are being faced with.

The research carried out confirmed this general finding but it also provided more information about the complexity of the relationship between parental attitudes and their children's attendance at school. Most parents:

Thought it was important that pupils attended school regularly
Believed that poor attendance and poor work were connected; and
Believed that children needed to get qualifications from school.

However,

Fewer parents whose children had attendance problems held these beliefs, and they were more ready to keep children at home, particularly if they needed help at home.

More parents whose children had attendance problems thought it did no harm for children to miss school occasionally. They were also less likely to think that children's safety was at risk if children were not at school.

Parents who were unhappy with their children's attendance were more likely to think that children missed school because of problems with teachers, bullying and peer pressure. Further reasons for absence included boredom with school and problems with friends.

Parents who were happy with their children's attendance also identified difficulties with school as a cause of truancy.

Over a tenth of the primary school pupils surveyed indicated that their parents would condone absence for a variety of reasons.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

Information-sharing and closer links between primary and secondary school staff

Staff in three of the secondary schools included in the research emphasised the importance of the **transition from primary school to secondary school** for pupils. In one case, the head of a Year 7 group visited all 34 of her school's feeder primary schools to analyse the attendance data for each

pupils which allowed them to identify the pupils who were more likely to find the transition to secondary school difficult.

LEAs worked with a **range of agencies** in order to combat poor attendance. These included education-related professionals, such as school nurses and educational psychologists. Other frequently-used agencies were:

   The police service and youth liaison officers (mentioned by all LEAs)
   The social services (five LEAs)
   Local businesses and projects (three LEAs); and
   Health boards (two LEAs).

Individual LEAs were also working with:

   Housing associations
   Local religious leaders
   Neighbourhood wardens
   Transport groups; and
   The parks police.

Representatives in four Local Education Authorities made it clear that links with local authorities were very important. However some disagreed, saying the links were developing too slowly, sometimes because of staff changes or agencies' differing priorities.

Improving Children's Behaviour and Attendance through the use of Parenting Programmes: Examination of a Good Practice (2004)

This study considers a range of parenting programmes and the impact of these on children's behaviour and attendance. Referrals to these programmes may be voluntary or compulsory and the profile of participants varies – including in terms of the issues they face and their socio-economic background.

Introduction

A lot of evidence has been provided to suggest that school attendance and academic performance are closely related and that those who are absent on a regular basis are more likely to become involved in crime. More and more emphasis is now given to the parents with research showing that they play a pivotal role in improving the attendance and the behaviour of their children.

This research examines **parenting programmes** when they were most effective in the context of improving attendance and behaviour in school and to identify good practice. The report explores who provided the programmes, how they were funded, quality assured and the effectiveness of each one. A range of factors including the curriculum, the organisation of programmes and the effectiveness of

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from the sector

Department of Education
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different types of programmes on parents' attitudes and behaviour are analysed along with the impact of any chances in parenting on children.

Referrals to these programmes may be voluntary or compulsory (given the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 which introduced new powers for LEAs to apply for a parenting order[12] to help address children's behaviour in school; parenting orders are already available for non-attendance). In the past, some LEAs encouraged parents who had not been issued with a parenting order but whose children were experiencing school attendance problems, to attend such programmes on a voluntary basis.

The Anti-social Behaviour Act (2003) has enabled schools and Local Education Authorities to arrange parenting contracts which are voluntary and will involve the parent agreeing to carry out specific actions to improve their child's attendance or behaviour in return for the LEA or school providing or arranging support, typically a parenting programme, with which the parent will be required to co-operate.

The evidence of improvement in attendance in individual cases was supported by attendance data from 12 children whose parents were attending programmes which had a specifically educational focus. **Attendance increased from an average of 81% in the Autumn term of 2003 to 87% in the Spring term of 2004**. This difference was statistically significant.

The programmes, overall, were reported by parents to have a very positive impact. 97% of responding parents reported that the programmes were enjoyable and helpful. They contributed to increased confidence in interacting with and understanding their children. In almost all cases parents reported improvement in the child's behaviour at home and in interactions with the family. 9% of parents strongly agreed with the suggestion that after the programme they should expect to see an improvement in their child's attendance. 68% of parents did not agree or strongly agree with the same expectation.

Although only a small proportion of parents had indicated that they were looking for support in improving their child's behaviour and attendance at school following participation in the programme, 52% felt more confident in improving their child's attendance at school and 58% in improving school behaviour. Despite the fact that the data was limited, there was evidence of improved behaviour and attendance at school as a result of parents' attendance at parenting programmes.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The report includes a number of practices including the Stepping Stones Programme, Family Workshops and programmes run by the Education Welfare Office. These are all aimed towards

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[12] A parenting order compels a parent to attend a parenting programme and to fulfil other requirements as determined necessary by the court for improving their child's behaviour, e.g. ensuring that the child arrives for school on time. Parenting orders are already available following prosecution for non-attendance. Under the Anti-social Behaviour Act they are available following a permanent exclusion or a second fixed term exclusion within 12 months. They will be used when a pupil has been excluded for serious misbehaviour and where parenting is considered a factor in the child's behaviour and the parents are unwilling to engage with the LEA or school in attempting to bring about change on a voluntary basis.

improving communication, setting boundaries, rewarding and consequences. Much of their impact came from the parents gained as they used the various strategies.

The success of the different programmes depends on the skills of those facilitating them. The ability to listen, be supportive and also ensure that each participant is respected during discussions is crucial. Parents value these interactions and the support given to each other.

In the education-focused work, the providers also saw it necessary to work with the children as well as the parents. The attendance and behaviour at school will not improve through parents attending a parenting programme if the problems are not based at school. Examples such as bullying, inappropriate curriculum and difficult relationships with children will require an approach that develops both the skills of the children and the parenting skills of the adults in order to be effective

Effective Attendance Practice in Schools (DFE, 2005)

This study provides a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These apply to all schools.

Role of the School in Promoting Regular Attendance of all Registered Pupils of Compulsory School Age

This document provides an overview of the methods that schools have found the most useful in improving school attendance. It is aimed at senior managers in both primary and secondary schools who are responsible for any issues regarding attendance. The objective of the document is to develop ideas that the schools can consider when creating their own approaches to improve attendance. The document is not a compulsory list of "must do" items; it is simply a list of suggested practices. The effective practices which are listed allow schools to choose their own methods which meet the requirements of their own attendance priorities.

The main approaches which it recommends are summarised in the table below.

Table 7: Examples of Effective Practices to Improve Attendance (2005)

Approach	What this means
demonstrate a strong attendance ethos by having:	• a **whole school approach** which reinforces good attendance, teaching and learning to encourage all pupils to attend and to achieve; • an **attendance and behaviour policy** which is easily understood by all, regularly updated, consulted on and disseminated widely; • appropriate **school attendance targets** (e.g. by pupil or year group) which are understood by staff, parents and pupils; • a **senior manager to lead on attendance** and **all staff seeing attendance as a shared responsibility**; • allocated resource for an **attendance officer**; • **weekly reporting** of attendance issues to the senior management team; and termly to the governing body; • considered how the **physical layout of the school** can help improve attendance, punctuality and deter post-registration truancy; • developed a **multi-agency response** to improve attendance and support pupils/families.
have a clear policy on absence which	• pupils and parents **understand the circumstances in which schools will or will not authorise absence**; • requests for **holidays in term time are discouraged** and where made are handled

Approach	What this means
ensures:	• consistently at a senior level; • **lateness and post-registration absence procedures** are understood by all; • **longer term medical absences** (consistent or intermittent) are **discussed with medical personnel.**
use effective, non-bureaucratic systems for monitoring attendance which have:	• **clear procedures** for staff, parents/carers and pupils for accurate recording and reporting; • **appropriate training and support** for staff using the system; • **consistent use** by staff **of the absence codes** for recording absence; • **monitoring of the quality of data** recorded by staff and procedures to deal with any concerns; • **a daily system for checking the attendance of pupils on approved educational activities** off-site; • procedures to resolve **unexplained absences within a week;** • **electronic registration systems** where appropriate.
use data and other information to improve school and pupil performance by:	• **benchmarking** school absence against year groups or other schools in similar circumstances; • **regularly monitoring progress** towards attendance targets in school; • **collecting and analysing attendance data frequently** (e.g. weekly) to identify causes and patterns of absence; • **understanding and using data** to devise an action plan and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions; • considering **the link between an individual's attendance and their attainment**; • **using effective attendance management practices** from other schools and sharing their own practices; • **monitoring post-registration and internal truancy;** • **using LEA/Ofsted advice on attendance**; • using the **range of materials and expertise available** through the KS3 behaviour and attendance strand.
promote the importance and legal requirements of good attendance to pupils and their parents/carers by:	• using **school promotional material, parent evenings, pupil reviews and home/school agreements to engage parents/carers**; • **communicating clearly with pupils and parents** about the consequences of truancy and parentally condoned absence; • **reminding parents of their responsibility** for ensuring the children's regular attendance, including their punctual arrival at school; • **reminding parents of the potential sanctions** for failure to meet their responsibilities (e.g. Penalty Notices); • explaining the **link between poor attendance and reduced attainment**; • **providing information about the range of support services** that parents can access; • **using school assemblies and visual displays to engage pupils.**
intervene early when individual pupil absence gives cause for concern by:	• making **first day/first instance contact** with parent/carer for all pupils absent without known reason (telephone, e-mail, text); • **analysing individual pupil data** to identify quickly patterns of absence which cause concern; • setting clear **trigger points for higher levels of intervention** which are consistently applied; • having **school attendance panels** for pupils causing significant concern; • seeking advice and follow-up from the **Education Welfare Service.**
have support systems in place for vulnerable groups which provide:	• **pastoral support plans** for pupils with long term attendance difficulties; • a process to **enable returning pupils to catch up on learning and re-integrate** within the school; • **signposting and access to external support** for parents and pupils; • **alternative/flexible curriculum provision** for pupils who are disaffected and may benefit from such help; • **training for staff on specific needs of pupils** e.g. young carers; • **access to relevant social and emotional behaviour skills for staff** to equip them to support these pupils.
reward and	• a range of **reward systems** which are appropriate for pupils with high levels of attendance and

Approach	What this means
celebrate good and improved attendance through:	those who are improving; • use of **attendance "mascots", certificates etc.** to celebrate pupils' or classes' good or improved attendance; • the **inclusion of parents, learning mentors and partner schools in celebrations** where relevant.
make best use of additional support for pupils and parents with greatest need by having:	• a **clear system for reporting concerns about non-attendance** to the local authority; • a **clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of schools** (including between teachers and support staff in line with the National Agreement and workforce remodelling) and other agencies in relation to the provision of support for pupils with attendance problems; • a **service level agreement (or equivalent) with the Education Welfare Service**; • **partnership working with the local authority** to ensure appropriate use of legal interventions to reinforce parental responsibility; • **parenting contracts for non-attendance** where parenting is thought to be a contributory factor to poor attendance; • **in-school multi-agency support meetings** to agree action.

Source: Adapted from Effective Attendance Practice in Schools (DFE, 2005)

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

Of the approaches listed in Table 7 above, several relate specifically to the interface between schools in deprived areas, the home and the community and its role in promoting regular attendance:

- an **attendance and behaviour policy** which is easily understood by all, regularly updated, consulted on and disseminated widely;
- appropriate **school attendance targets** (e.g. by pupil or year group) which are understood by staff, parents and pupils;
- **pupils and parents understand the circumstances in which schools will or will not authorise absence**;
- **requests for holidays in term time are discouraged** and where made are handled consistently at a senior level;
- **clear procedures** for staff, parents/carers and pupils for accurate recording and reporting;
- using **school promotional material, parent evenings, pupil reviews and home/school agreements to engage parents/carers**;
- **communicating clearly with pupils and parents** about the consequences of truancy and parentally condoned absence;
- **reminding parents of their responsibility** for ensuring the children's regular attendance, including their punctual arrival at school;
- **reminding parents of the potential sanctions** for failure to meet their responsibilities (e.g. Penalty Notices);
- explaining the **link between poor attendance and reduced attainment**;
- **providing information about the range of support services** that parents can access;
- making **first day/first instance contact** with parent/carer for all pupils absent without known reason (telephone, e-mail, text);
- **signposting and access to external support** for parents and pupils;
- the **inclusion of parents, learning mentors and partner schools in celebrations** where relevant.

parenting contracts for non-attendance where parenting is thought to be a contributory factor to poor attendance.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

Of the approaches listed in Table 7 above, several relate specifically to the interface between schools and external support services, and its role in promoting regular attendance:

developed a **multi-agency response** to improve attendance and support pupils/families.

longer term medical absences (consistent or intermittent) are **discussed with medical personnel.**

using LEA/Ofsted advice on attendance;

seeking advice and follow-up from the **Education Welfare Service**.

signposting and access to external support for parents and pupils;

alternative/flexible curriculum provision for pupils who are disaffected and may benefit from such help;

the **inclusion of parents, learning mentors and partner schools in celebrations** where relevant.

a **clear system for reporting concerns about non-attendance** to the local authority;

a **clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of schools** (including between teachers and support staff in line with the National Agreement and workforce remodelling) and other agencies in relation to the provision of support for pupils with attendance problems;

a **service level agreement (or equivalent) with the Education Welfare Service;**

partnership working with the local authority to ensure appropriate use of legal interventions to reinforce parental responsibility;

in-school multi-agency support meetings to agree action.

Improving School Attendance in England (NAO, 2005)

This study highlights a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These apply to all schools.

Introduction

This report examines attendance in state schools in England for children of compulsory school age. It examines the factors associated with absence from school, and considers whether initiatives taken by the Department, local authorities and schools to reduce absence have been successful. To do this, the NAO carried out statistical analysis of school absence in 2002-03, visited 17 schools, and through surveys and discussions they obtained the views of head teachers, local authority staff, school inspectors and policymakers.

The absence rate for 2003-04 in England was 6.72% which on average is equivalent to 13 days missed per pupil, 450'000 of the 6.7million pupils failing to attend school each day and absent pupils sufficient to fill 816 average-sized primary schools plus 252 average secondary schools.

Role of school in promoting regular attendance

The schools examined in the report had a number of effective practices to help improve the management of attendance in schools. **Attendance policies** are important in prioritising, focusing attention and providing guidance on attendance matters within a school. The Department's guidance states that head teachers should ensure that a clear policy on attendance is in place. Without a clear policy there are risks that teachers and parents will not give attendance the priority that it requires. The school may struggle to take a tough line on attendance if teachers become inconsistent in their handling of individual cases of absence.

Electronic registration and reward schemes are other procedures which the report suggested were practical measures in improving attendance levels in schools. **Electronic registration** helps schools to record and monitor attendance and provide information to follow up cases. These systems can also make it easier for schools to take registers at each lesson, in order to deter or identify post-registration truancy. **Reward schemes** aim to provide recognition and incentives for pupils to improve their attendance. The schemes take many forms, rewarding both high attending pupils and those whose attendance has improved.

The report also examined the **use of alternative academic subjects** as a method of stimulating interest and excitement in schools. Almost all education welfare services believe that there is a link between the curriculum and attendance. Principal education welfare officers consider that the academic focus of the National Curriculum discourages some pupils from attending school and some consider it to be the biggest barrier to raising attendance. **A varied, alternative and relevant curriculum**, in which pupils can learn skills that they will need at work, can raise pupils' interest, making them more likely to want to attend school.

Interface between schools, the home and the community around promoting regular attendance

The **first day calling** practice of telephoning parents on the first day that a pupil is absent from school without prior authorisation allows for a more efficient lines of communication to be in place between parents and schools. Many of the schools examined in the report had decided against it because of the resources involved however one school had spent £6000 on an automated telephone calling system which reduces the time spent calling parents of absent children.

The **collaboration of schools with other schools** may also help staff understand what they are doing wrong in terms of poor attendance rates and what they can do to improve. Some head teachers are keen to know how well their schools' performance on attendance compares with similar schools, but they do not have the information they require. While some local authorities disseminate tables of schools' performance, many do not do so and it is difficult for a local authority to make soundly based adjustments for schools' contexts because it requires statistical expertise. The Department has the resources to carry out and disseminate analysis of absence rates, enabling schools to assess their performance and, where appropriate, identify other local schools that could provide advice. Some schools feel, however, that there is competition between schools within their local authority that can inhibit some successful schools collaborating with others.

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Interface between schools and external support services and its effectiveness in promoting regular attendance

One of the practices which schools found effective in improving attendance was **working with the local authority's education welfare service**. This will benefit the school through expert advice and resources and will help create a more efficient method of managing attendance within the school. Pupils will also receive specialist support if they have any difficulties. The report showed that some local authorities provided very effective services, however some head teachers considered the support from authorities to being not up to the standard they had hoped.

The **Behaviour Improvement Programme** was set up in 2002 to provide funding to local authorities in order to tackle poor standards of behaviour among pupils including poor attendance. The Schools and local authorities began implementing measures, one of which was to reduce unauthorised absence. Examples of the sorts of measures that were in place **included telephoning parents on the first day their child is absent from school, visiting parents of persistently absent pupils and developing the school's attendance strategies**. The service also developed innovative schemes for encouraging attendance such as **home reading books that emphasise the importance of good attendance.**

The Department of Education also funded local authorities to recruit **behaviour and attendance consultants**. The consultants were available in all secondary schools in all local authorities and the initiative, which also included the provision of audit, guidance and staff training materials. Higher priority was given to attendance by local authorities and there was more widespread use of good practice in secondary schools as a result with has increase at least 1% each year since its introduction.

House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts, Department for Education and Skills: Improving school attendance in England. Eighteenth Report of Session 2005–06 (2005)

This report highlights a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These apply to all schools.

This report to the Public Accounts Committee identifies 10 key practices to help schools manage attendance more effectively (Table 8). It notes that consistent application of the practices should be encouraged.

Table 8: Effective Practices in Attendance Management

Effective Practice	Commentary
1. Head teacher support for attendance management	Head teachers determine the priority that schools give attendance management and the resources that they apply. Some schools have higher absence rates than their circumstances suggest that they ought to have. They may need to give a higher priority to attendance management.
2. Communication of a clear policy on attendance	The onus is on head teachers to ensure that parents, pupils and teachers know what is expected of them and why. Most, but not all, schools have a documented attendance policy. Some head teachers are uncertain about when to authorise holidays during term-time.
3. Electronic registration at each	All schools have to take a register and, used well, electronic registration systems produce reliable attendance data efficiently. Many schools do not have electronic registers and

Effective Practice	Commentary
lesson	could use their devolved funding to implement these systems.
4. Early contact with parents of absent pupils	Most, but not all, schools contact parents on the first day of a child's absence. Early contact demonstrates to parents that attendance matters and absence is noticed, so contributes to the building of a strong ethos of attendance.
5. Regular analysis of attendance data	Analysis of attendance data enables schools to identify causes and patterns of absence and whether individual pupils need support. Most schools analyse data to varying extents.
6. Schemes to reward attendance	Reward schemes can be effective in reducing absence. The schemes can be designed to tackle the particular problems of a school and they increase the profile of attendance.
7. Provision of alternative curricula	Curricula need to match pupils' aspirations to make school attractive. Some schools work effectively with colleges of further education to provide vocational training.
8. Collaboration between schools	Schools apply management practices in different ways to tackle absence. Sharing their knowledge and also their resources can improve practices.
9. Effective working with education welfare services	Local authority education welfare services provide specialist support for difficult cases, for example where pupils have severe behavioural problems or have home circumstances (such as caring responsibilities) that make school attendance difficult. Some education welfare services also give expert advice to schools on attendance management.
10. Threat of legal sanctions	Where other approaches fail, in some cases the threat of sanctions can get pupils to return to school. Some local authorities have used penalty notices very effectively.

Evaluation of School Behaviour and Attendance Pilot (University of London, 2006)

This evaluation report presents findings from a pilot project to improve behaviour and attendance. This pilot was run in areas with above average levels of social deprivation.

Introduction

The key priorities for the Primary National Strategy are behaviour and attendance. The Improving Behaviour and Attendance Unit and the School Standards Group work together within the DfES to ensure that strategies to improve behaviour and attendance are embedded in whole school policy and practice and work on teaching and learning.

The Primary Behaviour and Attendance Strategy pilot took place from 2003-05 and involved 25 Local Authorities. They were selected from LAs which were not eligible for other funded programmes. They were LAs with above average levels of social deprivation, often bordering Excellence in Cities areas with significant numbers of schools where behaviour was likely to be a key issue

The pilot aimed to:

Allow schools in the pilot Local Authorities to have entry to high-quality collaborated and sustained professional development and attendance issues;

Develop and test models of Local Authority support where they key issues for schools are behaviour and attendance;

Test curriculum materials which develop children's social, emotional and behavioural skills and materials for school self-review and training in improving behaviour (SEAL)

Implement and evaluate small group interventions for children needing additional focused help;

Promote the development of a common approach across the 25 participating Local Authorities and the Department's Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) Local Authorities.

The pilot includes four different components:

1. A universal element providing professional development opportunities to all schools in the pilot authorities (the CPD strand);

2. A targeted element providing focused support to schools where behaviour and attendance had been identified as key issues (the school improvement strand);

3. A universal element providing curriculum work focusing on the social and emotional aspects of learning for all children in pilot schools (the curriculum materials or SEAL strand);

4. A targeted element providing group work for children needing extra help in this area, and their parents/carers (the small group interventions strand).

Role of the School in Promoting Regular Attendance

The circumstances which affect each school's behaviour and attendance are specific to that school. The **behaviour and attendance audit** was designed to enable schools to identify their own good practice and those areas which warranted further attention. The behaviour and attendance audit played a crucial role in the school improvement strand but was not universally welcomed.

The use of a '**Teacher Coach'** is the key method discussed to impact on student attendance in the report. The role of the teacher coach was to provide an efficient and effective service to the schools targeted by facilitating the school behaviour and attendance audit by providing coaching to teaching staff. Their contribution to the school was crucial in the operation of the school improvement strand. In many of the Local Authorities the teacher coach expanded to focus on pupil engagement in learning and behaviour issues. It was important that the **quality of learning in the classroom was high** and that teachers were given the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and behaviour management in a confidential situation.

Evaluation of Full Service Extended Schools Initiative Final Report (DfES, 2007)

This evaluation report presents findings from a national initiative to provide a comprehensive range of services in schools including health services, adult learning and community activities as well as study support and childcare. Most schools served areas of disadvantage.

This report presents the findings from the final year of the three-year evaluation of the national **full service extended schools (FSES) initiative**. The FSES initiative was launched by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2003. The original aim was to support the development in every local authority (LA) area of one or more schools which provide a comprehensive range of services, including access to health services, adult learning and community activities as well as study support and 8am to 6pm childcare. Local FSES projects received funding from DfES, and came on stream in each of three successive years. Most FSES served areas of disadvantage and in the first year were located in Behaviour Improvement Programme areas. By the end of the initiative, 138 schools were involved, together with a further 10 funded through the London Challenge.

The evaluation aimed to identify:

the activities undertaken by participating schools;
the processes underpinning these activities;
the impacts of activities; and
The outcomes of activities.

Measuring a school's performance in terms of attendance can create problems in terms of what comparisons and measures are used. The national full service extended schools initiative can have significant impacts on individuals in terms of attendance and exclusions. From the case studies

included in the report the impacts are very visible in whole school performance data. Most FSESs claimed improvements in their performance on certain indicators during the lifetime of the initiative. Some of these supposed improvements can be supported in the data collected from the report. For instance, a secondary FSES 1.11 has moved from 90 fixed term and 3 permanent exclusions in 2000-01 to 15 fixed term and no permanent exclusions in 2005-2006. During the same period, absence fell from 11.8% (authorised) and 2.2% (unauthorised) to 8.5% and 1.4% respectively. Likewise, in secondary FSES 1.7.1 (Hornham), exclusions fell from 120 fixed term and 5 permanent in 2002-03 to 14 fixed term and no permanent in 2005-06.

However, some caution again needs to be exercised. For instance, where improvements were reported, these tended to have begun before the school was involved in the FSES initiative. So, the authorised absence figures for secondary FSES 1.7.1 (Hornham) show a fall between 2002-3 and 2005-6 from 7.6% to 6.4%. However, in 2000-01 the same figure had stood at 10.3%. Interestingly, the figure for unauthorised absence actually rose from 1.5% in 2000-01 to 1.9% in 2005-06. Elsewhere (primary FSES 1.3), absence fell during the lifetime of the initiative, but remained higher than it had been in 2000-01. The same school had its first permanent exclusion for 10 years in 2006.

Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder - Evaluation (DCSF Research Research Report No. DCSF-RW054, 2008)

This evaluation report presents findings from parenting programmes targeted at parents of children at risk of negative outcomes. At the time of starting the groups the parents were characterised overall by high levels of disadvantage.

This report addresses the role of schools and extended schools in delivering the Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder (PEIP). The PEIP was a DCSF funded programme over the period September 2006 – March 2008 at a cost of £7.6 million. PEIP funded 18 local authorities (LAs) to implement one of three selected parenting programmes with parents of children aged 8 – 13 years: Incredible Years, Triple P and Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities, selected as having a sound evidence base for their effectiveness.

The PEIP aimed to support parents by improving their parenting skills by increasing the accessibility of **parenting programmes** for those children and young people at risk of negative outcomes. The programme is based on research which has identified the value of helping parents reflect and develop their parenting style.

At the time of starting the groups the parents were characterised overall by high levels of disadvantage as reflected in low educational attainment, low income and high demands on support services. However, it is important also to note the range, for example 13.3% had attended university. The ethnic profile indicates that the PEIP was accessed by a wide range of the community and that there were more parents from minority ethnic groups than would be expected from a nationally representative sample. At the start of the parenting courses, parents overall had significantly lower levels of mental well-being and had recent histories of substantial use of support services.

The PEIP was piloted in 18 Local Authorities and these were evaluated by the Centre of Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR). The evaluation found that:

The parenting training was very successful in improving the parents' mental wellbeing, their parenting skills, their sense of being a parent, and also in the behaviour of the child about whom they were concerned.

The PEIP almost halved the number of parents who classified their children as having significant behavioural difficulties.

Many parents reported changes including being calmer with their children, more confident in parenting, and giving more time to talking and listening to their children. They thought their relationship with their children had improved, as well as their behaviour, well-being, self-esteem and interest in school.

Certain features were identified as fundamental to the effectiveness of PEIPs after the evaluation:

- o There should be clear referral arrangements through either schools or professionals
- o A range of practitioners from multi-agency backgrounds who are trained in the use of evidence-based parent programmes should be provided and supported by frontline staff who have received common core/awareness training;
- o Local requirements should be met through the completion of a local assessment of parent needs including specific communities and their specific needs;
- o Greater promotion and awareness of the programme should occur across a wide range of Local Authorities.

Good Practice in Re-engaging Disaffected and Reluctant Students in Secondary Schools (Ofsted, 2008)

This report provides strategies for re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools based on a survey of schools which have a record of sustained good practice in re-engaging disaffected students (including those with poor attendance).

Introduction

This report draws on a survey of 29 secondary schools (including one academy and one pupil referral unit) selected because they had shown a decrease in unauthorised absences between 2004 and 2006 and had a record of sustained good practice in re-engaging disaffected students. The aim of the survey was to identify which of the actions taken by the school was most successful when trying to help students enjoy learning again.

For the purposes of the survey, "disaffected students" were defined as those who displayed one or more of the following characteristics:

regularly non-compliant, but not aggressive or threatening, and caused repeated low-level disruptions;

regularly disruptive, challenging or both, which led to repeated entries in the school's incident log, recurring fixed-term exclusions or both;

absent for 20% or more of the available school sessions in the year; and

quiet and withdrawn and uninterested in most lessons.

The schools in the survey had 32,987 students in all, of whom 4,347 had become disaffected at one time or another. The schools had managed to re-engage 3,404 (78%) of these students successfully. Of the disaffected students in the schools surveyed, the girls had a far higher absence rate than the boys.

Barriers to Re-engagement

The schools perceived three common factors that worked against the reengagement of disaffected students:

> unwillingness on the part of parents to work with the school and, in some cases, collusion with the students against the school;
>
> external influences and attractions that were more compelling for the students than school, such as gangs, criminal activity and drug-taking; and
>
> weaknesses in the provision made by the schools and other services for their students.

Factors that Support Re-engagement

The features below were common in the secondary schools that were successful in helping disaffected students to begin to enjoy learning again:

> **commitment from all staff to meeting the students' needs**:
> - o the staff shared a commitment to helping the students succeed, which they expressed clearly to students and their families. The school ethos valued and respected the needs of individuals. The students felt part of the school.
>
> **effective monitoring systems to identify students at risk**
> - o Robust monitoring of academic, personal and social progress, and close collaboration with primary schools and other services for children and young people ensured that students who were likely to become disaffected were identified early. They received appropriate support before and after they entered secondary school.
>
> **close collaboration between primary and secondary schools to prevent students' disengagement at transition**
>
> **the involvement of a wide variety of adults within the school and the community to support the students**
> - o Teaching assistants provided vital support for individuals, helping them to maintain their interest and cope successfully with any crises. This allowed teachers to focus on teaching the whole class.
> - o Pastoral support was managed by assigned support staff. They acted as the first point of contact for all parents and carers and they directed them to the most appropriate member of staff if they could not deal with the issue themselves.
>
> **regular and effective communication with parents and carers, including involving them closely in determining the strategies to be used to support their children**
> - o Communication with students and their families was very effective. It ensured that they were fully involved in the process and had confidence in the decisions that were made. Students knew they were listened to and felt they could contribute to decisions about their future. Home–school liaison staff played a critical role.
>
> **modifying the curriculum and drawing on educational providers beyond the school**
> - o Specific support, such as temporary withdrawal from classes and training in life skills to help students change their attitudes and improve their learning, was very effective.
> - o At Key Stage 4, a high-quality, flexible curriculum, involving a range of accredited training providers outside the school, was effective in engaging students more in their learning.
>
> **close working relationships with local agencies responsible for supporting children and young people.**

o   Some of the schools surveyed felt that significant delays from specialist services, such as child and adolescent mental health services, had contributed to students' continuing disengagement.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

Many of the schools surveyed in the report **allocated specific pastoral staff to support students**. The role of these adults was to establish a personal link to the school while at the same time providing a friend, advocate, supervisor critic and motivator. Support staff will provide teachers with the opportunity to concentrate on teaching and to be less involved with the discipline and behavioural aspects of school. This allows teachers to spend more time focusing on the education of the students and more time for those who may need more help. For those who have been absent, teachers have more time to help the student catch up on anything they had previously missed.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

From the survey it is clear that a **home-school liaison** is critical in improving pupil's opinions of school leading to high levels of attendance. Effective communication with students and their families ensured that both parties were fully involved in the processes undertaken which allowed schools to have greater confidence in the decisions they were making. Staff were able to share the commitment to helping the students to succeed by expressing clearly to both students and their families.

One of the key factors in improving the level of enjoyment, satisfaction and consequently attendance at the schools being surveyed was the school's recruitment and deployment of support staff. Staff were selected from a wide range of backgrounds in an attempt to seek people with key attributes such as patience, willingness not to pre-judge the children and tolerance. Some schools took the approach of **recruiting support staff from the local community which was effective in breaking down the barriers between home and school**. As students and their families did not view these staff as part of the local authorities, social services provision or teachers, they felt more at ease and less intimidated when at school.

All of the schools visited identified a **close partnership with parents or carers** as a fundamental aspect in re-engaging students and keeping them in school. Schools decided to ease any feelings of embarrassment or intimidation by giving parents the telephone number of a designated member of staff, other than the pastoral support manager. Some schools even offered a **separate entrance into the school for parents** in an attempt to build a close relationship and effective communication. **Home-school liaison teams** were also present in many of the schools with key adults being provided to reinforce parental support.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its Effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

The schools surveyed in the report decided to **work very closely with relevant agencies**, including educational psychologists, social services departments and the education welfare service. To integrate the services with the students, the school organised regular meetings with representatives from the organisations to discuss specific issues and in some cases were referred to specialist agencies.

Twenty Outstanding Primary Schools – Excelling Against the Odds (Ofsted, 2009)

This report draws on the experience of 20 consistently outstanding schools to identify how they: achieved excellence; sustain excellence and share excellence – these include some strategies for improving attendance. The schools are chosen from the small number that have been judged outstanding in two or more inspections, which serve disadvantaged communities and which have exceptionally good results.

Characteristics of outstanding primary schools in challenging circumstances

The 20 schools in this report serve some of the most impoverished electoral wards in England. They excel against the odds and teach children to do the same. The communities under stress served by these schools contain a disproportionate number of families that find it difficult to function as such. The symptoms, as they affect the young children in those families, particularly but not only where the parents are White British working class, include absent parents – particularly fathers; young carers – children looking after siblings or a parent; grandparents who are carers; alcohol misuse; drug misuse and dealing; domestic turbulence and violence; child abuse; criminality; convoluted and unstable adult relationships; poor diet; social dysfunction and parental ineptitude – ignorance about parenting. Resources are scarce and often not used wisely. There is poverty of hope and aspiration, little productive or creative energy and little emotional stability or moral direction. The children, although they may be loved, are embroiled in and often the victims of their confused circumstances.

Children from other heritages can also present some of these problems, as well as family circumstances that are associated with or exaggerations of their culture, for example: the role of women in the family and perceptions about what that role should be; dominant males and home languages which do not include English. Children of recent immigrants, who may also be asylum seekers or refugees, may come from backgrounds which value education and respect the teacher, but can carry traumas from their past, encounter prejudice and bigotry in their communities, and be faced with financial insecurity, unsettled accommodation and an immigration status which is unresolved or temporary.

The following five criteria were used to identify the small sample of schools in challenging circumstances that have proved remarkably successful over a period of time:

Sustained excellence, indicated by being judged to be outstanding in two or more inspections;

Disadvantaged intake, indicated by over a quarter of pupils – that is 50% above the average – being eligible for free school meals;

Being judged outstanding in their inspections in terms of leadership and management and teaching and learning as well as for overall effectiveness

Standards that compared favourably with national averages and were well above "floor targets"

In the schools that had Key Stage 2 pupils, a contextual value-added (CVA) score exceeding 100.

Success Factors

The outstanding schools in the sample succeed for the following reasons.

a strong and caring ethos and commitment to the children from all staff, coupled with a genuine desire to achieve the very best for our children

a very positive 'can do' culture where praise and encouragement prevail and self-esteem is high

outstanding teaching by consistently high-quality staff who show great commitment and passion

a constant focus on maintaining and improving standards of attainment, emphasising the systematic development of basic literacy and numeracy skills

high-quality planning, assessment and targeted intervention to enable all children to achieve the best they can;

the quality of school leadership is also crucial.

Links to Attendance

With regard to specific aspects of Achieving and Sustaining Excellence, the report highlights how schools have addressed issues related to poor attendance and engaging with parents and the community:

Under Achieving Excellence, one of the features is "Structure and Routine"". One example relates to unintended consequences of reward / incentive schemes for attendance:

Assemblies are structured and used to promote active learning at Ramsden School. There is a strong reward system and all children over the course of time receive prizes and stickers. Friday is the "well done" assembly. **The school stopped having an award for attendance because too many children were coming to school when they were not well.**

Under Sustaining Excellence, one of the features is "Working with parents and the community"; this includes examples of good practice in engaging with parents and the community as follows:

Commonly, the White British working class parents are perceived as particularly hard to reach. Many had poor experiences when at school and do not want to come near school unless they have to. Schools in communities like Mixenden (Calderdale), Barrow-in-Furness (Cumbria) and Cotmanhay (Derbyshire) have gradually changed the attitudes of their parents towards education. Parents' responses range from a grudging respect for the school to something close to social dependence on it, and some turn to the school for help and advice on a range of problems in their lives. To do this meant overcoming the residual antipathy to school which many parents bear. One measure of success may be typically high attendance rates at events the school holds for parents – at times which best suit them. Parents tend to come to school when their child is performing, and schools in challenging circumstances ensure that such occasions occur frequently. Schools take such opportunities to raise concerns and questions with otherwise elusive parents: 'While I've got you…' Gradually, parents realise that the school is approachable and supportive.

Several schools have parent partnership co-ordinators who facilitate close links between staff and parents;

The schools typically have high expectations of parents as well as of the children.

Twelve Outstanding Secondary Schools – Excelling Against the Odds (Ofsted, 2009)

This report draws on the experience of 12 consistently outstanding schools to identify how they: achieved excellence; sustain excellence and share excellence – these include some strategies for improving attendance. The schools are chosen from the small number that have been judged outstanding in two or more inspections, which serve disadvantaged communities and which have exceptionally good results.

Characteristics of outstanding secondary schools in challenging circumstances

The schools in the sample serve some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country, defying the association of poverty with outcomes; they enable such young people to succeed and reduce their disadvantage.

A higher than average proportion of students in these schools come from poor or disturbed home backgrounds, where support for their learning and expectations of their achievement can be low. Many students are subject to emotional and psychological tensions, owing to their circumstances. Regular attendance at school is a problem for many. The areas in which they live are subject to some of the urban ills that often characterise poorer communities. These come not only from the ready availability of drugs and alcohol, but the peer pressures of gangs and fashions, and overt racism, all of which tend to attract behaviour which ranges from antisocial to violent. Getting these students ready and willing to learn is a constant challenge, which the schools strive to meet by providing a better daytime alternative to being at home or on the streets.

The following five criteria were used to identify the small sample of schools in challenging circumstances that have proved remarkably successful over a period of time:

- at least two inspection reports in the last three inspections in which the school was judged outstanding
- an above-average proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals
- outstanding grades for teaching and learning, leadership and the school overall in the most recent inspection
- high standards and a sustained trajectory of improved attainment to 2007
- a pattern of high contextual value-added (CVA) scores from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4.

Reasons for success

The outstanding schools in the sample succeed for the following reasons.

- They excel at what they do, not just occasionally but for a high proportion of the time.
- They prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement, that speaking English as an additional language can support academic success and that schools really can be learning communities.
- They put students first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities.
- They have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently and never relaxed.
- They fulfil individual potential through providing outstanding teaching, rich opportunities for learning, and encouragement and support for each student.
- They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and well-being of every student.
- Their achievements do not happen by chance, but by highly reflective, carefully planned and implemented strategies which serve these schools well in meeting the many challenges which obstruct the path to success.
- They operate with a very high degree of internal consistency.
- They are constantly looking for ways to improve further.
- They have outstanding and well-distributed leadership.

Links to Attendance

Overall, it is worth noting that amongst the twelve school, two have made improvements from a starting point which included attendance levels of 70% (Greenwood Dale School, Nottingham and Robert Clack School, Barking and Dagenham).

With regard to specific aspects of Achieving and Sustaining Excellence, the report highlights how schools have addressed issues related to poor attendance.

Under Achieving Excellence, one of the features is "Inclusion: students as individuals". In some cases, this includes a link to attendance:

> Underachieving students tend to have problems related either to attendance or to their circumstances such as difficulties at home, the wrong curriculum or peer group tensions.

> At Middleton Technology School, attendance is a challenge and is under constant focus. **Persistent absentees and their parents are telephoned**. These calls are supported by **home visits and legal action** remains a last resort. The school is reducing its fixed-term exclusions, and **good inter-school arrangements exist for temporary placements in another school**. The school's attendance target is an ambitious 96%.

Under Sustaining Excellence, one of the features is "No student left behind". In some cases, this includes a link to attendance:

> For schools that sustain their excellence, an absolute focus on the progress of every student means that none is overlooked and everyone who needs support is given it.

> Rigorous analysis of data identifies the underachievement of individuals or groups of students at an early stage. This information feeds into the school's systems for accountability, ensuring that teachers and departments are challenged and supported to take any necessary action. It also enables the school to intervene directly.

> At Greenwood Dale School, there are two examples of interventions to ensure students are not left behind.

> **Targeting Groups:** Key Stage 4 students are placed in groups; the school works with each group differently.
> - o Early in Year 10, the head teacher reads every report and holds a 15-minute interview with each of the 220 students. The school then identifies four groups of students and works with them in different ways.
>   - § Group 1: students who will certainly achieve five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics.
>   - § Group 2: 'OK but need impetus.' They become the responsibility of the head of year.
>   - § Group 3: considered to be capable of five GCSE passes at grades A* to C but for particular reasons, **such as poor behaviour or attendance**, which may derive from their home circumstances, are not likely to achieve this target. They are allocated to directors of achievement with the objective of achieving eight A* to C grade passes, including English and mathematics. They are monitored weekly by the year group directors of achievement, each of whom has a team of learning mentors. Their work is focused on action and early intervention. The senior leadership team checks the progress of all these students with the directors of learning (heads of department) each half term. School targets are updated each week. The particular focus is on students

who are likely to 'pass' English or mathematics but not both, to understand the reasons, and focus attention on the weaker subject.

- Group 4: a small group of disaffected students at risk of underachievement. They have an alternative curriculum and are monitored directly by the staff who work with them.

Intensive mentoring: At Greenwood Dale School, the Director of Achievement selects underachieving students at the end of Year 9, focusing on mathematics and English. She and a learning mentor then mentor 40 students between them and diagnose issues related to their learning. The main aim of the support is to ensure that all Year 10 students are fully up to date with their course work by the end of the year.

- o One-to-one interviews help to identify problems in particular subjects, and staff can then decide what action to take. They involve parents, where appropriate, and have parents' mobile numbers for ease of contact. Every student is treated individually.
- o **Unorthodox solutions are used, such as an arrangement where a student with a very poor and long-standing attendance problem was given a reduced timetable requiring one day fewer in school, provided that, first, the student attended every day for two weeks.**
- o The emphasis for all interventions is on achieving success and on the pride that accompanies it. Where sanctions are needed, there is a very good email system, so that when a teacher has a problem, the information is shared. No stigma is attached to having a learning mentor. One of the students who refused at first changed his mind and asked for one after seeing the enthusiasm of his peers. New mentors are well briefed, then tutored by an experienced mentor. Mentoring is focused on academic support; they have a clear brief but may work in different styles, as long as they do not become over-sympathetic. They represent the diversity of the school.

Investigating the use of Parental Responsibility Measures for School Attendance and Behaviour (York Consulting LLP/ DCSF, September 2010)

This report discusses the use of a range of parental responsibility measures particularly in the context of attendance and exclusion. It notes that statistical evidence suggests a relationship between social deprivation (as indicated by Free School Meals) and the use of these.

Introduction

This report presents the findings from research undertaken on behalf of the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The overarching aims of the research were to:

review national patterns of usage of the four main parental responsibility measures (Parenting Contracts[13], Parenting Orders[14], Penalty Notices[15] and Fast Track[16]) and corresponding national patterns of attendance/exclusions across Local Authorities (LAs);

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[13] Parenting Contracts (for attendance and behaviour) – are voluntary, written agreements between a parent and either a school or LA, and provides support to the parent

formulate a sense of LAs' experience of implementing the measures, including any issues (facilitators, barriers etc.) around their implementation;

examine in-depth the use of the measures in a selection of LAs and the impact of those measures on attendance and behaviour at a school level and across the LA; and

Recommend how parental responsibility measures should be best applied in the future, in order to improve attendance and behaviour.

Statistical evidence suggests a relationship between social deprivation (as indicated by Free School Meals) and the use of the measures as follows:

the greater the proportion of secondary pupils who are eligible for free school meals in a LA, the higher the usage of Fast Track and Penalty Notices for attendance; and

greater growth in the usage of Fast Track in LAs between 2006-07 and 2007-08 was associated with LAs with higher rates of secondary pupils eligible for free school meals and lower rates of primary school persistent absenteeism in 2007-08.

Role of the School in Promoting Regular Attendance

The case study research suggests that schools were given the opportunity to develop their own procedures when addressing the issue of poor attendance. The types of early intervention included:

First day contact (automated phone calls and text messages and telephone contact by attendance officers)

School absence letters – used when levels of attendance were becoming a 'cause for concern'

Informal meetings and/or telephone calls with parents to discuss the reasons for a pupil's poor attendance

Awareness about the importance of attendance at a school level (assemblies, parents evenings, the use of attendance mascots in primary schools and newsletters)

Attendance Initiatives (trophies, rewards and incentives)

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

As part of their early intervention support, **drawing in support from other agencies and services was common practice** across all case study authorities. This approach was most evident for LAs that had established prescriptive and holistic delivery models. However, there was also evidence of prescriptive authorities also bringing in support for families where this was needed.

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[14] Parenting Orders (for attendance and behaviour) – impose requirements on parents to attend parenting course/counselling for three months

[15] Penalty Notices (for attendance and behaviour) – are used as an alternative to court action against parents who fail to ensure their child's regular attendance. They can also be used for excluded children found in a public place

[16] Fast Track to Attendance – is a non statutory time-focused attendance case management intervention, specifying clear actions for improvement. If a pupil's attendance continues to be an issue, prosecution procedures are initiated

Links to specific officers or services to support families within Attendance Service teams was common. Links to Parenting Support Advisors (PSAs) and other parenting workers or support were also common across local areas.

The case study research provided much greater insight into approaches to the use of Parenting Contracts. **Parenting Contracts** provided the opportunity for schools to engage parents in support at an early stage, with the aim of meeting family needs earlier and reducing the need for Attendance Service involvement. Parenting Contracts were identified in those LAs where the LA took ownership of the process (albeit in partnership with the school). Parenting Contracts were likely to be used as a part of the LA's formalised approach to addressing attendance issues. This type of contact was mainly used by authorities that had adopted a prescriptive delivery approach (Model A) and tended to be used in the following circumstances:

- As a follow-up to an informal agreement between a school and parents, and if the case proceeds to LA intervention, it may be deemed appropriate to then offer a Parenting Contract led by the LA; or;
- Where a Parenting Contract had not previously been offered by the school and it was felt that this would be a beneficial intervention for the family.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

A number of models of practice were established by Local Authorities which covered areas such as attendance structures, training and support for staff and monitoring and evaluations. Examples of these are:

- **Local Authority Attendance Structures** – The majority of the case study authorities were operating a centrally-based team structure to address attendance issues. Responsibility was allocated for a number of schools to Attendance Managers and operational Attendance Officers. The remaining case study authorities were either operating a school-based team or a locality-based team structure.
- **Local Authority Approaches to Attendance** - The attendance measures were not used in isolation by the case study authorities. They were instead used as a wider package of measures and interventions that Local Authorities and schools could draw upon to support and challenge pupils and parents.

The report draws on a number of recommendations which are suggested for consideration in future Local Authority approaches. These include:

- Ensuring that all Local Authorities and schools using Parenting Contracts meet all the requirements in Section 19 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003.
- Additional opportunities to be provided for sharing practice through the use of locally developed forums or meetings focusing on the use of networks and new contacts
- Improvements in monitoring and the evaluation of processes to measure the impact of behavioural measures. Strengthening in these processes will give authorities a much greater knowledge and awareness of the impact of the measures which will help strengthen their evidence based practice.

Not Present and not Correct: Understanding and Preventing School Exclusions (Barnardo's, 2010)

This report describes interventions for working with young people who are mainly from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds to re-integrate them into learning.

Introduction

This report by Barnardo's was prompted by the recognition of the unique potential for education to break the cycle of poverty. The report looks at four effective methods of working with troubled young people to improve their behaviour for the long term through early intervention and offering alternatives to reintegrate them into learning. The four methods are:

1. Raising awareness of underlying reasons for young people who are being excluded

2. Examining successful models of intervention that prevent difficulties escalating to the point of exclusion

3. Raising the profile of successful alternatives to exclusion for young people who have reached a crisis point in their lives

4. Demonstrating the social and economic costs of exclusion by building a case for investment in preventive services and alternative provisions.

The research conducted only covers the attendance issues in England as the permanent exclusion rates are more than double those in the other three UK nations.

It notes that statistically, school exclusion is strongly linked to poverty and disadvantage stating that: "secondary pupils who are already poor or socially disadvantaged are three times more likely to be excluded". This research also revealed a worrying incidence of unofficial exclusions among the young people Barnardo's works with, who are mainly from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds. Unofficial exclusions are illegal and Barnardo's notes that children who are unaccounted for and missing education without an official record are at risk.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

The report consists of several models of intervention to help reduce the levels of exclusion at school: The Shropshire Project, Leeds Reach and Palmersville Training. The relevant aspects of these models are explained in more detail below under the appropriate headings.

The recommendations at the end of the report suggested that the key features of an effective method of reducing school exclusion were:

Intervening before problems become entrenched;
Working with parents and families;
Small group work;
Applied vocational options;
A young work approach; and
Persistence and belief.

Interface between schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The report consists of four models of intervention to help reduce the levels of exclusion at school. The Shropshire Project works with the local authority to support young people aged 5-18 who have family and other difficulties that distract them from learning and affect their behaviour at school. The project provides **family support workers** (FSWs) in schools which allowed young people to refer themselves to in order to discuss whatever issues are bothering them.

Of the four models of intervention, The Shropshire Project was the most involved with parents and carers. Those who worked on the project were able to identify how parents were reluctant to go near a school because of their own bad experiences which led to unclear lines of communication between the school and home. Parents also felt guilty that they were to blame for their own child's exclusion at school because of their inability to help. One method to **build parents confidence and self-esteem** was to help them to arrange clubs and community groups during the summer holidays.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

Within the Shropshire Project, **multi-agency teams** consisting of FSWs and other professionals such as social workers, young offending workers and mental health workers provided informal discussions and consultations to identify any problems that they felt could escalate in the future.

As well as working to resolve family issues, the family support workers also have excellent links with schools and teachers and there is a close relationship with themselves and local authority exclusion officers**.** Strong connections such as these meant that authorities could intervene and advocate on behalf of young people to achieve the best educational outcome for them. In turn schools, teachers and the local authority workers respected the insights that FSWs were able to offer on the best way to support a young person through difficulties at school which helped them to engage in their school work.

In the second model of intervention was Leeds Reach, **schools work as a partnership together and with other agencies to help deliver an alternative, inclusive learning programme** for one term for young people who have found it difficult to remain in mainstream education. The model addresses previous issues of poor behaviour, attendance and attainment effectively allowing parents and schools to bridge any cultural misunderstandings.

In order to provide an opportunity for young people to gain entry back into mainstream school the placements were introduced at Leeds Reach and were viewed by teachers, parents and students as a positive solution as opposed to a sanction or punishment. The Leeds Reach model provided tuition towards the NOCN qualification along with any help that was required for GCSEs or coursework. This allowed young people to learn valuable lessons, achieve and gain the confidence to continue learning when they returned to school.

Another model of intervention was Palmersville Training which offers between one and three days a week of a **vocational learning option** for people in North Tyneside. The service aims to help those who feel excluded from the academic nature of school to gain qualifications and see the relevance attendance at school. Examples of the vocational learning subjects are horticulture, hair and beauty, painting and decorating and catering.

Improving Attendance and Reducing Persistent Absence (DE, 2010)

This study highlights a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These apply to all schools.

Introduction

Pupils who attend school on a regular basis and are offered access to high-quality teaching and learning opportunities will usually leave school with qualifications and access to greater employment opportunities. The links between attendance and achievement are strong, and high levels of attendance at school should be a right of each pupil. This practice manual is intended to help schools gain the understanding and tools to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence

'Persistent absence' refers to absence of more than 20%, whether authorised or unauthorised. Pupils with persistent absence are often those unlikely to attain at school and stay in education after the age of 16 years. They are also significantly more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour and youth crime and are more at risk of other negative outcomes (including teenage pregnancy and drug and alcohol abuse). It follows that schools and local authorities that focus on this high-risk group will be in a strong position to make progress in the range of outcomes for children and young people for which they are accountable.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

School-based procedures should be addressed as a first measure. Schools should have:

- a robust **school attendance policy** (which may be part of the overall behaviour and attendance policy), with a code of practice that details the aims, expectations and responsibilities of the school, parents/carers and students (this must underpin school procedures);
- a thorough understanding of the **absence and attendance codes**;
- a thorough understanding of the **regulations for pupil registration and the guidance on keeping pupil registers**;
- a system to ensure that there is **consistency in application of codes, practices and procedures**;
- A **school attendance leader** (who is a member of the senior leadership team) to ensure there is a strategic lead for attendance within the school.

The school should actively promote attendance and discourage absence. Policies should be proactive as well as reactive and should involve all school staff.

A school attendance policy should outline the vision of the school, explaining the role that all members of the school community have in limiting absence and promoting attendance. The policy should convey clear messages, highlighting the place of attendance within the school ethos and identifying clear links between attendance, attainment and pupil well-being. The policy should also outline the role that all members of the school community play in promoting good attendance and limiting absence.

A positive and successful school policy should also include:

an explanation of types of absence and the methods the school will use to tackle different reasons for absence;

actions to be taken for pupils who are identified as persistent absentees;

the school's policy on term-time holidays and punctuality;

definite policies outlining the way that attendance is recorded in the school;

an explanation of the hierarchy of actions the school takes in the event of an absence;

expectations of school staff and parents/carers in the event of an absence;

A regular review process that should involve pupils and parents/carers.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

Local authority children's services should provide support and challenge to help the school reach attendance targets. School-level intervention should always precede referral to external support services.

School policy should advise clearly that the Education Act 1996 states: 'If any child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his parent is guilty of an offence.' Schools should align their practice with the following policies of local authority children's services:

code of conduct for penalty notices

parenting strategy, including use of parenting contracts and parenting orders

attendance strategy

A Guide to the Law for School Governors: School Attendance (DE, 2011)

This sets out the role and responsibilities for School Governors in England with regard to attendance.

Introduction

The Department for Education's thirteenth guide to the law of school governors notes that all school governors need to know what their legal responsibilities are and how these fit in with the responsibilities of the head teacher, the local authority (LA) and the Secretary of State for Education. This guide explains what the law says and how it affects governors. It should be read alongside the 'law' and 'guidance' sections listed at the end of each chapter, and any information on governance provided by the LA. In this edition, information can be found on:

Community schools, including community special schools and maintained nursery schools (MNS)

Foundation schools, including foundation special schools and trust schools

Voluntary-aided schools

Voluntary-controlled schools.

This guide has been revised to incorporate the changes that were current at 1 January 2010, but it may also refer to regulations that will be introduced at a later date.

Role of School in Regular Attendance

Schools should have **effective systems and procedures** for encouraging regular school attendance, investigating and resolving the underlying causes of poor attendance, and for early identification of persistently absent pupils and prevention of their absence. These should be set out in an **attendance policy**.

These systems should be **reviewed regularly and modified** where necessary to reflect the circumstances of the school.

Parents should be aware of the school attendance policy and should be encouraged to co-operate with the systems and procedures that the policy describes.

A good attendance policy should clearly **set out staff roles and responsibilities for dealing with attendance**, and should link to the school's behaviour and bullying policies.

The attendance policy should reflect the LAs attendance strategy and **should be endorsed by the school governors**.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The Education and Inspections Act (2006) places a **duty on parents and carers to ensure that their child is not found in a public place during school hours without a reasonable justification**. If this does occur, parents should be notified and a penalty notice issued. The LA local codes should detail what would be accepted as reasonable justification (for example, a medical appointment or being taken to an educational provision) to avoid a penalty being issued or the prosecution of a parent. The school must inform parents of excluded pupils and that a penalty notice could be issued if their child is found present on the streets.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its Effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

LAs have a responsibility for legal sanctions to enforce school attendance. This duty is normally exercised through employees known as **Education Welfare Officers** who will work in a joint effort with families and schools to resolve any attendance issues. They do this by:

helping schools to monitor and analyse attendance data;

helping schools to identify problems that are affecting the child's attendance at school and agreeing plans for improving attendance with parents.

At agreed intervals, the governing body must give the LA the name and address of every pupil who does not go to school regularly and inform the LA if:

a pupil has been continuously absent without authorisation for not less than 10 school days, specifying the cause if known;

a pupil has been permanently excluded;

a pupil is moving away from the area and is not known to have registered at another school;

a pupil has a custodial sentence of more than four months and has been taken off the roll;

Any pupil of compulsory school age has been taken off the roll because the parents have informed the school in writing that the child will be taught at home.

A Profile of Pupil Absence in England (DFE, 2011)

This highlights current levels of absence from schools in England.

This report provides a comprehensive view of the latest statistical trends in England's education system. It reviews the information already available on absenteeism from the public domain but investigates further into the attitudes, beliefs, aspirations and experiences of those pupils who persistently miss school.

Parents of children of compulsory school age are required by law to ensure that their child attends school regularly in order to receive an appropriate level of education. Attendance registers are taken twice a day at school allowing a record to be kept of how many days a child misses from school, and whether it is authorised or unauthorised.

The statistics included in the report show that the absence rate for all schools in England has generally declined from 1996 to 2010 and currently stands at 6.04%. Currently 6.8% of this population are persistently absence, down from 8.5% in 2006/2007. The majority of these absences are caused by a minority of students with over half of pupils in England missing less than 5% of the school year. Special schools have the highest levels of overall absence (10.27%) followed by secondary schools (6.88%) and then primary schools (5.21%).

School Attendance – Examples of Local Authority Strategies

Promoting School Attendance in Torbay: Strategy 2009-2011 (Torbay Council, 2009[17])

This highlights a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These apply to all schools.

Torbay Council recognises that punctual and regular school attendance is essential to effective learning and, for a significant number of children, poor school attendance is a direct cause of social exclusion and underachievement. It also recognises that children who are registered at a school and fail to attend regularly are placing themselves at greater risk of either offending or becoming the victims of offending by others.

The local authority is committed to improving levels of school attendance and punctuality. It aims to do this by:

Promoting the value and importance of regular school attendance;
Reducing all forms of unjustified absenteeism, especially levels of persistent absenteeism. (a child is classified as being a persistent absentee if he/she has an absence rate of 20% or more).

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[17] Accessed from Torbay Council Website: www.torbay.gov.uk/attendance

The local authority sets a range of attendance and absence targets, including statutory and non-statutory, and incorporates these into its key plans (including its Children and Young People's Plan) and supports schools to set their own individual targets.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

The strategy states that schools are responsible for supporting the attendance of their pupils and for responding to difficulties and issues which might lead to non-attendance. They play a major role in improving levels of attendance and punctuality and in reducing absenteeism through adopting a positive and proactive approach towards attendance matters and encouraging parents/carers to take an active role in the schooling of their children.

Schools should have a **whole school policy on attendance** (developed in discussion with staff, governors, parents and pupils) that reflects relevant guidance and good practice identified locally and nationally. This policy will be regularly monitored and reviewed in order to:

Give a high priority and value to attendance and punctuality;

Ensure compliance with all relevant statutory requirements (particularly with regard to the maintenance of attendance registers and the setting of targets);

Involve and identify a role for governors;

Identify a key senior member of staff with overall responsibility for attendance;

Help create an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance, addressing school-based causes of poor attendance such as bullying, racism, an inappropriate curriculum, etc.

Ensure that clear attendance information is regularly communicated to parents through the school prospectus, newsletters and parents' evenings. Parents should be specifically reminded of their legal responsibilities for ensuring their children's regular and punctual attendance;

Collect and make effective use of attendance data to monitor progress/trends and set targets for improvement;

Provide clear guidance to staff on the practice of registration and the appropriate categorisation of absence;

Identify clear procedures to identify and follow up all absence and lateness (allocating individual staff roles and responsibilities);

Identify pupils who are vulnerable to becoming persistent absentees and have individual action plans in place for each pupil;

Make provision for first-day of absence contact, particularly in relation to pupils who are known to be poor attenders or who might otherwise be considered to be at risk;

Monitor post-registration truancy through the taking of class registers and spot checks and ensure that the parents of any post-registration truants are promptly informed and where necessary actively involved;

Be alert to critical times (e.g. Key Stage transfers, exam and assessment periods);

Stress to parents the importance of continuity of learning, particularly in relation to family holidays during term-time (schools are encouraged to grant leave for term-time holidays sparingly, if at all);

Establish procedures for reintegrating long-term absentees and pupils who may, for specific reasons, have been on a reduced timetable;

Develop attendance incentive schemes which recognise pupils' attendance achievements; and

Participate in effective networks with other involved agencies and services such as Children young People & Family Centres, the Intensive Family Support Service. Inclusion and Mental Health Service and Integrated youth Service;

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

Parents/carers are responsible in law for ensuring that their children attend the school at which they are registered; regularly, on time, properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn. They can **support the regular and punctual attendance** of their children as follows:

ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day;

ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance;

always notify the school as soon as possible - preferably on the first morning - of any absence;

confirm this in writing when the child returns to school;

avoid booking family holidays during term-time;

take an active interest in their child's school life and work;

attend parents' evenings and other school events;

ensure that their child completes his/her homework and goes to bed at an appropriate time;

be aware of letters from school which their child brings home; and

talk to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

The key areas of activity regarding local authority support and challenge for schools, pupils and parents are:

the work of the Children young People and Family Centres;

the work undertaken by the Intensive Family Support Service, Inclusion and Mental Health Service and Integrated youth Service that have been developed as a result of the transformation programme

the development of multi-agency networks and partnerships

Work with key partners to develop a quality alternative curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils who are unable to engage in the current national curriculum and are at risk of exclusion.

One of the overarching aims of the Children Young People and Family Centres is to maximise attendance rates for individual pupils, individual schools and for the authority of Torbay as a whole; and to discharge the local authority's legal duty to ensure that all pupils of compulsory school age are in receipt of suitable education. Team members will also assist in removing barriers which may prevent a child receiving education.

Staff from Children Young People and Family Centres will employ three main interconnected and interdependent strategies to ensure that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly and punctually:

as authorised representatives of the local authority, monitoring attendance through the regular inspection of registers and liaison with school staff;

undertaking individual casework with non-attending pupils and their parents; and

offer strategic advice, support and challenge to enable schools to develop improved systems and practices.

Newcastle Children Services – Initiatives to Improve Attendance

This highlights a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These apply to all schools.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance[18]

This Local Authority aims to develop a service that will provide a long term impact on attendance by creating an environment where attending school regularly is an accepted practice and children and parents/carers can see the benefits of learning.

One aspect of this is to **promote the importance and value of regular school attendance and to motivate and encourage pupils, and in some cases parents, by using incentives and rewards**. Newcastle Children Services have provided a Transition and Attendance Good Practice Toolkit which to improve the level of attendance in primary schools through a series of suggested incentives and rewards.

The review from Newcastle Children Services indicates that promotion of attendance by school staff is crucial with regular reminders to maintain the momentum. The value of regular attendance should feature prominently in the school prospectus and other brochures. Regular messages should be given about the importance of attendance in school newsletters, school assemblies, parents' evenings, staff meetings and governors' meetings. Examples of new ideas to improve the low levels of attendance in primary schools include:

Launching attendance and punctuality projects (e.g. in school assemblies, letters to parents, school website)

Attendance theme days/week: Schools to have a day or week of activities in school promoting the importance of regular attendance with involvement of parents and supported by EWS.

Reward systems

- Attendance Tree: The class with the best attendance at the end of the week puts an apple on the Attendance Tree. The class with the second best attendance places a leaf on it. At the end of a half term the class with the most apples wins a prize as does the class with the most leaves

- Weekly Attendance Cup: This is awarded to the class with the highest attendance each week. The name of the winning class is displayed on parent information boards and mentioned in the school newsletters

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[18] Accessed from: Newcastle Children's Services – Transition and Attendance Good Practice Toolkit (0-5 years) http://www.newcastlechildrenservices.org.uk/wwwfileroot/microsites/childrensservices/schools/Promotion_incentives_rewards.pdf

- Class Ladder: A 'Class Ladder' with five rungs is displayed outside each classroom. If the class meets their weekly target (e.g. 93%) they climb a rung on the ladder. When they reach the top there is a small treat for each child.
- Outstanding Attendance: Pupils with 100% attendance for an academic year are invited by the Education Welfare Service to the attendance celebration event which takes place each autumn term at the Metro Radio Arena. They also receive a certificate to mark their achievement.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

Many of the events and projects offered by the Education Welfare Service (EWS) have a focus **on family participation**. Schools also invite parents to end of term/half term assemblies to observe presentations. This can be for individual classes, specific stages or for the whole school.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

The **EWS** offers a number of attendance initiatives and projects to first and primary schools. When a project is appropriate nursery schools are included, for example, projects developed with Disney on ice and Newcastle Pantomime Company.

Attendance – Good Practice Checklist[19]

Newcastle Children's Service has produced an Attendance Environment and Good Practice Checklist designed for use by staff and the Education Welfare Service. It provides a basis for assessing existing practice and highlighting where practice may be improved. It[20] covers in details the following areas.

A Whole School Policy
B In-school Systems For Recording And Monitoring Of Attendance
C Partnership with Education Welfare Service
D Networking, Other Agencies
E Preventing Absenteeism
F Promoting Attendance
G School Environment
H Immediate Community Environment
I The Broader Community
J Resources

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[19] www.newcastlechildrenservices.org.uk/wwwfileroot/microsites/childrensservices/newfiles/mcs_Attendance_Good_Practice_Checklist.pdf

[20] Checklist devised by and used with the permission of Birmingham EWS

School Attendance Initiatives – Reward Schemes

These describe specific "reward" initiatives that have been successfully used in Primary Schools in England to improve attendance.

Denaby Main Primary School (2011[21])

Denaby Main Primary School in Doncaster was suffering from poor pupil attendance. It teamed up with St Leger Homes of Doncaster, an organisation that manages around 21,000 homes for Doncaster Council, to help assist the school with its on-going attendance problems. St Leger Homes offered the opportunity for pupils who could maintain high attendance levels to visit Yorkshire Wildlife Park in Doncaster. The scheme was so successful that pupils who had achieved 96% attendance or more had to have their names drawn out of a hat to decide the 50 who went on the trip. The initiative was funded by St Leger Homes' positive activities budget – this supports initiatives which encourage young people to attend school, to be fit, active and healthy and to help tackle anti-social behaviour.

Dewhurst St Mary C of E Primary School (2011[22])

Dewhurst St Mary C of E Primary School in Churchgate pioneered a new scheme, called My School Rewards, which was set up by the My Rewards Company, and the school's trainee business manager with support from local companies. Pupils who achieved an attendance record above the national target level of more than 95% for each term received a special certificate with a unique reward code. They can key in their code on the My School Rewards website and select a child ticket or family ticket for free at one of 50 attractions.

The scheme was sponsored by Paradise Wildlife Park, Tesco Goodness and Toucan Print. The scheme was created by a member of staff from Dewhurst St Mary's (who was looking for incentives to improve attendance at the school as part of his training to become a school business manager) and the Paradise Wildlife Park which part owns the My Rewards Company.

Case Studies – England

Introduction

This section of the report is based on the writer's experience and work with two Academies which had significant issues regarding attendance. Allen Baynes worked with both of these Academies in a consultancy role brokered by the SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust). Prior to this he had worked with a number of Academies both as a consultant and as a

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[21] Accessed from: Community Newspaper for Doncaster and the wider Yorkshire Area: www.the-villager.co.uk and http://www.housingnet.co.uk/housingnet -news-html/Roaring_Success_For_School_Attendance_Initiative4936.html (story dated August 2011)

[22] Accessed from: http://www.hertfordshiremercury.co.uk?Education-and-Training/Primary-and-Secondary-Education/Attendance-initiative-a-success-in-Cheshunt-04082011.htm (story dated August 2011)

Director of Student Support in a failing, now outstanding, Academy, where he had management responsibility for Attendance and Behaviour.

His work with the Academies was based on his experience as a Senior Local Authority Officer with responsibility for Inclusion (including the management of Education Welfare and Behaviour Support Services across two LA's), together with his role as External Adviser to the Every Child Matters and Change for Children Programmes. These latter roles led him to being a member of the core team that developed the Narrowing the Gap project and as a Sector Specialist with C4EO.

The starting point for any school wishing to improve attendance is to ask the question*: "Is this school worth attending?"* This is a question not just for the Head and Senior Managers, it is one which needs to be asked of the staff, parents and most of all, of the students. All schools need to offer a curriculum which is both relevant and accessible to **all** students and which is delivered in a way that not only engages students but also gives them opportunities to succeed.

In both of the following case studies, the schools had a significant issue with attendance which had, or would have, put them into an Ofsted category requiring intervention. Both schools were newly formed Academies and faced challenges due to the socio-economic make-up of their catchment area. Significantly, the work which is described in the case studies was driven by the Head Teachers and Senior Managers: a key factor in giving their newly appointed Attendance Managers the licence to drive the changes which have led to improved attendance.

Case Study 1 – Landau Forte Academy, Tamworth

The Academy caters for 1,236 students aged 11 – 18 years and is on two sites, one for 11-16 on the previous school site and a separate Sixth Form site in the town centre. Although the Academy is not in an area of high social deprivation, it faced a number of challenges. The previous school had a history of low attendance and attainment below national averages. (It was placed in special measures in 2008). There was a lack of positive culture towards education; the number of adults in the area who have gone on to higher education is significantly below the national average and only 0.3 of households in the area are in the high social class category.

The most recent Ofsted report shows that attainment and student engagement are improving.

Table 9: Attendance and Persistent Absence – Landau Forte Academy, Tamworth

	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
Overall attendance	90.6%	91.5%	91.6%	91%	93.2%	94% (target)
Persistent absence (numbers)	N/A	N/A	N/A	70	37	>30 (target

The appointment of an Attendance Manager (AM), in September 2010, with strong backing from the Head Teacher and Senior Management team, has seen a significant improvement in overall attendance and a marked decrease in the numbers of persistent absentees. The projected improvement should see the Academy at least attain its attendance target for this academic year, (it is currently at 94.8%). The school closely monitors the attendance of groups of students e.g. FSM, SEN, Ethnicity, Vulnerable, and is also monitoring the impact of changes to the school year – the impact of the change in school term times which are now different from their feeder schools.

The appointment of the AM has led to the introduction of a number of changes in the way attendance is both monitored and promoted to the staff and students. Significant to these changes has been the support of the leadership team.

There is now a whole school response to improving attendance and the key responsibility for monitoring attendance is with the form tutors, who have a vertically grouped form. They have the frontline task of recording and starting the initial pursuit of non-attendance. They are supported by Heads of House and the AM oversees the whole system whilst focusing on those students whose attendance falls below 85%.

This enhanced role of the tutor in improving their form's attendance has been supported through training and improved induction of new staff, delivered by the AM. The tutors are supported by a monthly visit to their form room by the Head of House and the AM. As part of their visit they ensure that all forms have an 'attendance ladder' recording student progress in improving, or maintaining, their attendance.

The school uses the plasma information screens, strategically located around the school, to display the current attendance performance on a whole school, form and student level. This format is also used to publicise the extensive reward system that has been introduced to promote good and improved attendance. There are credits awarded for 100% and improved attendance. These credits can be redeemed for a range of prizes. There are also certificates and postcards home for 100% attendance as well as awards for the best house, best form and best student attendance. This has helped raise the profile of good attendance across the school.

There has been an additional incentive scheme of an iPod for all Y11 students who maintain 100% attendance during the exam period. There has also been a day trip to an outdoor adventure project for Y8 students with 100% attendance. Both of these schemes have been very successful and will be repeated this year.

The combination of a new attendance monitoring system underpinned by close management scrutiny and intelligent use of data to target action, coupled with a range of rewards which are well publicised and valued by students has led to significant improvement in student attendance. These changes give every indication that the improved attendance will be maintained and improved upon.

Case Study 2 – Isle of Sheppey Academy, Kent

This Academy, when it was formed in 2010, was faced by a long-standing and entrenched problem with student attendance. The new Academy was formed from the merger of two local secondary schools both of which had attendance levels significantly below national averages (see below). The area suffers from a perceived sense of isolation, and being an island, sees itself as different and apart from the mainland. The levels of unemployment, the numbers with poor health and those with no qualifications are all above, or significantly above, national averages. There is a view, (expressed by both students and parents to the writer) that the current school (March 2011), and previous schools had not got much to offer. They had a very negative view of the school, both in terms of what it had done for them and what it could do for their children.

Table 10: Attendance and Persistent Absence – Isle of Sheppey Academy, Kent

	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
Attendance	81.1%	78.7%	81.7%	84%	85%	85.7%	89.4%	91.95%
Persistent Abs	-	-	-	-	-	28%	9.7%	11.8%

Note: ^ = current figures 16.2.12. (The PA figure reflects that this is now 85% compared to the 80% indicator last year).

The figures graphically underline the depth of the problem facing the Academy. However, the current picture shows the incredible progress made in the last 18 months and the predicted trajectory is very positive. This shows what can be achieved in a relatively short space of time. Although the attendance figures remain some way below the national averages the improvement on the stubborn under-performance of the last 8 years is remarkable.

There are many factors underpinning this progress. Clearly, school is now worth attending for many students, (Y11 attendance is up by 7% on the same period last year). The fact that these attendance data are both available and robust indicates that the school now has and uses more accurate data. They are able to track individual groups of students, based on gender, SEN category, looked after, ethnicity, gifted and talented, year and house groups. Consequently, interventions can be targeted and directed where the key issues are, for that week or term. This has also been effective in ensuring that persistent absentees are a key target group and that families are signposted for additional support if it is required. They are pursued through the legal options if they fail to engage. As the contacts with parents are now driven by a culture of trust and respect, with an emphasis on help, there is less need to use the sanctions route as the first option, if support fails.

The Head Teacher and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) had identified improving attendance as a key priority for the new Academy; this was something which was also an issue in their Ofsted inspection, and a failure to improve would have led to the academy being placed in a category. One of their key tasks was to appoint an Attendance Manager (AM), to help drive the required changes. As with the other Academy case study, they also received specialist consultancy support from the SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust).

The SLT also appointed two Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) and restructured the administration and processes associated with monitoring and recording attendance. This created a new team and systems for the AM to lead, to start to address the long-standing cultural issues which have militated against an improvement in attendance. A key part of their work has been to convince both students and their families that attendance is important and that there are benefits in attending.

The AM has introduced a wide range of initiatives to tackle non- or poor attendance. There has been an emphasis on using incentives to reward both good and improving attendance. The Academy uses a reward system linked to prizes which students, when they have enough 'Vivos' (name of the rewards), can use to get a 'prize'. This has proved to be very popular and the AM has found imaginative ways to use Vivos to promote good attendance. This has been backed up by Gold, Bronze and Silver Attendance Certificates; this enables students to receive certificates on a termly basis. There is also the reward of a trip to Thorpe Park for those who achieve 100% attendance over the year.

In addition to this reward system, and as a way of highlighting attendance, they have introduced a weekly attendance lottery across each House. This means that if you have 100% attendance and no

lates you are in the lottery draw and if your name comes out you win £25. This, multiplied across the Houses, means that there are 5 potential winners each week and if there is no winner, a rollover! This has raised the profile of attendance and has proved an excellent motivator; the students try to get in to school, even when in the past they may have taken a day off. It has a cost but the impact can be seen in the dramatic rise in the figures compared to previous years.

There has been a concerted attempt to raise the importance of attendance in assemblies, in Newsletters to parents and in the local media, as well as putting posters up in local shops and Doctors' surgeries. Data have been used to promote competition across Form Groups, Houses and the two school sites. The Academy has even produced a coffee mug with the logo *I'm no mug, I attend Isle of Sheppey Academy.* These positive messages and the need to keep improving attendance have been taken out into the community by the FLOs who, with their local knowledge and commitment to the Academy, are starting to break down the previous negative image of the school.

The AM has targeted the transition from KS1 to KS2 as a key point to visit the feeder Primary schools and to ensure that poor attendees are identified and given extra support to attend the Academy even before they arrive in the September. This initiative has paid dividends as Y7 attendance is up by 2% on the same period last year.

The Academy has clearly made an innovative and energetic response to improving attendance; it has been characterised by having enthusiastic and committed staff, supported by Senior Leaders who have backed the AM to 'do things differently'. The marked improvement in attendance would suggest that this approach has been successful.

Case Studies - Conclusion

Both Academies have been successful with what were entrenched attendance issues. Their success has lessons for other schools with similar attendance issues; they have not used strategies which cannot be replicated in other schools in the UK. They have used many of the strategies and approaches which have been identified in the Narrowing the Gap research as being successful for improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

Example of Attendance Policy – Madeley Academy

Madeley Academy

Attendance Policy:

Staff Guidance

Prepared by Bobby Kaur

Introduction

The recording of student's attendance is a legal requirement

Aside from being a statutory obligation it is a key element of the duty of staff to ensure that students are safe, punctual and able to take advantage of learning opportunities. An attendance policy that is **consistently** implemented by **all staff** will help to **improve behaviour, punctuality, and attainment level, reduce truancy and raise student's self esteem**. This will in turn create a secure platform for teachers to teach and be in a more effective position to raise standards.

The success of this policy is dependant upon all staff implementing these guidelines every lesson, every day. Slack practice will lead to an ineffective policy with a subsequent deterioration in attendance, punctuality, behaviour and learning.

Registration

The AIP is the day to day mechanics of the Attendance Policy and the way in which attendance issues are tackled.

It is a key requirement of this policy that a register is taken promptly at the start of every lesson including tutor period.

The registration should be recorded on the eportal system. All tutor and teaching groups should have at least 3 paper copies of the register to be used if the electronic system fails. These will be issued at the start of the autumn term. It will then be the tutor's and subject teacher's responsibility to ensure that they have sufficient paper copies of their registers from the Attendance Officer.

Tutor Registration

The CMiS system will automatically record all children with a **/** for present. Staff will need to use the codes below to complete the register.

Code	Description
B	Educated off site
C	Other Authorised Circumstance
D	Dual registration
F	Extended family holiday (agreed)
G	Family holiday (not agreed)
H	Family holiday (agreed)
I	Illness
J	Interview
M	Medical appointment
N	No reason
O	Unauthorised absence
P	Approved sporting activity
R	Religious observance
S	Study leave
T	Traveller absence
U	Late (after registers closed)
V	Educational visit
W	Work Experience
L	Late

If a student has been marked absent in error, please note present next to the absence and it will be amended by the Attendance Officer, or delete the absence and replace N with **/** in CMiS. A student is deemed to be late for lesson/tutor group if they arrive 5 minutes or later after the register has opened at 8.30am. **Please note that the register should close at 8.45am at the end of the registration period and then it should be sent electronically to the Attendance Officer.**

Any additional information on students, ie raising a concern, or a query regarding a student's attendance, should be sent to the Attendance Officer via email. Please note that the priority for the Attendance Office in Period 1 is to do the first day calls to all absent students.

In Period 1 the Attendance Officer and other members of the student support team will be phoning/texting all parents/carers of students who are absent for the first time on that day. Any relevant information will be passed back to tutors via email if necessary.

A leave of absence form may be completed by parent/carer prior to the leave. (min 5 working days)

The request is for sporting, religious and other summer activities.

Holiday requests will be routinely rejected as the Academy believes in fostering high levels of attendance to support student achievement.

Completed forms should be returned to student services for the Deputy Headteacher – Student Services to make a decision as to whether the leave of absence is authorised.

Holidays taken by parents/carers in term time will routinely be coded (unauthorised absence) G. In the event of 10 consecutive days absence the EWO may consider legal action.

Parents who are requesting permission to take their son/daughter on holiday during term time need to complete an 'Application for Student Leave of Absence' form, obtainable from the Attendance Officer, at least 4 weeks prior to the start of the holiday.

Completed forms should be returned to the tutor for their comments regarding the student's attendance and punctuality, and then forwarded to the Attendance Officer. A decision will then be made by the Deputy Headteacher – Student Support as to whether this will be approved. Absence will only be approved if the student has good attendance (ie above the school average) and if he/she is not going to miss exams or the revision period prior to exams. In practice, parents may still go ahead with a holiday with or without our approval, but this will be marked as a G code which is unauthorised absence – and details will go to the Education Welfare Officer. This issue is also addressed under Rewards and Sanctions.

Subject Registration

Again all students will be automatically marked **P** for present. Subject teachers are required to mark students who are absent with an **N** and **L** if they are late, ie if they arrive 5 minutes after the start of the lesson without a valid reason. There is a degree of flexibility here and will require professional judgment and common sense. There are only 3 options: **P** for present, **N** no reason yet given, **L** for late.

Students can only be placed on an adjusted timetable by a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and these should only be used in exceptional circumstances. A key element of any planned adjusted timetable should be the steps that will be taken to return the student to full time education.

Changes to Tutor Group

Any movement between tutor groups must be approved by Lorna Parkhouse – Assistant Headteacher. Any change should normally be made for the beginning of the week to facilitate easier statistical monitoring of attendance data and any follow up action that may be required. Staff can then be informed of the change in the weekly briefing on Friday. The Attendance Officer should always be informed prior to any change and both tutors must ensure that their paper registers are amended. This is crucial for fire alarm procedures (see Fire Alarm Procedure below).

Changes to Subject Groups

Any movement between subject groups must be approved by the Head of Department and their line manager on SLT. Any change should normally be made for the beginning of the week to facilitate easier statistical monitoring of attendance data and any follow up action that may be required and for staff to be informed at the Friday briefing. The Attendance Officer should always be informed prior to any change and both subjects teachers must ensure that their paper registers are amended. Again, this is crucial for fire alarm procedures.

All changes should be communicated to Steve Barnes so that he can amend the electronic registers.

Accurate and up to date data is required for a number of purposes. It enables the Senior Leadership Team to monitor performance in a variety of ways and to identify students who may be vulnerable. The data will form a key point of any future Academy inspection or Joint Area Review and is required by the DfES on an annual basis and this in turn is used to produce the school PANDA.

The data will also be used to inform staff and students of performance in this area and this will be important in identifying students and staff for incentives as part of the Rewards system (see Rewards and Sanctions).

The Attendance Manager will monitor the attendance on a daily basis and will send the Academy's first letter of concern to a student when either the frequency or the pattern of attendance gives cause for concern ie those students whose attendance is below 90% or when students are consistently absent on the same day. The second letter of concern will be sent unless there is a significant improvement. At this stage the Attendance Manager will discuss the student's absence record with the Pastoral Deputy Head and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). Together they will determine the next course of action (see Rewards and Sanctions).

Work Supervision Agreements

This is a strategy that the Academy has adopted in recognition of absence necessary due to special circumstances where the student would normally have a good attendance.

Work Supervision Agreements may be considered after consultation with parent/carer and Deputy Headteacher - Student Services or Attendance Manager. Consideration will be given when a student will be absent for a short period of time, due to an injury or other certified medical conditions for example.

In this case the student is able to complete work at home under the direct supervision of a parent/carer. The agreement is signed by all parties, and a review date agreed.

The agreement may also apply in other circumstances where the Academy feel there are genuine circumstances which do not allow the student to attend; but they are able to complete work at home and evidence this.

Modified Timetables

The Academy, from time to time, adopts a variety of interventions in order to provide support for students. Applying a modified timetable is one strategy employed.

The objective of a modified timetable is often to improve poor attendance by providing a reduced number of hours in order to aid the reintroduction of a student back into the Academy.

Alternatively, where there are significant concerns about the behaviour of a student, a modified timetable could be introduced to minimise the disruption of the learning to other students and the student themselves.

Regardless of the reason for a modified timetable the hours and review date will be set in the best interests of the student. The review date should not exceed six weeks, but preferably be set to be reviewed fortnightly in order to closely monitor and amend as necessary to best serve the student.

An agreement will be drawn up between the Academy, parent/carer and student clearly outlining the timetable and its objectives. The hours implemented will be overseen by the Deputy Headteacher - Student Services on order to maintain consistency.

Punctuality

This is an area which will require a concerted and consistent effort by all staff to ensure that punctuality improves both for registration and in lessons. Lateness without good reason is unacceptable as it disrupts learning for both the offending student and for their classmates. If a student is marked in the late book as being late twice in one week they will automatically be placed in school detention. The Attendance Officer will alert the Admin office who will send a letter to the parent/carer.

The consistent operation of the electronic registration system will quickly highlight any students who have difficulty in this area. It is expected that any incidence of lateness in lessons will be dealt with in the first instance by the class teacher. This would normally be a verbal reprimand. If lateness to a lesson is a persistent problem or if lateness is exceeding five minutes then more punitive action is required. This should involve the student making up missed time in a subject detention or extra homework to redress the time lost. The use of detention should involve written notification to parents of the detention and reasons for it, if the detention is for more than 5 minutes. (Clarification of the legal position with regard to detention can be found in **Annex A** and further information is contained in the Academy's Detention Policy and in Rewards and Sanctions).

If a student is consistently late for tutor registration then the process outlined above should be followed. If punctuality remains a problem then parents should be informed and a meeting should be arranged between the tutor and the parent to seek an agreed joint strategy to address the problem. If lateness is a problem in both tutor groups and lessons then it is likely that an internal meeting will be required to involve all relevant staff and a member of Student Support Services. This meeting will determine the appropriate course of action to resolve the problem.

A lack of punctuality can frequently lead to internal truancy. Any incidence of internal truancy should lead to a detention to make up the time and the subject material missed. This detention should be administered through the departmental structure and will enable departments to effectively manage this punishment across year groups on a weekly basis. Where a truant misses a number of lessons then there needs to be an agreement as to how the detention will be supervised. Again, as with any detention of more than 5 minutes, parents should be informed in writing and at least 24 hours prior to the detention. Persistent truancy may result in placement in the In School Learning Centre (ISLC).

To enable this system to be effectively supported it is crucial that students are not out of lessons without a pass. The pass should state the name of the student, the date/time and the reasons for being out of class and the teacher's initials. Any student out of lesson without a pass should be returned to their lesson. This will be rigorously monitored by the Senior Leadership Team and supported by the Student Support Officer.

The late book in the Palm Centre should only be used by students who are late for school and who have not had their name recorded by the member of SLT who is on late duty. Lateness for lessons should be recorded on the electronic registration system.

Truancy

External truancy will be dealt with in the same way as poor punctuality. The difference will be that parents will be informed and invited into the Academy/or seen at home, to discuss the circumstances surrounding the truancy. An appropriate detention will be arranged through the Student Support Services team and further action may be actioned as appropriate. Truancy information will be passed onto the EWO who may then consider legal action or the use of a Penalty Notice.

Fire Alarm Procedure

The Academy must, by law, have a tried and tested Fire Alarm Procedure. At the sound of the fire alarm, staff should ensure that:

(a)   the electronic register has been sent
(b)   they bring a paper copy of their group register if possible

They should quickly complete a headcount. Teachers will escort their teaching group to the assembly area and repeat the headcount. The Attendance Officer will bring out print-offs of the class registers, conditions permitting.

The demands to ensure that children are safe and accounting for them again underlies the importance of keeping accurate, up-to-date registers.

Rewards and Sanctions

Any Attendance Policy needs to be underpinned by a system of rewards and sanctions. The emphasis in this policy will be on a wide range of rewards to incentivise excellent and improving attendance with further rewards for parents/carers and the tutors of students with excellent attendance

Rewards

Every student who achieves 100% attendance in a half term without any late marks will receive the Headteacher's Certificate of Merit for attendance. All the certificate winners will enter a draw for a £10 book or record token.

Any student who achieves 100% attendance for the year will receive the Headteacher's Certificate of Excellence for attendance. They will also be entered into a draw (if there is more than one student with 100% attendance) for a substantial prize (to be announced).

Students may also be rewarded with cinema vouchers for improved attendance by the EWO/School.

The tutor and group who has the highest average attendance over each term will receive rewards such as chocolates etc.

Sanctions

The first sanction for unauthorised non-attendance is for the tutor to follow this up and emphasise the Academy's expectations on attendance. The tutor needs continually to remind students of the Academy's expectations regarding attendance. They also need to ascertain any underlying pastoral or welfare issues and refer to the Student Support Services team.

The next stage if unauthorised non-attendance persists will be for the Attendance Manager to make contact with the family. If the student's attendance continues to give cause for concern then the process described in Registration (above) will be implemented.

The Attendance Officer will then involve the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) unless there is a significant improvement in attendance. The EWO will consult with the Attendance Manager and the Attendance Officer to decide if it is appropriate to place the student on their caseload and will follow the standard EWO procedures for addressing poor or non-attendance. This involves a structured programme of intervention beginning with a first letter of concern from the EWO Service drawing a parent/carers attention to a student's attendance level. They are invited to contact the EWO.

If attendance does not improve within 3 weeks a second letter of concern is sent followed up by a visit to the home. This enables early intervention if problems are identified to enable the child to access education again. If attendance continues to fall this may then lease to a first warning letter if it is discover that absence is not medically justified.

After a further 3 weeks of unacceptable attendance the EWO will invite parents/carers into the Academy. At this meeting the EWO along with Attendance Manager will ascertain whether there any further Academy-based issues preventing the child from attending the Academy. A Final Warning will be considered at this meeting and the parents/carers informed that if further non-attendance occurs they could be prosecuted. The penalty if found guilty is up to £1000 for a first offence or up to £2,500 or a maximum of 3 months imprisonment for a subsequent offence.

An alternative sanction available to EWOs for persistent non-attendance is the Fixed Penalty Notice. These can be issued in cases of 20 unauthorised absences. They are restricted to one per academic year. EWOs are the only service who can issue these notices.

A PN can be issued where there have been at least 20 sessions of unauthorised absence during the current term. They can also be used where a holiday has been unauthorised by the Academy. A period of 15 days is set whereby no unauthorised absences must occur.

If further unauthorised absences occur a PN is issued. This is a £50 fine to be paid within 28 days. If payment is not received during the 28 days but before 42 days the penalty is £100 and results in a Court prosecution.

In cases where a student is persistently late/absent and has other difficulties, either in the Academy or at home, the Academy will consider whether a Common Assessment should be completed and who the lead professional will be.

In order for any prosecution to be successful if is vital that registers are accurate and up-to-date. The role of the tutor in this task is crucial.

RSM McClure Watters

C4EO for the sector from the sector

Annex A

Detention

Detention is one of the sanctions Academies can use against bad behaviour. However, an Academy must, by law, give at least 24 hours written notice of a detention to the parent, so allowing time for the parent to raise any problems. A notice to parent should say:

- that their child has been given detention

- why detention was given

- when, where and for how long their child will have to remain at the Academy

A model letter is available within the Detention Policy: Guidance for Staff

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Department of Education
Research into Improving Attendance in Schools Serving
Deprived Areas
March 2012

Narrowing the Gap – implications for improving attendance

Introduction

The Narrowing the Gap (NtG) research was published in two parts in 2008 and 2009. It focused on the critical building blocks necessary for narrowing the gap in outcomes for children and young people. These were drawn from literature, research and data evidence, along with expert views of children's sector practitioners. This guidance was then tested in 101 English Local Authorities, through 9 regional workshops, which helped amend and refine the findings.

A key part of NtG was to answer in simple terms this question, *'What is it, that if applied universally and pursued relentlessly, would make a significant impact on the outcomes of vulnerable groups of children and young people?'* The answer to the question became what is known as the 12 Golden Threads.

12 Golden Threads

The 12 Golden Threads are listed below, together with how they might be used by school staff to help shape and improve practice in improving attendance and behaviour for children and young people.

You can do it! Expect the best

Creating high aspirations for all children irrespective of the situation they were born into. All staff showing respect for and belief in the children they work with and ensuring that all children have access to a trusted adult, usually the class teacher in Primary school and the form tutor at Secondary.

From good to great – passion with purpose

All schools having a clear vision of what they want to achieve: this vision clearly and frequently communicated to all who work in the school (including the students). This vision is driven by a strong leadership that is distributed across the staff team. A vision that is simple, signed up to by staff and which places the needs of young people at its centre.

It takes a community to raise a child

Recognising the power of the community to support both the children and adults who are part of that community. Ensuring that all parts of the Local Authority, leisure, parks, home maintenance, environmental services, police and health services play their part in raising the aspirations and creating the conditions in which children can be safe and can thrive.

Together with parents (you know your child, we know about children's services, together we can help him/her better)

Working with parents - 'doing with, not unto'. Ensuring that we treat all parents with respect, irrespective of the situation in which they find themselves. Listening to their views, concerns, ideas and shaping our services on their needs and not just on what suits us.

Through the voice and eyes of the child.

Ensuring that children's views are sought and listened to, understanding their perceptions of the barriers to participation that they face. Giving young people a sense of ownership of the schools they

attend and a responsibility to participate in making it an effective and positive place to be for all who work there.

Holding on to the baton – ensuring stability and continuity

Ensuring that we provide as much stability and continuity as possible in the relationship between school and other professional staff who may be involved in a young person's life. Managing those unavoidable transitions between phases of education to ensure continuity of learning and support for a child's identified needs.

Learning to learn

Making building children's resilience a major objective for all professional staff who work with them. Giving children opportunities to catch up, to learn and be guided when they get things wrong. To give them the right support at the right time in whatever phase of education that they are in.

Cornflakes to canoeing

Recognising that schools can be the focal point for the delivery of services, both before, after and during school hours. Adding services and support to school can make them more effective and therefore improve outcomes.

Unite to succeed

Making services that support children and young people to work together and not against each other and always keeping the child and their family at the centre of what they do.

Shape up and keep fit

Making sure that all staff who work with young people are appropriately trained and supported so that they understand the needs of the child and are able to meet them.

Culture not structure – shared vision, shared behaviour

Ensuring that the culture of the school/organisation puts the needs of children and their families at the centre of what we do. The structure is to support the culture and not the other way round.

Prove it – making change happen

Developing and commissioning services that are based on identified need and using data intelligently to focus those resources and to evidence their impact.

Narrowing the Gap - Conclusion

The Golden Threads can be used to audit what schools and services do and also to help develop and empower them to meet the needs of young people, particularly those who are vulnerable. They are well tried and based on research into what makes the difference in improving outcomes. They therefore have a strong validity in helping schools reflect and plan as to how they will improve both behaviour and attendance.

Scotland and Wales

Included, Engaged and Involved (Scottish Government, 2007)

This provides guidance for all schools with regards to promoting good attendance.

Introduction

Included, Engaged and Involved is a document provided by the Scottish Government for schools and education authority staff with the aim of promoting good attendance at school. It draws together advice on good practice and establishes requirements regarding classifying and recording attendance and absence. In addition to the classification of attendance and absence, this guidance seeks to explore and address wider issues around the promotion and management of good attendance and the prevention and reduction of absence.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

In order to promote regular attendance, the Scottish Government has created standards for schools to follow with regard to **personal support for students**. These include:

Make opportunities for developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes children and young people need to enable them to enable them to seek information and support throughout life;

Provide access to information to help children and young people make informed decisions and choices;

Make opportunities for children's citizenship and participation, through involvement in their school community, their neighbourhoods and in democratic society;

Provide regular review of progress in learning, and personal and social development;

Help with transitions between stages in education and between different providers of education and personal development opportunities;

Help to plan for the future;

Provide access to staff by children and parents who want support;

Co-ordinate support between agencies and schools, wherever learning takes place;

Respect confidentiality; and

Ensure time and space to seek help.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The community can work together to make absence from school a difficulty rather than the accepted norm. The report 'Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential[23]' recommends that **integrated support**

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[23] Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential: A Standard of Support for Children and Young People in Scottish Schools, HMIE, 2004

teams in school bring together pastoral care, learning and behaviour support, together with support staff such as home-school link workers and additional support staff. Effective teams are supported by effective leadership, a positive school ethos, and clear school policies and procedures of which all staff are aware.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

The Scottish Executive's Quality Improvement Framework for Integrated Services for Children and Young People (2006)[24] requires local authorities and their partners to set realistic and achievable local targets for improving attendance. They must ensure that specific groups, such as looked after children, are considered within the targets. It is expected that education authority and school development planning will reflect agreed local targets for improving attendance, and the process of Integrated Children's Services Planning is an opportunity to consider which of the other partner agencies involved can contribute to helping schools achieve the target. Any service involved in supporting vulnerable children or supporting parents has a potential role to play.

Local authority reviewing, monitoring and evaluation, including quality assurance in education, should support schools to develop good practice in promoting attendance and responding effectively to absence, recognising improved attendance and to reflect on the level of collaboration with other agencies to achieve this.

The importance of school-based support staff, led by senior managers in schools, forging links with partner agencies to strengthen support to pupils and parents is discussed. All national policies concerning children's services recommend **multi-agency training** as a means of enabling staff work effectively together particularly those supporting inclusion. Education authorities can support school-based teams by ensuring appropriate structures for centralised support to schools. **Continuing professional development for all staff**, particularly staff such as home-school link workers or family support workers whose remits may vary, helps schools to develop their practice.

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[24] Quality Improvement Framework for Integrated Services for Children, Young People and Their Families
Scottish Executive, Children and Families, March 2006

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Strategies for Schools to Improve Attendance and Manage Lateness (Welsh Assembly Government, 2011)

This provides guidance for all schools with regards to promoting good attendance.

Summary

This document provides a number of strategies that schools can utilise to help improve the attendance of pupils. The importance of attendance is clearly outlined in the review. When a child attends school in a frequent basis, they are given a much better chance of learning and developing new skills. Those who have poor attendance will fall behind and under perform in examinations. Socially, the more time a child spends around other children, whether in the classroom or outside of school, the better the chance they have of making friends and building their confidence and self-esteem.

The document notes that the responsibility of ensuring that a child attends school on a regular basis is primarily down to the parents of those children. However where problems with attendance do exist, a collaboration of effort from the school, local authority and the parent is required in order for the most effective solution to be found.

Examples of interventions which are of particular relevance to the research objectives of this study are briefly described in the following sections.

Role of the School in Promoting Regular Attendance of all Registered Pupils of Compulsory School Age

Have an Attendance Policy

A school's attendance policy should clearly identify the procedures in place for monitoring attendance and the actions that are to be taken for cases of poor attendance. The policy should take into account the school's approach to promoting the emotional well-being of students and how it relates to the school's aims and curriculum.

Use of Electronic Registration

Electronic attendance software allows schools to keep more effective and efficient records of attendance on a daily basis as well as being able to view the trends of absence which can contribute information towards the development of new attendance policies. Electronic registration is automated meaning parents are contacted whenever their child is absent. This has proven to be an effective method in reducing absence, locating the whereabouts of the children and reducing the workload for school staff.

Make use of the data available

Schools may possess a large amount of information and data on the attendance of their pupils. A lot of schools who have successful attendance policies have a clear understanding of the attendance issues within their school as they have analysed the attendance data that is at their disposal.

Continuous analysis of individual pupil attendance and of the whole school can help develop strategic planning. By identifying the level of attendance and persistent absenteeism, it is easier for the schools to recognise the extent of the problems. The school can then target time provided by the education welfare officer and pastoral staff more effectively by producing:

- individual attendance records which highlight reasons for absence and the pattern and rate of unauthorised absence; and
- lists of all pupils with unexplained absence which can be fed back to the responsible member of staff.

Have a First Day Contact System in place

It is the duty of the school to emphasise the parent's responsibility of contact the school when they know their child will be absent. If a student is absent without an explanation, schools should contact the parent on the same day to underline the importance of attendance and the manner in which it is treated. By contacting the parents, they are also made aware that their child is off school allowing them to take their own action which should, overall, reduce the level of absenteeism.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

Have an Attendance Policy

A school's attendance policy should set out its systems and procedures for ensuring regular school attendance and investigating the underlying causes of poor attendance. It is important that it is not just one member of staff who writes the policy. The policy will be more meaningful if developed in consultation with teachers, pupils, families, the Education Welfare Service, administrative and ancillary staff, governors and senior management.

Involve Parents

Schools and parents should communicate frequently regarding the positive achievements and improvements which emphasise the roles and responsibilities of the school. Parents should feel comfortable to discuss any issues they feel are important with school staff. To overcome attendance problems, it can be useful to have meetings with parents to discuss strategies in school and at home which encourage regular school attendance and the production of an action plan for improving attendance.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance at School

Have Attendance Policy

The attendance policy of the school should include the rights, roles and responsibilities of governors, staff, pupils and parents including:

- Details of the school's partnership agreement with the Education Welfare Service.
- The legal responsibilities of the LA, school and parents.
- Emphasis on a partnership approach between senior management, governors, and those working to support attendance with parents and pupils should also be outlined.

Target Support

The use of targeted intervention and support in areas of specific need can be very effective in improving attendance, particularly when working in partnership with the Education Welfare Service and the local authority.[25]

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[25] Strategies for Schools to Improve Attendance and Manage Lateness, 2011, Welsh Assembly Government

Ireland

Special Report - Department of Education and Skills (Comptroller and Auditor General, September 2010)

This report documents responsibilities for attendance and processes for monitoring attendance in Ireland.

Responsibility for Attendance

At the level of public administration, **responsibility for school attendance** actions is divided between

the Department of Education and Skills (the Department) which is responsible for policy formulation, effectiveness, evaluation and funding

NEWB which is responsible for intervening in cases where students are not attending school regularly and where there is a concern about the child's educational welfare

individual schools who record attendance and are the first line of response to attendance issues.

Related services in the areas of participation, promotion and retention of students in the school system are provided by:

the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme whose coordinators liaise with parents and teachers/schools in order to maximise active participation of students, in particular those who might be at risk of failure

the School Completion Programme (SCP) which provides support to individual students who are 'at risk' in order to increase the level of pupil retention in primary and post-primary schools

the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers (VTST) which works to promote, facilitate and support the education of the Travelling Community from pre-school up to third level access.

No overall performance targets have been established in Ireland in the area of school attendance. By contrast, in the UK all Local Authorities (who administer schools there) set school attendance targets as indicators of performance. For example, Cambridgeshire, using 2003/04 attendance data as a baseline figure aim to improve attendance each year by 0.1%. In Ireland, schools designated as disadvantaged are supported in developing school based plans to facilitate self-evaluation against a range of self-determined targets including the setting of targets on school attendance.

Information on Attendance

- The **level of non-attendance** has remained relatively stable. In 2008/09, on average, primary school students missed 11.5 days and post-primary students missed 13 days.
- **Annual Attendance Reports**
    o These form the basis for overall statistical information on attendance, allowing for patterns to be monitored by county, region and for the State.
    o While the **compliance rate for the submission of the Annual Attendance Report** has in the main been increasing, approximately 12% of post-primary schools (88 schools accounting for approximately 43,000 students) and 8% of primary schools

(281 schools accounting for 36,500 students) had not submitted the Annual Attendance Report at the end of March 2010 in respect of the school year 2008/09.

- **Periodic returns**
    - o It is estimated that only 61% of **absence in excess of 20 days** were reported (in periodic returns) in the course of the year.
    - o NEWB stated that some schools report details of **absences over 20 days** directly to the relevant EWO but were not in a position to quantify the number of student absences reported in that way.
    - o In 2008/09, 15% of absences reported on periodic returns were for students who missed **50 days or more**. The number of pupils reported was 8,190.
    - o Information based on periodic reporting has proved inadequate because it is neither comprehensive nor validated.

Home School Community Liaison Scheme (Department of Education and Skills)[26])

This scheme seeks to build relationships between schools and parents, pupils and the community; it is targeted at schools serving disadvantaged areas. Addressing attendance is one issue that the scheme can address.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The Home/School/Community/Liaison Scheme was established in 1990 with the appointment of 30 teachers as liaison co-ordinators in 55 primary schools in large designated areas of urban disadvantage. In 1991 the scheme was extended to 13 second level schools which serve the children who already had the liaison service at primary level. Subsequent extensions to the scheme at both levels took place mainly on the basis of:

offering the scheme to designated primary schools in urban areas with **high concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds**; and

offering inclusion in the scheme either simultaneously or subsequently to the second level schools into which the primary schools in the scheme 'feed'.

Selected schools, largely in urban areas and to a lesser degree in rural areas, with high concentrations of pupils with characteristics that are associated with **educational disadvantage** and early school leaving have been invited to join the scheme. Currently, 278 primary schools and 188 schools at second level have joined the scheme.

The underlying policy of the scheme is one that seeks to promote partnership between parents and teachers. The purpose of this partnership is to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system. In addition, the HSCL Scheme places great emphasis on collaboration with the local community. The HSCL Scheme is the pioneer in involving the school in the life of the community and involving the community and its agencies in the life of the school.

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[26]Accessed from: www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=17216&ecategory=34291&language=EN and The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme in Ireland - From Vision to Best Practice (www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/des_hscl_vbp_fore.htm)

Aims and Principles

The five aims (now denoted as goals) were established in the Department of Education and Science during the summer of 1990. The five goals of the HSCL Scheme focus on

supporting marginalised pupils

promoting co-operation between home, school, and community

empowering parents

retaining young people in the education system

disseminating best practice.

The HSCL scheme is based on the principle of partnership between homes, schools and communities. The scheme is governed by twelve basic principles:

The scheme consists of a partnership and collaboration of the complementary skills of parents and teachers.

The scheme is unified and integrated at both primary and second levels.

The thrust of the scheme is preventative rather than curative.

The focus of the scheme is on the adults whose attitudes and behaviours impinge on the lives of children, namely, parents and teachers.

The basis of activities in the scheme is the identification of needs and having those needs met.

The scheme develops teacher and staff attitudes in the areas of partnership and the "whole-school" approach.

The scheme promotes the fostering of self-help and independence.

Home visitation is a crucial element in establishing bonds of trust with families.

Networking with and promoting the co-ordination of the work of voluntary and statutory agencies increases effectiveness, obviates duplication and leads to an integrated delivery of service to marginalised children and their families.

Home/School/Community liaison is a full time undertaking.

The liaison co-ordinator is an agent of change.

Community "ownership" of the scheme is promoted through the development of the Local Committee[27].

Structure

A National Co-ordinator and Assistant National Co-ordinators advise on and support the development of the scheme, liaise with participants in the scheme at local level and provide a link between local and national levels. The basic unit of the scheme is at local school level where a full-time co-ordinator serves the liaison needs of one school or of a number of schools in no more than two catchment areas. "Family clusters" of co-ordinators in primary and second level catchment areas serve the families which have children from pre-school years to leaving certificate level. Co-ordinators in an

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[27] The HSCL coordinators are responsible for the setting up and maintenance of the Local Committee. The purpose of the Local Committee is to identify school-related issues at the community level that impinge on learning and to address these issues by working collaboratively with other interest groups. In short, the Local Committee deals with issues in the community that impinge on learning, in its widest sense. The Local Committee is centred on the post-primary school(s) and the relevant feeder primary school(s). The membership is divided equally between school personnel and representatives of voluntary and statutory bodies on the one hand and marginalised but developed parents on the other. Some of the Local Committees have included primary and post-primary pupils.

area form wider clusters and meet regularly for mutual support and development. Co-ordinators from numbers of clusters are brought together for in-career development on two occasions in each school year.

Parents

While the primary purpose of the scheme is the promotion of partnership in the children's learning, parents frequently identify needs which are not directly concerned with their children's education. Meeting those identified needs is a critical factor in the development of parents' awareness of their capacities and in fostering their self-confidence. Scheme activities which meet parent's needs include:

   home visitation with the objective of establishing bonds of trust with parents and families and supporting parents in the identification of their developmental needs
   provision of drop-in centres and parents' rooms in schools
   provision of childcare facilities so that parents can attend scheme activities
   Courses and Classes on:
   - o   curricular areas so that parents can assist and support their children with their school work
   - o   personal development through parenting and assertiveness training
   - o   leisure activities
   - o   aspects of educational development which range from basic literacy to certificate examination subjects and diploma courses; and
   - o   the development of parents as home visitors, facilitators and classroom aides.

Teachers

Development for teachers in the liaison scheme is in the area of developing partnership and collaboration with parents in the interests of the children's education. This development includes:

   the promotion and establishment of a continuity in the children's transfer from home to school, and from primary to second level
   an understanding of partnership in the context of the parents' role as the primary educators of their children
   the development of attitudes and behaviours regarding the complementarity of parents' and teachers' skills, knowledge and experiences in the enhancement of children's' learning; and
   joint policy making between parents and teachers on issues such as homework, code of positive behaviour, study skills, attendance, substance misuse and home/school/community liaison.

Local Committee

The Local Committee identifies and addresses issues in the community that impinge on children's learning and life in the community. This involves co-operation and partnership with parents, pupils, community agencies, and the schools that participate in the HSCL Scheme. A Local Committee may consist of principals, HSCL coordinators, School Completion Programme coordinators, school staff, parents, pupils, representatives from the local business community and voluntary and statutory agencies. It works to provide an integrated provision of service at the local level and encourages active community participation in the social, personal and educational development of children.

At the first meeting of a Local Committee there is normally a brainstorming session to identify issues that affect children's learning, in effect, a needs analysis. Parents' contribution here is of paramount

importance. Sub-committees meet to further each project, in accordance with needs. In many Local Committees the pupil representatives have their own sub-committee, and they give their own feedback at the general meeting. The next part of the process may require training for pupils or other members of the committee. Sometimes the process requires the Local Committee to prepare a funding proposal for a particular event or activity. Throughout the school year, HSCL coordinators provide support to all the actions of the Local Committee.

A case study relating to school attendance is described below

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Case study: School attendance

The issue identified at the initial meeting of the Local Committee was **poor school attendance**. The response to this issue was the formation of sub-committees to address homework support, part-time work, and good attendance.

One sub-committee decided to deal with the provision of **homework support clubs**. The main stumbling block facing this group was lack of funding, which was overcome by successful application to the local partnership. The result was a thriving homework support club in each of the schools involved. Teachers commented on the fact that pupils who attended the homework support club had improved both in their school work and in their participation, and they were less likely to be absent from school.

The second sub-committee addressed the **problems caused by pupils participating in part-time work**. Having researched it from the parents' and the pupils' viewpoints, the committee decided to meet and voice their concerns with the employers of the town. The hoteliers and supermarket managers attended this meeting. They acknowledged the concerns mentioned and agreed on terms regarding work times, days and contracts. However, despite the promises made by the employers, not all complied with the agreed arrangements regarding part-time work.

The third sub-committee looked at the issue of **good school attendance**. Firstly, SCP staff members who monitor attendance contacted the homes of frequently absent pupils. This contact between the school and the home resulted in a reduction in the level of truancy, and as a result attendance improved. Secondly, to complement this, the sub-committee also produced a pamphlet, entitled School Attendance Matters, outlining the benefits of good attendance and offering advice, encouragement and support to parents. Following its launch the pamphlet was included in all school transfer packs and pre-school packs. Parents who were trained as home visitors also circulated this pamphlet in their various housing estates. The response from parents and principals to this pamphlet confirmed to the Local Committee that this had been a most worthwhile project.

Through working in partnership in Local Committees, collaborative responses are established; this approach means that:

- all the local stakeholders take ownership of initiatives to deal with local problems and to work on possible solutions;
- the collaborative approach means that members identify any gaps that arise in the provision of services, and the duplication of services is avoided.
- the collaborative approach means that a fairer, more inclusive and more co-operative relationship is developed between home, school, and community.

bonds are strengthened between primary and post-primary schools;

the Committee provides a forum where links between the education partners and voluntary and statutory agencies are formed and strengthened for the betterment of the whole community;

strategies are devised and continuously improved to promote the education and development of parents and pupils.

all stakeholders have an ownership of the process, and this enhances outcomes.

School Attendance and Participation: What Works and Why? (NEWB, 2008)

Report of a conference - describes a range of strategies to promote attendance – some of which focus on areas with social deprivation.

Introduction

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. The board's statutory function is to ensure that every child either attends a school or receives and education elsewhere. In order to prepare a set of guidelines that will allow the NEWB to do this, more knowledge was needed to explain why children miss school and why those, from similar backgrounds, do not. This report analyses this as well as discussing how current strategies, plans and programmes work.

The report states that the school is the lead player in the development and application of these strategies. Each board of management must prepare a statement of strategy that outlines how the school can promote and encourage attendance and participation. Under the Act, NEWB must develop and issue guidelines to support schools in this work.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

The key points covered in the report regarding the methods schools should use to boost their attendance rates are:

There is no one solution or 'magic bullet' to school attendance. The approaches that are often the most successful are developed as to address particular circumstances and are characterised by **flexibility and pragmatism**.

Teacher-student relations are crucial to students' sense of belonging and attendance.

Teacher expectation – whether teachers and staff project the belief that all students can succeed academically – influences student engagement and attendance.

Curriculum should be assessed to ensure that it suits the needs of all students. It should also include high quality vocational education.

Registration and on-going analysis of data is vital. This should include a rapid response system that identifies the reason for non-attendance.

It is important to pay attention to **lateness as an indication of the beginning of an attendance problem**.

Intensive support from the **Education Welfare Service** can help schools develop a whole school and community approach to tackling non-attendance.

The report includes two examples which illustrate the role of the school in promoting regular attendance:

Ballymun School Principal Network. The Ballymun School Principal Network is an example of partnership working. Within 10 minutes-walk of one another in Ballymun in North Dublin, there are 11 schools – 10 primary and 1 secondary – serving 2,800 children between 4 and 18 in this **area of multiple deprivation**. Instead of working in isolation, however, these 11 schools joined forces to tackle issues of common concern, including attendance. By networking, sharing information and maximising resources, they discovered that there is strength in the collective approach and that issues such as attendance can be tackled both at an individual school and at a community level. Inter-agency co-operation is also crucial to the programme's success.

North Inishowen School Completion Programme: The focus on attendance originally grew out of unique social and cultural circumstances in North Donegal. This programme focuses on North Inishowen, an area with few employment opportunities. Early school leaving was a prominent feature of the area because many students left school to take up industrial jobs that did not necessarily require school certification. This trend occurred because of the need for many students to contribute to family incomes in a **region of disadvantage**.

The school's attendance programme revolves around an attendance monitoring system which:

Allows the school to spot attendance trends quickly;

To intervene early in order to prevent persistent non-attendance;

To analyse the reasons why pupils are not attending school; and

To develop creative initiatives which help to address the needs of individual students in the location.

The initiatives included in the programme, which range from curriculum changes to family visits to school football tournaments – are underpinned by a number of key principles. The approach must be student centred. Initiatives must be consistent, continuous and be carried out in partnership with the parents and the student. The SCP Co-ordinator reported that a recent school survey showed that the three most common reasons for non-attendance were: illness; medical appointments; and family problems.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

The NEWB report highlights the **Londubh Project** as demonstrating particularly the power of inter-agency co-operation and commitment. It is a community-based, preventative project targeting children from ages 4-12, located in Inchicore, Dublin – **a well-known disadvantaged area**. It was established under a Government led initiative in 1998 called Integrated Services Process (ISP), which aimed to "to develop new procedures to ensure a more focused and better co-ordinated response by statutory authorities to the needs of the communities with the greatest level of disadvantage."

One of the main findings of the project, assessed over the school year 2005-2006, was that between 93% and 97% of children participating showed some improvement in at least one critical area: Attendance; punctuality; behaviour in class/session; participation in class/session; social interaction with peers and with adults; self-confidence and motivation. Specifically, teachers assessed that 40.4% showed some improvement in attendance and 36.2% showed improvement in punctuality. Linked to these findings on attendance, Londubh helped improve the children's overall sense of belonging in school.

Reducing the barriers to School Attendance: Testing a new way of Working (NEWB, 2009)

This report summarises the learning from a new approach for agencies working to address school attendance and placement matters. It is focused on supporting vulnerable children and families rather than having a specific geographic / location focus.

Introduction

The report outlines a new way of working with vulnerable children and families in collaboration with schools and other colleagues in education support services in relation to school attendance and placement matters. The new approach represents a significant shift in paradigm from focusing solely on raw attendance data. The model recognises the role of schools in early intervention. It outlines a safe way of working together to achieve what is best for the child.

Seventeen Educational Welfare Staff and seventy-nine schools participated in the Pilot Project in six Pilot areas. School principals and Education Support Services (Home School Community Liaison Coordinators, School Completion Coordinators and Visiting Teachers for Travellers) participated in the Pilot areas, along with the NEWB teams.

The key features of the new way of working tested in the Pilot Project were:

Recognising the role of schools as the first line of early intervention when attendance difficulties occur;

A formal referral process to NEWB by schools;

Brief interventions by EWOs to prevent a child's attendance problems from becoming chronic;

A focused emphasis on strong interagency collaboration with Education Support Services and other agencies to ensure most effective use of skills and resources and clearly delineated responsibilities;

Streamlining intensive casework with children around key processes – assessment, target-setting, case planning, review and monitoring of outcomes, case closure;

Listening to children and recognising their central part in finding solutions to their own attendance problem; and

Measuring impact of the work, especially the outcomes for children.

The project was short in time frame (6 months) and compact in number of Pilot areas (6) and number of Educational Welfare Staff (17) and schools (79) involved. However its impact on participants and teams was high, resulting in strong support for the new way of working.

Educational Welfare Service staff who participated were supportive of all elements of the Pilot. The aspects of the Pilot Project that secured strongest support from NEWB staff were the new referral process, standardised assessment, and structured case planning; in the case of each of these aspects, more than 90% of staff saw the new way of working as an improvement on current practice. The structured approach to case planning had the support of all staff.

The new emphasis on listening to children, the use of attendance targets, case reviews at regular intervals and decision-making about case closure at 24 weeks were all regarded as a significant improvement or some improvement by more than 75% of staff.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

With regards to the methods of intervention and monitoring of the child's progress in the new way of working Pilot Project, the role of the school in promoting regular attendance included the following:

Ensuring the child's view about the barriers to attendance are listened to carefully to establish how those barriers may be overcome ;
Ensuring the child knows what the plan is trying to achieve;
Engaging the young person at every stage;
Having assessment information on educational attainment and ability; relationships with teachers, other staff and peers; particular subject interests or talent; specific learning challenges; out of school activities and hobbies;
Planning for the school to address any school-based barriers to attendance; and
Planning for the school to use strategies to promote the child's attendance.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

One of the dimensions included in the assessment and planning process of the Pilot Project was the interaction between the school and the child's family – this included:

Knowing the pattern of attendance of other siblings in the household;
Assessing the capacity of the parent(s) to follow through any agreed plan to improve attendance;
Exploring with the families the ways in which they can support the child's attendance;
Involving the family with the attendance targets and ways of meeting these; and
Identifying ways of using family strengths and resources to achieve results.

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

School principals were asked if the greater emphasis on collaborative working prior to referral to NEWB had improved the service to children with poor attendance. 68% of principals felt that the new approach was either a significant improvement in that regard (28%) or better than current practice (40%).

Some principals stated that they worked well with their EWO prior to the Pilot Project and the face-to-face meetings that were required in the Pilot Project were time consuming. Others felt that the Pilot encouraged a more focused and collaborative way of working between the EWO, the school and Education Support Services. Principals also commented on the time involved in holding meetings, and the difficulty in ensuring that all team members could attend.

Netherlands

Tackling Non-Attendance in Schools: A Practical Approach (Netherlands Youth Institute/National Centre for Education and Youth Care)[28]

This report provides details of approaches to dealing with non-attendance.

Prof. Dolf Van Veen (Director, Netherlands Youth Institute/National Centre for Education and Youth Care) presentation focused on school strategies to reduce non-attendance and to promote and improve participation in schools. It drew upon the results of a comprehensive, four year research and development programme in Amsterdam (The Netherlands), which addressed the problems, risks and challenges associated with non-attendance amongst 10-15 year olds in 240 primary and secondary schools.

Van Veen stated: "If children do not feel missed then there is a problem. They are tourists in the classroom and not citizens of the school." In order to begin to address these challenges, the researchers undertook specific interventions or "experiments" in selected school groupings. The strategies employed included*: i) improving school climate and parental involvement, ii) communicating a clear behavioural code and follow up policy, iii) developing policies to deal with lateness and iv) developing interagency support structures for schools to help identify causes of non-attendance and to support modes of intervention and prevention.*

Specifically:

- In 30 primary schools with high non-attendance, the researchers focused on improved registration, follow-up, and intensified communication with the parents, including targeted interventions;
- In 6 secondary schools with good attendance, they focused on developing a system of fast response;
- In 1 low performing secondary school, the focus was on discipline and management; and
- Finally, in 12 secondary schools, the researchers focused on building improved learning and behaviour support teams and concentrated specifically on the development of fast responses in cases of frequent illnesses.

The research showed that there is no 'magic bullet' for addressing non-attendance. However, it was clear that strategies on prevention and pedagogy were more successful than repressive strategies. Some of the practical learning showed that:

- **Registration is vital**. This should include a rapid response system that identifies the reason for non-attendance;
- It is important to **pay attention to lateness**. Lateness is often an indication of the beginning of a problem and needs a rapid and intense response;

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[28] School Attendance and Participation: What Works and Why? (NEWB Conference, 2008)

> **On-going analysis of attendance and timekeeping data** at pupil, class, year, group and school level is vital in understanding reasons for non-attendance and then developing school level strategies that work;
>
> Effective school strategies for non-attendance must be **integral to the pupil and parent support systems;**
>
> Non-attendance is lower if **teaching and learning are personalised**, if students feel "missed" and if students like to be at school;
>
> **Personal (phone) contact with parents on attendance** is vital. Letters do not work;
>
> It can be effective to **encourage peers to visit non-attenders**; and
>
> Students were more likely to re-engage if their **peers inform and help them with homework they have missed**.

The recommendations in the report included:

> Having **attendance policies** that were sound, reasonable, well communicated and understood. It is also vitally important to distinguish between excused and non-excusable absences.
>
> **Early interventions** must be made which must involve home-school contact and early support when a student starts struggling.
>
> Strategies for **increasing family involvement** should be personalised and mentors should be provided.

Dropout Prevention Measures in the Netherlands: An Evaluation (TIER, Maastricht University, 2010)

This evaluation report provides details of approaches to dealing with dropout from school.

Introduction

Every year more and more students drop out of school without obtaining a higher secondary education diploma. This can have a negative impact on the productivity and development of the individual in today's knowledge-driven society. These 'drop-out' students or 'early leavers' are part of a group that is at risk of obtaining low education levels which may lead to unemployment.

At the Lisbon 2000 summit, the European council decided to aim for a lower dropout rate with the use of other benchmarks. The average rate of early school leavers was targeted at below 10% for 2012. The European member states have developed various programs to reduce dropping out at secondary education.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

This evaluation discusses just how important it is for schools to have **efficient measurement instruments** when developing dropout policies. Previous measures have been inaccurate and unreliable and there has always been a lack of transparency. As a result, the program 'Aanval op de uitval' (or fighting dropout) was launched in 2006 in the Netherlands. It represented an attempt to upgrade the registration systems at schools and has allowed the Netherlands to possess the sort of reliable dropout data that exists today.

Every pupil who attends school in the Dutch educational system gets a **personal identification number** (or education record). These registrations are then transferred into a national database called

'het Basisregister Onderwijs' or BRON. Since 2007, BRON has been used to evaluate the regional and national policy measures for reducing the levels of school dropouts at secondary level of education.

An incentive based on **'naming and shaming' of schools with superior and inferior dropout rates** can also boost competition among schools with regards to attendance. Other methods include **ensuring that the importance of attendance and obtaining a starter's qualification is communicated to all young people**.

Another policy measure which aims to report non-attendance is **registering truants in a central database**. An important feature of the database is discouraging risk-averse pupils as they may not want to run the risk of "being caught" in not attending classes. Therefore, increasing the chance of pupils being caught discourage them from undertaking outside school activities during school time.

One of the main reasons of dropping out at secondary education is making the wrong study choice. About 20% of all dropouts in the Netherlands indicate to leave school because of a bad study choice. **A professional approach to managing the study curriculum can enhance school attendance.**

Apprenticeships are shown to be effective learning methods when developing transferable and interpersonal skills and increasing employability. A lack of workplaces for apprentices is an important trigger of the dropout decision. Finding better matches between apprenticeships and labour organisations and improving information and support for pupils can make the problem much less persistent.

Extended school time refers to a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to meet the needs of pupil and their families. For instance, schools offer sport and leisure activities to augment their attractiveness for pupils. It also offers the chance to motivate youngsters to do sporting activities, to combat the problem of overweight and to develop talented youngsters to professional sport careers.

USA

Enrolment, Attendance, Engagement and Achievement: Successful Strategies for Motivating Students – Evidence of Effectiveness from Comparisons of 50 States and 45 Nations (John H Bishop, CAHRS[29], 2004)

This study highlights a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These are relevant for all schools; however a number of examples (vocationally focused education, KIPP Academies, Foundation for Excellent Schools) are discussed as these are particularly relevant for children and young people from low income / disadvantaged backgrounds.

Introduction

This paper presents strategies to address the goal:

"How do you increase the proportion of young people who enrol in and attend school while simultaneously setting high standards and being induced to become engaged and effective learners?"

The three main strategies discussed in the paper to help achieve this goal are:

Convince students that the benefits of staying in school are huge;
- o   Advertise on television;
- o   Recruit mentors at local colleges and use college aspirations as a motivator;

Make High School more attractive to 'at risk students';
- o   Offer a variety of quality career-technical programs at convenient locations;
- o   Never expand an already large high. New high schools should be small;
- o   Create more middle school magnets like the KIPP Academies
- o   Create more middle school academies at each of the state Vocational Technical Centres;

Exit exams should create moderate stakes for everyone, not high stakes for just a few;
- o   Base accountability for high school students on end-of-course exams;
- o   Create additional graduated rewards for doing well on state tests; and
- o   Reform the admissions policies of State University Systems.

Role of School in Promoting Regular Attendance

With regard to **making school more attractive**, the report advocates "Career-Technical Education (CTE) Programs". Schools should offer courses that allow students to prepare for their chosen career and reflect that both the needs of the labour market and the interests, talents and learning styles of

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[29] Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies

students are diverse. The CAHRS report cites the Report of the Advisory Committee for the National Assessment of Vocational Education (2003): "A career focus often gives students a sense of direction and motivates them to achieve and stay in school…. This is especially important for young people who learn best by doing, a group that includes disproportionate numbers of disadvantaged and special education students. Just having the option of being able to concentrate in CTE in high school results in more young people staying in school because more individually relevant choices are available to them".

The report notes that finishing high school increases earnings by 30-40% and that the benefits of finishing high school are particularly large for those who take three or more advanced Career-Technical Education (CTE) courses during the final two years of high school. Shortly after they graduate from high school, they earn 50% more than drop outs. This is the kind of promotional message that the author advocates in order to ensure that **students are aware of the disastrous consequences of not graduating from high school**.

With regard to **making school more attractive** and in particular creating more middle school magnets, the author cites the **KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) Academies**[30] - which he refers to as America's most successful middle school model for students from **disadvantaged backgrounds.** More than 85% of KIPP students are from low-income families and eligible for the federal free or reduced-price meals program; nationally, more than 95% of KIPP middle school students have graduated high school, and more than 85% of KIPP alumni have gone on to college.

KIPP is a national network of free, open-enrolment, college-preparatory public schools with a track record of preparing students in underserved communities for success in college and in life. There are currently 109 KIPP schools in 20 states and the District of Columbia serving more than 32,000 students. There are 61 KIPP middle schools (grades 5-8), 30 elementary schools (grades Pre-K-4), and 18 high schools (grades 9-12). Students are accepted regardless of prior academic record, conduct or socioeconomic background.

KIPP builds a partnership among parents, students, and teachers that puts learning first. By providing outstanding educators, more time in school learning, and a strong culture of achievement, KIPP is helping all students to and through college.

KIPP academies are non-selective schools of choice that run from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM during the normal 180 day school year, have compulsory Saturday enrichment programs three times a month and a three week summer school. During the summer prior to entering middle school for the first time, new students spend a couple of weeks in skills building exercises, learning the KIPP culture and bonding with their future classmates and teachers. KIPP academies are islands of discipline and caring and demanding teachers in a sea of chaotic schools led by dispirited adults. Parents queue for a chance to enrol their child in one of these very demanding schools. Achievement gains are remarkably large and have been replicated in new implementations of the model.

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[30] Data from 2004 CAHRS report and more up-to-date information accessed from www.kipp.org

In 2007, KIPP commissioned Mathematica Research Policy, Inc. to complete a national, multi-year study of KIPP middle schools. An evaluation report[31] published in 2010 found that:

KIPP does not attract more able students (as compared to neighbouring public schools);
KIPP schools typically have a statistically significant impact on student achievement;
Academic gains at many KIPP schools are large enough to substantially reduce race and income-based achievement gaps; and
Most KIPP schools do not have higher levels of attrition than nearby district schools.

A further evaluation report (to be published in 2012) will include data on a larger sample of KIPP schools across the country, and, where possible, will compare the achievement results of KIPP students to those students who tried to enrol in KIPP but were not successful. Further reports will also expand the scope of the evaluation by including a larger population of KIPP middle schools; incorporating additional student outcomes beyond state test scores; and exploring aspects of the operation of KIPP schools that may be related to producing larger impacts on students.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

With regard to convincing students of the benefits of school, the concept of using college aspirations as a motivator is illustrated in the **Foundation for Excellent Schools.** The FES has been implemented in America and aims to help schools partner with local colleges to enhance college aspirations through a program called The Century Program (TCP). Each TCP partnership targets at least **100 underserved students - youth who might not graduate from high school** but, through TCP intervention, will graduate and attend and succeed in college. These students benefit from four core practices that have proved effective in raising aspirations and student performance in FES schools nationwide: mentoring, goal setting, early college awareness, and community service. TCP will help these students improve academic performance and attendance, develop personal and academic goals, and ultimately ensure that they graduate from high school and go on to and graduate from college. All TCP Scholars participate in high-impact activities that incorporate four core practices:

1. **Mentoring**: All TCP Scholars have a mentor, either a college student, older high school student, and/or community member.
2. **Early College Awareness**: Colleges offer activities for TCP Scholars and their parents/caregivers to help them understand how to access and succeed in college.
3. **Goal Setting**: College students help TCP Scholars to identify short- and long-term, as well as "dream," goals.
4. **Community Service**: All TCP Scholars participate in service activities that enable them to give back to their schools and communities.

Note: since the CAHRS report was published (2004), the FES has undergone some changes and is now known as the College For Every Student (CFES)[32], a nonprofit organization committed to raising

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[31] Student Characteristics and Achievement in 22 KIPP Middle Schools (Christina Clark Tuttle, Bing-ru The, Ira Nichols-Barrer, Brian P. Gill, Philip Gleason, Mathematica Policy Research, June 2010)

the academic aspirations and performance of underserved youth so that they can prepare for, gain access to, and succeed in college. CFES currently works with 150 rural and urban schools and districts in 22 states. Each school works with more than 50 CFES Scholars (low-income youth), most of whom would be first in their family to pursue higher education, to help them get to college and succeed there. CFES seeks to engage each student in three high-impact practices:

Pathways to College - CFES K-12 schools partner with colleges to provide opportunities for their CFES Scholars to visit college campuses, interact with college students and faculty, and gain exposure to admissions, financial aid, and other higher education components.

Mentoring fosters academic and personal growth among CFES Scholars by providing them a supportive relationship with an older, more experienced individual who can serve as a role model. All CFES schools have mentoring programs for their CFES Scholars that utilize peers (including other Scholars), adults, teachers, and/or college students as mentors.

Leadership through Service - activities designed to help CFES Scholars identify and express their leadership potential to improve their school, neighbourhood, and/or the global community. CFES schools create meaningful opportunities for CFES Scholars to provide student leadership in service activities. Gaining leadership skills and taking responsibility for others contribute to Scholars' self-confidence, stimulating greater personal aspirations for college and building resilience that leads to college success.

According to CFES, research confirms that student engagement in CFES Core Practices is correlated with higher aspirations and improved academic performance. The most successful programs incorporate all three core practices in order to help Scholars gain college access and success. The CFES Annual Report 2011[33] highlights outcome data across CFES Schools in 2008-11:

Improved Attendance – 63%
Improved Grade Point Average (GPA) – 68%
Improved Behaviour – 74%
College-going Rate for Senior CFES Scholars – 95%

Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies from Research and Practice (North West Educational Laboratory, 2004)

This study highlights a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These are relevant for all schools.

Introduction

This booklet includes a series of reports produced by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory which briefly addresses current educational concerns and issues such as how schools are attempting to tackle low attendance and making use of the resources at hand.

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[32] www.collegefes.org/about.php
[33] www.collegefes.org/pdf/cfes_annual_report_2011.pdf

The research reveals a number of views and solutions for increasing attendance. It notes that "much research, especially research on truancy prevention, views attendance problems as the result of a "functional problem," such as self-motivation, peer relations, mental health, substance abuse, social skills, poverty, and discipline. Interventions are designed to treat these problems by using counselling and family mediation, involving law enforcement, and providing social services". However, it also refers to an increasingly prevalent view in the literature, "that attendance is an indicator of larger, more complex issues of disengagement and student motivation, and that school culture and structure contribute to both".

NWREL's review of the literature did not find a definitive answer to the question: Do some strategies work better than others? Nor did it find many resources that offer step-by-step guidelines for developing attendance strategies. However, it has found that a number of key factors must be in place for any school change strategies, including attendance strategies, to take hold and be effective.

It quotes Scott Perry, student services director at Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District (Oregon), "who has years of experience in conducting attendance audits and providing student and family services, echoes researchers in advising that sustained improvements will only occur in schools that have system readiness. This includes a cohesive staff, trusted and shared leadership, data-based decision-making, an oversight team for school improvements, a positive climate, and identification, evaluation, and assessment of school and student needs. In addition, research on comprehensive, effective, truancy prevention programs indicates that consistent policies, building-level support and commitment, and continuous evaluation all are important for success."

The booklet summarises the strategies for increasing attendance under the following categories:

> Sound and reasonable **attendance policies** with consequences for missing school
> **Early interventions**, especially with elementary students and their families
> **Targeted interventions for students with chronic attendance problems**, such as truancy reduction programs— both school and community based.
> **Strategies to increase engagement and personalisation with students and families** that can affect attendance rates: family involvement, culturally responsive culture, smaller learning community structures, mentoring, advisory programs, maximisation and focus on learning time, and service learning.

Many of the ideas discussed in the booklet come from case studies of schools and programs.

Role of school in Promoting Regular Attendance

The booklet recognises the importance of creating structures and opportunities for students to experience personalised learning. It strongly suggests that schools which have created **smaller and personalised learning environments** have higher attendance and lower dropout rates. Students in small high schools attended almost four or five more days of school per semester than students attending the other high schools. The study said the reasons for this were down to teachers knowing the students well, higher expectations of students and the use of a broad range of strategies when engaging students in school.

Perhaps the most important finding in research concerning dropout prevention, attendance, student engagement, and effective small schools is that students are more likely to remain and achieve in schools where people care about them. If **relationships between staff and students and their**

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families are to affect student outcomes, they must be based upon trust, respect, fairness, and equity. The research shows that in schools where there is trust, caring, and support, there is higher attendance, higher student performance, and a lower rate of suspensions.

Mentoring was also noted as an effective method in reducing the level of absences in schools. It is one way to ensure that a child has a continuous, sustained, and caring relationship with a trusted adult—whether in or outside school. Research from the document clearly indicates that children who were mentored in these programs had increased attendance (this is not quantified), more positive attitudes toward schools, and possibly improved grades. Mentoring researchers caution people that one should not expect that a mentor will solve all the child's problems, including attendance, and that a mentor program will automatically mean other strategies don't need to be in place. Ideally, a mentoring program should be part of the comprehensive plan for increasing attendance.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The booklet reports that the last 30 years of research has consistently linked **family involvement** to higher student achievement, better attitudes toward school, lower dropout rates, increased attendance, and many other positive outcomes for students, families, and schools. In particular, the research in the report found that in a study of 12 elementary schools, as the schools developed school **family - community partnerships** to help improve attendance, the average rate of chronically absent students decreased from 8% to 6.1%. Most important was constant and personal communication between the family and the school. In schools where home visits occurred on a regular basis, the overall percentage of chronic absenteeism was lower.

Family involvement is absolutely vital in attendance intervention programs. Most truancy intervention programs involve and hold family members accountable every step of the way; from initial contact, to family counselling, to court hearings. It is important to remember that informing families of attendance problems is not enough, that encouraging their active participation during times and at locations most convenient for them can show that schools value family input and contributions.

These are some of the suggestions made from the research and school practitioners on how to involve parents in increasing attendance:

- Overall, parents are the school's main source of support for getting children to school. **Share ideas with parents and make them part of the team**—don't place blame on them (Sheverbush, Smith, & DeGruson, 2000).
- **Family counselling sessions should focus on finding positive solutions and treating the family with respect**. The goal is to emphasize solutions based on the power of the family, rather than the power of the school (Sheverbush et al., 2000).
- Conduct a communitywide **public relations effort to stress the importance of school attendance** and the necessity of family involvement (Sheverbush et al., 2000).
- Establish a **contact at school** for family members to work with (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).
- **Make home visits to chronically absent children**. Provide a home family liaison to identify the root causes for children not coming to school, and to "initiate discussions about community services that can assist" (Schargel & Smink, 2001, p. 51)

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21 Ways to Engage Students in School (NCSE[34], 2007)

This study highlights a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. These apply to all schools.

Introduction

Based on research and community dialogue, the NSCE has identified the following "best practice" with regards to its 3A's (attendance, achievement and attachment) of school engagement. For attendance, these are:

Clear expectations of students, families and school staff-roles are understood and contracts are developed to support student attendance.

Monitoring and rewarding good attendance is supported by consistent and accurate tracking of absences and timely follow-up with truant students, and incentives and rewards are provided to recognize good/improved attendance.

Outreach to families and communities emphasizes the importance of school attendance and family involvement in the education of children and youth.

Effective policies to promote attendance are developed, implemented and evaluated.

In April 2007, the NCSE hosted a contest, called "21 Ways to Engage Students in School", to create a list of successful and practical strategies that contribute to school engagement. The goal of the contest was to create a greater awareness of strategies that are asset-based. The strategies included:

Activities/Special Events for students, families and communities

Best practices

Incentives

Instructional/curricular innovations

Professional development for educators and program providers

School policies

School-wide programs

Examples of interventions which are of particular relevance to the research objectives of this study are briefly described in the following sections.

Role of school in promoting regular attendance

Numeracy / Fun Events

o **Factor in Math Fun -** In Oswego, New York, a Factoring Fan Club was created for 9th grade math students to get them excited about factoring, to keep it fresh in their minds, and to be "good" at factoring[35].

o **Celebrate Pi Day on 3/14 -** This event was created to help students enjoy math by offering a fun-filled day honouring Pi. Events included a pie eating contest, measuring

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[34] National Centre of Science Education

[35] Oswego School District, Oswego, NY

the diameter and circumference of round objects to calculate pi, and other games related to circles[36].

Offer After-school Programs

An after-school program in Englewood, Colorado, was designed using many aspects of instructional best practices: establishing guiding questions, webbing with students, etc. Through this approach, learning experiences are created with intentional learning in mind[37].

Increase Public Awareness Around School Attendance

Public Service Announcements (PSA's) were developed and aired on local television stations. The 30-second PSA's featured parents talking about failure to send children to school, the consequences of such action, and that obstacles can be overcome. The PSA's also featured students encouraging good school attendance and the importance of a high school diploma[38].

Collaborate with Higher Education

In Mesquite, Texas, a local college delivers 3.5 hours of continuing education courses ("Educational Opportunities") to truant students and their families. The curriculum includes the negative consequences associated with poor school attendance and the positive consequences associated with scholastic achievement. Discussion of transition from high school to college is discussed and a tour of the college is provided[39].

Coordinate Bullying Prevention Activities

Bullying prevention efforts seem to work best if they are coordinated by a representative group from the school. A student advisory group also can be formed to focus on bullying prevention and provide valuable suggestions and feedback to adults[40].

Track and Mentor Students

A "Daily Attendance Accountability Log" is an example of a tool to help redirect truant students with a proactive approach to time management and attendance accountability. Through the use of an attendance log and mentoring, students are shown structure, responsibility and accountability and begin to understand the importance of attendance and academic achievement[41].

Offer Incentives

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[36] Independence School District, Independence, VA
[37] Englewood Schools, Englewood, CO
[38] State Attorney Truancy Arbitration Program, Jacksonville, FL
[39] Dallas Independent School District, TX
[40] Brush School District, Brush, Colorado
[41] Truancy Reduction Achieved in Our Communities Project, San Antonio, TX

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As a reward, a lunch-time soccer game is organized for students with good attendance by school staff[42].

Support Positive Behaviour

Jacksonville School District adapted the principles of Got Fish? (a book to build business morale) for the classroom. Principles include: being there, play, choosing your behaviour, and make their day. Students are recognized when observed "living" each of the principles[43].

Create Student-Generated Classroom Rules

In Eugene, Oregon, students create a list of classroom rules to be followed. Each student signs off on the rules and is held accountable by fellow students. In addition, they developed their own "honour roll", in which students are recognised for doing their best, following directions, and not talking out more than 3 times a day[44].

Develop Leadership Skills

In Australia, children are a part of a team chosen to start the class in "morning circle" with the support of the teacher. Children have different roles that rotate weekly: organiser, writer, and collector/messenger[45].

Organise Interest Clubs

Interest clubs were developed and organized in Madison, Wisconsin, to provide all students an opportunity to participate in an activity of their choice. The clubs are run by teachers and staff every Friday during the school day for 45 minutes. Each student gets to join 3 clubs during the school year[46].

Facilitate Positive Student-Teacher Connections

Some schools in Oregon encourage students to sign up for a one-on-one lunch with their teacher during school time. The teacher uses this time to get to know the student and offers them encouragement and praise. Children and youth benefit when their teachers demonstrate that they care about student well-being in addition to academic success.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

Promote "Paired Reading"

In Tampa, Florida, parents were taught how to implement "paired reading" with their first grade child in the home for 10 minutes a day[47].

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[42] Summit School District, Frisco, CO

[43] Jacksonville School District, Jacksonville, FL

[44] Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, Eugene

[45] Elementary School, Sydney, NSW, Australia

[46] School District, Madison, WI

Promote Family-School-Community Events

A school in California participated in International Walk to School Day in October in which 200 students and families walked. The school was able to partner with the Nutrition Network who supplied water and fresh vegetables to the participants[48].

Mobilise Community

Community Now! is an asset-based community development tool of the Connection Institute. It uses asset-based language and planning to bring the community together to discover what values the community shares as a whole. It then works to mobilise community members around its assets and shares values to become proactive in its planning rather than reactive[49].

Expand Family and Community Involvement

In addition to attending the standard "parent night", parents and students are required to complete hours toward building community partnerships (i.e. volunteering at the local museum, city clean-up day, etc.). These types of strong, supportive partnerships lead to the development of leadership, community involvement, attendance accountability and responsibility[50].

Host a Family Dinner Night

Family Day is celebrated on the fourth Monday in September. Over the past few years Colorado CASASTART programs, students and their families have celebrated Family Day by hosting special school-based events. Schools and local businesses contribute to the success of the event that supports positive family communication and builds family-school-community partnerships. CASA created Family Day — A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™ in 2001, as a national effort to promote family dinners as an effective way to reduce substance abuse among children and teens[51].

Offer Programs to Support Children and Parents

FAST is an examples of an after-school program designed to build protective factors for children (0-16 years old) and empower parents to be the primary prevention agents for their own children[52].

Collaborate in Attendance Planning

In Virginia, students and their families along with the school, court, and community come together to discuss and implement appropriate levels of intervention including an attendance contract, monitoring, and treatment[53].

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[47] Tampa School District, Tampa, FL

[48] Schmitt School, Westminster, CA

[49] Kittery Children's Leadership Council, Kittery, ME

[50] Truancy Reduction Achieved in Our Communities Project, San Antonio, TX

[51] For more information go to- www.casafamilyday.org / CASASTART Columbia and Colorado CASASTART

[52] FAST National Training and Evaluation Center, Madison, WI

[53] School District Alexandria, VA, Alexandria, VA

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Re-engage Truant Students

Project Reconnect is a court-ordered, 30-day tracking program that reengages students back in to school. Students use a tracking form that must be completed every hour by every teacher. The form records attendance, homework and behaviour. Students are also required to complete community service hours based on the needs of that student[54].

Present, Engaged and Accounted For - The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades (Hedy N. Chang and Mariajosé Romero 2008, National Centre for Children in Poverty)

This study highlights the link between attendance and academic progress and the benefits of early intervention in reducing absence. Contributory factors to absenteeism include low income and unstable family lives.

This report on school absenteeism highlights the importance of regular attendance in order for children to learn, grow and thrive in their education. It discusses how participation at school forms the foundation for further academic and development which is why chronic absenteeism must be dealt with immediately. The report also notes that socio-economic factors that contribute to absenteeism include: **low income, troubled and unstable family life, behavioural problems and cultural adaptation issues.**

The study notes the adverse impact of early school absence, most notably in the child's diminished educational progress in primary school: analysis shows links between chronic absence (more than 10% - nearly a month or more of school over the course of a year) in student's early years and a number of negative outcomes later in life such as truancy, delinquency, substance abuse and dropping out of high school. There are also potentially adverse effects for regular attenders with their educational experiences diminished as teachers divert their attention to meet the learning and social needs of children who miss substantial amounts of school

The report states that *"Attendance is higher when schools provide a rich, engaging learning experience, have stable, experienced and skilled teachers and actively engage parents in their children's education. Chronic early absence decreases when educational institutions and communities actively communicate the importance of going to school regularly to all students and their parents, and reach out to families when their children begin to show patterns of excessive absence. Attendance suffers when families are struggling to keep up with the routine of school despite the lack of reliable transportation, working long hours in poorly paid jobs with little flexibility, unstable and unaffordable housing, inadequate health care and escalating community violence. At the same time, communities can help lower chronic absence by providing early childhood experiences that prepare children and families for entry into formal education."*

The report suggests 4 main areas for action to address early absenteeism and related educational and familial issues:
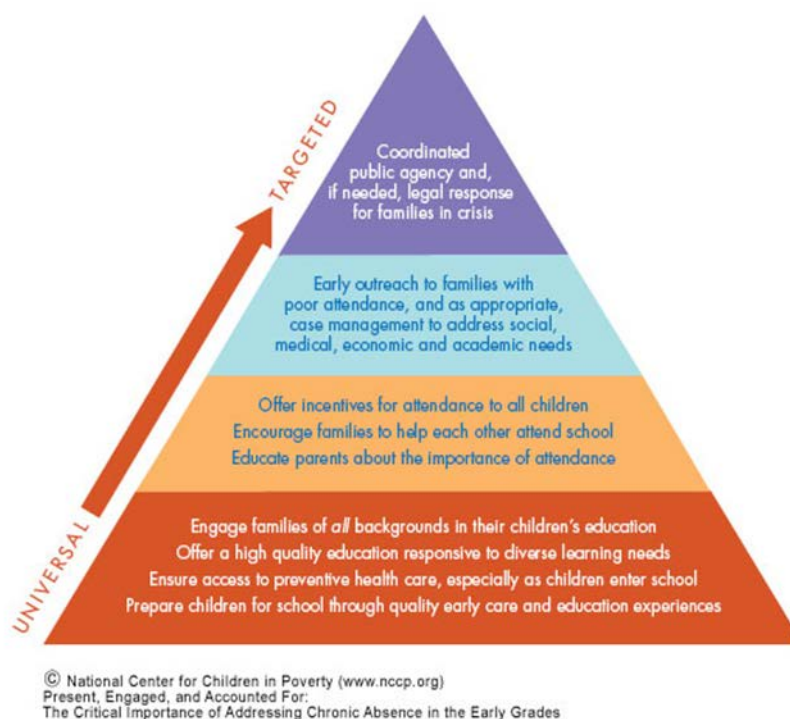
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54 Warner Robbins Schools, Warner Robbins, GA

Monitor chronic absence;
Improve attendance through strong school and community partnerships;
Embed Chronic Early absence into relevant initiatives; and
Conduct further research.

With regards to school and community partnerships, the report recognises that that cchildren's development and educational outcomes take place in the context of multiple, ongoing influences among children themselves, their immediate environments (family, school, peer group), and the larger environments (neighbourhood, community, culture, society at large). When chronic early absence occurs, the extent to which schools, families and communities each might play a contributing role must be considered. Strong partnerships between the schools and communities can help to promote attendance. The diagram below illustrates what could be encompassed within a comprehensive response. Based upon an assessment of their own strengths and challenges, each school community can identify which strategies need to be put in place to reduce chronic absence.

Figure 2: Diagram of comprehensive response to chronic absenteeism

TARGETED

Coordinated public agency and, if needed, legal response for families in crisis

Early outreach to families with poor attendance, and as appropriate, case management to address social, medical, economic and academic needs

Offer incentives for attendance to all children
Encourage families to help each other attend school
Educate parents about the importance of attendance

Engage families of *all* backgrounds in their children's education
Offer a high quality education responsive to diverse learning needs
Ensure access to preventive health care, especially as children enter school
Prepare children for school through quality early care and education experiences

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© National Center for Children in Poverty (www.nccp.org)
Present, Engaged, and Accounted For:
The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades

The strategies included in the comprehensive approach to chronic absenteeism include:

Prepare children for entry into school through high quality early care and education experience.
Ensure access to preventive health care, especially as children enter school.
Offer a high quality education that responds to diverse learning styles and needs of students.
Engage families of all backgrounds in their children's education.
Educate parents about the importance of attendance e.g. PACT programme in Hawaii- a series of workshops designed to meet the needs of parents of children who were chronically absent. After initially requiring parents to attend, the programme shifted to a voluntary approach which proved more successful.

Encourage families to help each other attend school e.g. Verde Involving Parents Programme in which trained parent leaders receive the class roll lists from teachers and then called to check in with the parents of all absent students.

Offer incentives for attendance to all children

Conduct early outreach to families with poor attendance, and as appropriate, case management to address social, medical economic and academic needs e.g. Check and Connect programme which found that working with the family over an extended period of time and staying with families even as they changes schools is a key ingredient.

Coordinate public agency, and if needed, legal response for families in crisis

The report also draws out the relationships between absenteeism and other issues – stating that: "*Paying attention to early absenteeism can be an effective strategy for identifying and addressing educational and familial issues early on. Schools and communities can benefit by embedding attention to chronic early absence in relevant initiatives focused on, for example, school readiness, afterschool programs, school-based health services, and dropout prevention. Monitoring chronic early absence and using it as a trigger for early intervention, could help schools and communities partner with families to ensure every child begins school with an equal opportunity to reach his or her potential.*"

The report includes a number of "Promising Programs for Reducing Chronic Early Absence":

Check & Connect, Minneapolis, Minnesota: first developed as a truancy prevention model among urban middle and high school students and initially with a special education population. Now used with a general student population and has been successfully piloted with elementary age children as well. Its comprehensive approach emphasizes relationship building, routine monitoring of alterable indicators (for instance, attendance, academic performance, behaviour), individual and timely intervention, problem-solving and strengthening affiliations between school and learning. A key component is a monitor or mentor who is responsible for working with students and their families to support their participation and engagement in school. Among elementary aged children, a monitor engages in family outreach and helps parents to be active partners in their children's education. Monitors are typically trained professional social workers who operate at the district level so that they can continue to work with children even if they move to a different school. An evaluation of Check & Connect's implementation in nine elementary schools showed significant increases in the percentage of students whose absences or tardies dropped below five percent of the time. School staff also reported increased engagement among students and their parents.

Project GRAD/ Communities in Schools, Atlanta, Georgia: a research-based school-community collaborative designed to improve student academic performance, and increase the numbers of young people graduating from high school and attending college. Cities in Schools of Atlanta (CIS) implements the Family Support Component of Project GRAD. CIS staff in GRAD schools offer guidance, counselling, community outreach, and family support services to all students, especially those experiencing academic difficulties or family issues. Project GRAD Atlanta was initiated in 2000 and now impacts more than 16,000 students in 27 Atlanta schools, including 18 elementary schools, six middle schools and three high schools. The overall model involves working in a school feeder pattern and helping them to implementing the following elements: reading curriculum, math curriculum, parent and community involvement, social services, academic enrichment, and classroom management.

Data tracked by CIS shows in schools where the program has been in place for more than two years, the average % of students missing 15 or more days in schools fell from 18% to 9% from 2001-2006.

Project PACT (Partnering to Assess and Counteract Truancy), Oahu, Hawaii: Project PACT included a school based program working with students and families of two elementary school serving low-income students on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. Each school had an attendance monitor hired from the community whose primary purpose was to work with teachers and counsellors to identify and address the needs of students with attendance problems and their families. While the school retains primarily responsibility for contacting and convening meetings with parents of absent children, the attendance monitor builds relationships with parents and encourages them to help their child engage in school. They also serve as responsible caring adults for students who, unfortunately, have none at home. If absences continue, parents are encouraged to attend parenting attendance workshops helping them learn new parenting skills and understand the importance of regular school attendance. Because some parents need a "little push," the services of Child Protective Services and the courts were used as needed. A review of the data maintained on-line on program participants shows an improvement in attendance and a significant decrease in unexcused absences (from 19.55 at intake to 5.03 after six months) as well as a decline in tardies and excused absences.

Savannah Chatham School District, Savannah, Georgia: The Savannah Chatham School District takes a very thorough and comprehensive district-wide approach to addressing chronic absenteeism. After three days of absence letters are sent home. If the child is absent five or more days, a social worker pays a home visit to find out what is happening and to help the child return to school. By the 10 days, several agencies including the police are involved in determining how to improve the situation. Within each school, the principal receives a data "dashboard" showing him or her which children have been absent and for how long. The principal convenes weekly attendance meetings with the social worker, counsellor and teacher to review the situation, if appropriate with the parent as well. At the district levels, a Student Truancy Attendance Monthly Protocol Senate brings together a broad array of stakeholders including school administration, the courts, nurses, and community groups to review data on attendance and learn about best practices. Children and families attending Savannah Chatham schools also benefit from an array of supports and resources offered in collaboration with other agencies. For example, through the support of a local businessman, a parent university was established several years ago. Held quarterly on a Saturday, this parent university brings resources and classes to parents aimed at helping them gain skills and knowledge based upon their interests. Child care is available on site. The public health department also offers resources to schools including eye assessments, health fairs and professional development for teachers on chronic diseases affecting children. Most recently the district, with support from the city manager and an array of other public agencies and non-profits, created a comprehensive assessment centre. The centre is available to assess the needs of children and families, link them to available community resources and then follow-up to ensure their needs are met. The district donates use of the building while other agencies provide their services on site using their own agency resources. A review of data on chronic early absence shows that prevalence is very low at 5.4% in 2006. From February 2003 to March 2006, the incidence declined from 10% to 5.0% in among children from high poverty residential areas. For the past two years, chronic early absence has been slightly lower among children living in high poverty areas than their peers living elsewhere in the district.

Truancy Arbitration Program, Jacksonville, Florida: this begins when elementary students continue to have attendance problems even after an attendance intervention team staffed by the school has met with them about the problem. At that point, the State Attorney's Offices summons the family to a hearing held at their offices. TAP hearings are facilitated by State Attorney volunteers who act as arbitrators for the program. School social workers also participate in the hearings. If there is a problem, the social worker and a case manager working out of the State Attorney Office attempt to rectify it. When appropriate, students are referred for counselling and tutoring. Parents are referred to parenting skills office. After each hearing the parents and the student are required to sign a performance agreement compelling school attendance. If they do not abide by this agreement, parents can be arrested on the basis of contributing to the delinquency of a minor – a first degree misdemeanour as well as a second degree misdemeanour for failure to comply with compulsory school attendance laws. If this is the first time, usually the DA requests that they do not serve jail time but serve one year probation. Typical stipulations are to require parents pay for court costs, attend parenting classes, attend school with child for three full days (so they can see what child is missing) and make sure that all children in the home attend school with no unexcused absences or tardies. Program evaluations conducted by the National Center for School Engagement found significant long-term improvement in both attendance and grades.

Verde Involving Parents, North Richmond, California: Verde Involving Parents (VIP) believes that students will do better academically if students come to school regularly and have the tools and skills to manage conflict and negotiate relationships and if parents and community residents are positively involved in day-to-day life at the school. Its staff members, called Family Partners, are parents and/ or residents of the North Richmond community. Family Partners contact the families of every absent and tardy student by phone and home visit. They offer referrals and resources (for example, bus tickets, alarm clocks, raingear, etc.) to help get children back to school as soon as possible. When families face particularly intense challenges, they are connected to a multidisciplinary team of professionals from the Family Service Center. Family Partners also help teachers by working with students when they act out in class to help them get their needs met without disrupting the class and to teach students violence prevention/conflict resolution skills. VIP also offers parents training on how to help children build empathy and solve conflicts peaceably at home, gives monthly student awards for good attendance and holds community-building activities for families. VIP reduced absences at Verde elementary school by more than 50% and tardies by 38% over four school years, and pushed monthly attendance rates from under 89% to over 93%. During that same time frame, VIP returned over $470,000 in vitally needed Average Daily Attendance revenue to the district. Verde elementary school also experienced substantial improvements in test scores: its API rose from a base score of 315 in 2000 to a growth score of 609 in 2006. In 2007, VIP began to apply its model to the nearby Helmes middle school.

RSM McClure Watters

C4EO for the sector from the sector

Project SHINE (Schools and Homes in Education) – A 21st Century Learning Centers Program Administered by Lehigh Carbon Community College[55]

This project includes a range of strategies and interventions which are effective in promoting attendance. 86% of project participants were from low income families in 2009-10.

Introduction

The SHINE 21st Century After-School Program is located in rural Northeast Pennsylvania and provides educational services to children in 5 public schools and 4 parochial schools covering over 430 square miles. Almost 500 children and 1,000 adults are served throughout the school year and during the summer program. It enacted attendance tracking measures as part of its after-school operations because it serves students that are at high risk for chronic absenteeism. The results of the programme are evident with 71% of the students improving or maintaining their levels of attendance while they were taking part.

The key objectives of the project are:

To improve academic performance;
To improve student behaviour;
To improve and increase family involvement.

The success of SHINE's approach is clear:

88% of the SHINE students were regular attendees as compared to below 60% nationally for other 21st Century After-School Programs;
93% of the students who attended SHINE 90 days or more had exceptional or satisfactory attendance;
96% of the students over the past 5 years were promoted to the next grade; and
78% of the SHINE students demonstrated improvement in academic performance

The profile of participants in 2009-10 was as follows:

51% are male and 49% female
100% are referred for academic reasons
23% have IEP's (Special Education eligible)
74% are Title I remedial students
79% have special or remedial needs (i.e., Title I, IEP, ADHD)
86% come from low income families
35% are already in or were in the Children & Youth system or foster care
17% are minorities
25% of families have more than one child enrolled in SHINE related programs.
57% of SHINE students participated in the program 2 to 4 years

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[55] Accessed from www.shineafterschool.com/ and Project Shine Evaluation Report 2009-10

22% of SHINE-Carbon KG students participated in the program 2 to 3 years

17% of SHINE students are ESL or second language learners.

Role of School in promoting Regular Attendance

The primary focus of SHINE and many other effective after school programs is to help students become proficient on core academic standards. The emphasis on academics, however, is not done to the exclusion of enrichment. **Enrichment activities** are an important, required aspect of after school programs. They can spark student interest, broaden the horizons of children, provide exposure to new learning experiences, promote reading, and expand learning beyond the classroom walls. Overall they can provide a more enjoyable experience for students at school which will reduce the chances of high absenteeism.

One example of the enrichment activities provided is the **SHINE After School Program**. It is based around one simple goal: improve the school-day attendance of the students who show up for the after school program in rural Pennsylvania. It resulted in school attendance rates being significantly higher than similar programs nationally. As well as this it improved communications with parents and a created a remarkable collaboration with school teachers that could prove a model for out-of-school time programs.

When families sign up for after school, providers visit the home to get to know the parents and children. Parents must sign a contract stressing the importance of attending school and the after school program. SHINE sends a middle of the year letter reinforcing the message. When students don't come to school, they can't come to SHINE.

For students who do improve their school day attendance, SHINE offers **rewards:** a visit to the "treasure chest" for younger students, gift certificates for others. Parents, too, are entered in monthly drawings for gas cards, family dinners or trips to Walmart.

Central to SHINE's attendance initiative is **tracking—and sharing—attendance data**. The after school providers receive report cards and attendance reports from school teachers every nine weeks. Providers also track attendance for the after school program and submit it, along with the school district information, to an evaluator. Analysis shows the more that students attend SHINE, the better they do in school and in school attendance.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around promoting Regular Attendance

Parent involvement is an integral component of the SHINE Program. The SHINE staff employ a variety of strategies to encourage and provide opportunities for parental involvement. The opportunities include **regularly scheduled events and programs, invitations for classroom visits, an open invitation to serve as a classroom volunteer, and adult education programs**.

Home visitations are regarded as a critical, invaluable component of the SHINE-Carbon and Schuylkill Program. The Home Visitors work with the Pre-K and Kindergarten children referred into the program. They make regular bi-weekly home visits during the school year and the summer. The length varies according to the needs of the child but 60-90 minutes is the norm. When students are transitioning from the SHINE Kindergarten program to the SHINE After School Program, children are invited to participate in an orientation session at the centre they will attend. During the summer months SHINE

teachers in the first to fourth grade after school program complete home visitation assignments to students. These visitations help SHINE staff stay connected with the students and their families to help retain academic skills and to learn new academic skills for the upcoming school year.

The After School Corporation (TASC) – Expanded Learning Time / ExpandED Schools (2010-2011) [56]

This study highlights the benefits of Expanded Learning Time / After-School activities to help improve achievement (and with related benefits in terms of improvements in attendance). These initiatives typically focus on pupils with the greatest disadvantage.

TASC Expanded Learning Time builds on a research evidence base which shows that when students participate regularly in high quality after-school programme for at least 2 years, they improve their achievement, school attendance and engagement in learning. A five-year independent analysis of 10,000 students who participated in TASC –model after-school programmes (operated by community organisations inside schools) showed that students who participated longer-term significantly increased their school attendance rates compared to non-participating students, and they continued to have better attendance records even after they went on to high school. The least advantaged students gained the most from participating. (There are also positive impacts in attitudes to learning and academic achievement).

The Expanded Learning Time schools approach recognises that students who enter schools with the greatest disadvantage need more learning hours and opportunities; that the poorest kids are the least likely to have opportunities to keep learning after 3 PM and that they are least likely to attend schools that educate the whole child. An internal benchmarking tool called Grad Tracker is being developed and refined to track proficiency in Maths and English, school attendance and school suspensions.

ExpandED Schools seek to address the issue that when the traditional school day ends at 3pm, opportunities for students – particularly those with the greatest needs – are restricted. By giving students in public elementary and middle schools more time and a wider range of opportunities to learn, they offer a promising way for educators and communities to reinvent schools that are struggling to fully deliver on the promise of public education. The scheme lifts the limits off the out-dated school calendar and ensures that students receive a more individualised, balanced and hands-on education and a fighting chance to succeed no matter where they begin.

The reasons for reinventing the school day for children include:

More than one-third of students in urban schools drop out, putting them on a path to a lifetime of low-wage, unstable jobs.
The U.S. has dropped from 1st to 16th in the world in college completion.
The current school day was designed for an age of factories and farms, not a knowledge economy.

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[56] Accessed from www.tascorp.org; TASC Expanded Learning Time; Unlocking the Power of Expanded Learning Time: Year Two Report-Update on a TASC Initiative (Dec 2010); ExpandED Schools: A New Way to Increase Kids' Learning Time & Opportunity (2011)

Demands on students, teachers and principals keep growing but the school day stays the same. Too many schools lack the time and resources for arts, recess or inquiry driven projects that inspire a life-long love of learning.

ExpandED Schools build on proven practices. Dozens of empirical studies from the past decade show the same results: more learning time, in the form of high-quality after-school and summer programs, leading to greater achievement, better school attendance and more enthusiastic learners. New research on the highest performing charter schools finds additional learning time to be a critical element of their success. TASC conducted a 3-year pilot of Expanded Learning Time in 10 New York City public schools and found that:

Students out-performed city and state peers in improving their maths and English proficiency;
Student attendance improved on average seven more days per year than in matched schools;
85% of teachers said learning improved.

ExpandED schools achieve 35% more learning time at less than 10% additional cost to the school day – about $1,600 per student.

The changes that are to be implemented include:

The Team: Each school partners with an experienced youth-serving organization to bring in new resources and staff members such as AmeriCorps volunteers. Teachers, administrators, parents and community partners work together to reinvent the school day to more fully meet the needs of their kids. Community educators help teachers personalize instruction, build a lively culture of exploration and achievement and fortify kids against lives often marked by stress and hardship.

The Schedule: The school day expands by roughly three hours to match parents' working hours without mandating longer hours for teachers.

The Curriculum: Schools increase academic rigor and offer a wider variety of learning opportunities such as music and web design that support and expand on core knowledge.

Australia

Disengagement, Disenchantment, Disappearance (Graeme Withers, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2004)

Graeme Withers, a senior research fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research, published a paper[57] in which he identifies these common ingredients in strategies used to strengthen engagement with formal education:

- **dynamic classrooms** led rather than ruled by teachers
- **classrooms that respond flexibly to students' stated or perceived needs,** rather than a rigid, qualifications-driven process
- **strengthening teachers' skills** with in-service education that enables them to function more professionally for a wider range of student abilities and interests
- **cultural inclusiveness and sensitivity** to learning styles, languages and traditions amongst minority ethnic groups
- **changing a school climate to emphasise cooperation and to encourage active learning,** to take place in and out of the classroom
- **whole-school commitment** to effort in reducing absenteeism and suspensions, involving not only the whole school community, but also its surrounding community
- **provision of options for any suspended students, allowing their learning to proceed**
- **smaller schools** where values and expectations are shared and clear, both in policies and their enactment
- a thorough system of **pastoral care and counselling that reaches parents as well as students**.

Evaluation of School-based Arts Education Programmes in Australian Schools (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2004)[58]

This evaluation report assesses the impact of arts education programmes including on attendance; it also considers whether these are of benefit to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This report presents evaluations of four Australian school-based arts programmes which were regarded as examples of good practice: Arts@Direk (South Australia), Boys' Business (Northern Territory), Indigenous Music Education Programme (Northern Territory), and SCRAYP – Youth Arts with an Edge (Victoria). Arts@Direk and SCRAYP provided a focus on drama, while Boys' Business

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[57] from Withers G. (2004) *Disengagement, Disenchantment, Disappearance*. A paper prepared for the Learning Choice Expo conducted by the Dusseldorf Skills Forum, Sydney, 23–24 June
[58] Accessed from
www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/evaluation_school_based_arts_programmes.htm

and Indigenous Music Education Programme (IMEP) concentrated on music. Participating students ranged in age from Year 4 to Year 10 and came from a diverse range of backgrounds. The study investigated the impact of each arts programme on students' academic progress, engagement with learning and school attendance. It also considered which attributes of arts programmes were of particular benefit to the students and whether exposure to the arts provided positive general learning outcomes, particularly for young people who are Indigenous, in remote or regional communities or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The study of Arts@Direk suggested that, on average, students participating in the programme wrote better, had higher problem solving, planning and organising, and communications competencies, and were better able to work with others, that non-participating students. Beneficial attributes of the programme included strong support from the students' school in encouraging children to participate, the feeling that it was inclusive and not dependent upon academic skills, and working towards the outcome of a public performance which gave the programme validity.

The Boys' Business participants displayed improved self-confidence, greater interest in school, development of literacy and numeracy skills, and development of metacognitive skills such as reflection. Beneficial attributes included having a positive role model, participating in an environment that was non-threatening and where all students' views were respected, not having to read or write, and being able to be less constrained than in a conventional classroom.

The students associated with the IMEP programme displayed increased musical skills and knowledge, and literacy and numeracy skills gained through reading and performing music, than their peers who were not involved in the programme. Beneficial attributes of the programme included the **association of school attendance with positive experiences**, approval by the Yolngu people, positive teacher role models, all students' views were valued and respected, and participation in individual activities was voluntary, with students choosing the type of activities they wished to be involved in.

The SCRAYP programme resulted in students acquiring improved interpersonal skills, enhanced self-esteem, and widening their experiential horizons, with an increased understanding of personal and social issues. Beneficial attributes included encouragement of student effort and ownership, young artists as role models, an explicit and stable organisational structure, focus on a final performance as a specific and tangible outcome.

No quantitative data is available on the impact of the programme on attendance.

Effective Strategies to Increase School Completion Report: Every Child, Every Opportunity (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008)

This report discusses a range of interventions to improve engagement and increase completion rates; some of these are of particular relevance to students suffering disadvantage and with specific needs (e.g. poverty, homelessness, personal and/or family problems).

Introduction

The Effective Strategies to Increase School Completion Report outlines successful intervention strategies that work to improve student engagement and increase rates of school completion. This Report was commissioned by the Youth Transitions Division, Office for Policy, Research & Innovation,

and undertaken by Associate Professor Stephen Lamb and Dr Suzanne Rice from the Centre for Post Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Melbourne.

The research identified effective strategies that are being implemented in a number of Victorian government secondary schools and that were identified in national and international literature. The report describes a range of strategies that are most effective at re-engaging and supporting students at risk of early school leaving that can lead to increased rates of school completion.

Role of school in Promoting Regular Attendance

The report discusses the need for schools to create a culture that supports engagement and completion. In order for a school to create this sort of culture, certain features must be in place:

Commitment to success for all: building a shared view that all students can succeed with on-going commitment to identifying the most effective teaching and learning strategies to raise the achievement of at risk students;

Flexibility and responsiveness to individual need: capacity to respond to varying needs which in addition to welfare and academic might include social, personal and emotional needs;

High expectations: research findings point to the key role played by aspirations and the need to create a climate of achievement through effective leadership and a high level of teacher commitment and expectations for student learning;

Shared vision: building a consensus around the aims and values of the school and developing a sense of community with a shared purpose;

Focus on continuous improvement: continuing to reflect on and monitor the impact of changes and encourage innovation for improvement as well as refine and adjust approaches as student and parent needs shift;

Climate of challenging and stimulating teaching: ensuring that programs engage learners, by offering tasks that are challenging and stimulating, that involve opportunities for shared learning, that are satisfying as learning experiences, and that have clear and demonstrable benefits beyond school;

Strong and fair disciplinary climate: research on school effectiveness and engagement points to the need for creating a safe school disciplinary climate with clear and fair rules; and

Encouraging student responsibility and autonomy: building an ethos of students taking responsibility for their own learning and behaviour so that learners accept the idea that their own efforts are important for progress.

Schools visited as part of this project reported that program continuity and long-term support for students were vital. A number of principals commented that they allowed time and funding for initiatives to be embedded in the school culture and then modified to maximize their impact. Principals also stressed the importance of funding stability and staffing stability in creating the necessary environment for change.

In most effective schools, staff frequently report that no single strategy works alone to increase student engagement and retention, although some strategies are more important than others. Rather, it is important to approach different needs associated with engagement and retention using a combination of strategies, using a multi-faceted rather than singular approach. It means that schools need to consider using an **integrated, multi-strand approach to addressing the needs of at risk students**. This could mean, for example, addressing social issues and practical problems, using strategies such

as **individual case management**, while also putting in place **strategies that improve the school's program provision, such as broadening the curriculum and strengthening teachers' teaching and class management skills**.

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around Promoting Regular Attendance

The most effective schools in the study were proactive in their approach to students, identifying problems at an early stage in their secondary school careers and working to address them before students had become disengaged. This could be seen in practices such as providing substantial remedial programs from Year 7, forging strong links to feeder primary schools, and starting Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) planning with at risk students at Year 7 or 8, rather than waiting until Year 10. Again, this is in keeping with research suggesting that **earlier intervention with at risk students has more impact** and is more effective than late intervention.

Welfare support is essential for students who have high levels of need associated with family or personal problems. Such problems as poverty, drug or family abuse, teenage pregnancy, and homelessness can be substantial barriers to engagement in school. One important tool for helping Victorian schools address students' welfare needs is the **School Focused Youth Service (SFYS).** The SFYS coordinates the delivery of preventative and early intervention services for students at risk, developing partnerships between youth services and using additional funds to address any gaps in service delivery. Integrated service models and on-site support services also have a positive impact on engagement. One of the schools visited as part of the current study, innovative in this area, had established a welfare centre with a welfare co-ordinator, school nurse and a visiting GP. The centre provides co-ordinated services for students in need as well as operating programs on interpersonal and social issues.

Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools (Western Australian Auditor General's Report, 2009)[59]

This report provides an overview of attendance levels and also makes recommendations for improving attendance.

Introduction

Regular attendance at school is important for a student to learn. A child's academic achievement is at risk if they regularly miss more than half a day of school a week. Poor educational outcomes can affect student's work skills and their ability to participate in the workforce. It can also affect their level of participation in the community. In Western Australia, a child must attend school from the beginning of the year in which they turn six years and six months until the end of the year in which they turn 17.

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[59] Accessed from: http://www.audit.wa.gov.au/reports/pdfreports/report2009_09.pdf (dated 2009)

Management of Attendance

The Department of Education and Training (DET) has assigned responsibilities for managing attendance among its Central Office, 14 district education offices (district offices), and more than 760 public schools, each administered by a school principal. Schools are primarily responsible for addressing attendance, supported by their district office and Central Office.

DET has identified student attendance as an issue that requires management. It has set up a range of mechanisms across schools, districts and Central Office to monitor attendance and manage students where their attendance falls below 90 per cent. DET's approach to managing attendance includes:

- school-level interventions such as attendance plans and case management of individual students
- specialised staff (attendance officers in district offices and some schools)
- district attendance forums for districts to share models and strategies for improving
- attendance
- student tracking system
- an attendance strategy (2006):
  - o an attendance audit of all public schools
  - o a resource package for schools
  - o a one-off grant to district education offices to support delivery of attendance services
  - o community posters and parental brochures
  - o district attendance officer support to private schools
  - o Prosecution of parents and students when all other strategies have failed.

The resource package advises schools that planning to improve attendance needs to occur at a range of levels across the school, from whole of school approaches through to targeted approaches for groups and individuals to casework with individual students. It promotes a graduated response to attendance from promotion and universal prevention through to individual casework for managing the most severely at risk. The package includes examples of what some schools and staff have done to improve attendance. It does not give schools key strategies for improving attendance, such as for identified cohorts of students. DET recently released a similar package for district offices.

DET's attendance policy outlines the steps that a school should take to encourage an individual student to attend school regularly and to manage non-attendance, including:

- monitor non-attendance and further investigate why, if a student's attendance falls below 90% over a term
- referral to an attendance panel for advice and support to parents and students with non-attendance issues
- refer students to the children's whereabouts unknown list when they cannot be located after 15 or so school days
- Implement and document what they have done to improve a student's attendance.

Key Findings

Of the more than 177 000 students in Years 1 to 10 in WA's public schools in 2008, almost 49 000 (28 per cent) are at educational risk because they are not attending school regularly. DET does not have a

timely and comprehensive understanding of attendance in schools and has not been successful in addressing the growing number of students that do not attend school regularly.

- School attendance is steadily declining. Between 2000 and 2008 average attendance in primary schools fell from 94.5% to 92.6% and from 90.7% to 88% in secondary schools.
- Almost three quarters of public students attend school regularly (over 90% of the time).
- The number of students at educational risk due to poor attendance rose six per cent in 2008 to nearly 49 000.
- Poor school attendance is a significant problem among Indigenous and non-Indigenous students:
  - The greatest numbers of students at educational risk due to poor attendance are non-Indigenous children in metropolitan schools.
  - A high proportion of Indigenous students have low levels of attendance, making them over twice as likely to be at educational risk. Achieving adequate levels of education is one of the key contributors to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.
- Attendance drops significantly as student's progress through secondary school so that by Year 10 only 53% of students attend regularly

Recommendations

The report recommended that the Department of Education and Training should:

- **publicise, promote and demonstrate the importance of regular school attendance to parents, students and the community**
- **develop a better understanding of the causes of non-attendance** and the student groups they affect most
- **review its current attendance strategy** to:
  - reflect the causes of non-attendance and which student groups they affect most
  - ensure greater consistency in when and how schools and districts respond to
  - non-attendance
  - improve guidance on the types of interventions required and the levels of
  - attendance that trigger these
  - provide evidence based interventions that reflect the different student cohorts
  - and the requirements of schools and districts
  - Link attendance to other measures of educational risk.
- **improve the use of attendance as a key indicator of educational risk**, including as an early signal of changes in student behaviour and academic performance;
- **improve the processes for dealing formally with parents and students for persistent failure to attend school**, such as fast-tracking referral to attendance panels
- ensure that a **timely and comprehensive view of attendance data and issues is available** to schools, districts and Central Office staff, including information for triggering and monitoring interventions;
- ensure on a regular basis that **schools are implementing the attendance strategy and policy and are responding appropriately and consistently to low attendance;**
- **set and regularly monitor targets** for student attendance, including an overall state target; and

- evaluate and review interventions addressing attendance, to identify and replicate good practice across districts and schools.

Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM)[60]

This describes an approach to improving attendance through links to social security benefits.

The Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) is an Australian Government measure to trial the attachment of conditions to income support and family assistance payments. Its aim is to encourage parents (or those with responsibility for a child) to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are enrolled in and attending school regularly.

SEAM uses possible suspension of income support and family assistance payments to encourage responsible parental behaviour towards their children's schooling. This approach is supported by individual case management.

The relevant state, territory or independent education authority can inform Centrelink in instances where a child is not attending school regularly. The Centrelink programme sits under the Department of Human Services; it delivers a range of payments and services for retirees, the unemployed, families, carers, parents, people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, and people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and provides services at times of major change.[61]

Parents are required to show they are working with the school and their child to try to improve school attendance. Families will be offered support from school and from Centrelink social workers before any consideration is given to have support payments suspended.

If parents cannot demonstrate that they are taking reasonable steps in enrolling their children or ensuring their children attend school, they may have their income support payments temporarily suspended until action is taken. Where a child has unsatisfactory school attendance despite the best efforts of their parents, no penalty will be imposed on parents.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has overall responsibility for implementing this measure, and will work collaboratively with FaHCSIA, the state and territory governments, school and parent associations to implement this measure.

Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) Evaluation Report for 2010

This describes the evaluation of an approach to improving attendance through links to social security benefits.

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[60] Accessed from: www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/progserv/welfarereform/Pages/ImprovingSchoolEnrolmentAttendance.aspx

[61] Accessed from: http://www.humanservices.gov.au/corporate/about-us/

The SEAM Evaluation Report (2010) indicated that attendance processes were implemented effectively. Where students were referred to Centrelink because of attendance issues, monitoring data shows that attendance improved by 11% in the Northern Territory (NT) and 55% for Queensland Australia (QLD).

A high proportion of referred students (52% in the NT and 76% in QLD) experienced barriers which precluded regular school attendance and they were granted reasonable excuse exemptions (for instance, due to moving house or illness). Although attendance may have improved for some of these students subsequently, it still suggests that improving overall school attendance is not straight-forward.

In 2010, the attendance rates of the NT SEAM students were lower than their non-SEAM peers across all school terms. On average, the attendance rate for SEAM students in 2010 was around 7% lower than that for non-SEAM students, compared to around 11% in 2009. The attendance rate in 2009 gradually declined from Term 1 to Term 4 for both SEAM and non-SEAM students whereas the attendance rate in 2010 spiked in Term 3 before markedly declining in Term 4 (which is consistent with attendance trends in previous years). The introduction of the automatic referral process in the NT in July 2010 may explain this elevated attendance rate in Term 3 during 2010. It is possible that the existence of SEAM in these schools coupled with changes to the referral process has influenced overall attendance in the NT, that is, for both SEAM and non-SEAM students in trial locations.

A distributional analysis of the 2010 attendance rates in the SEAM and non-SEAM populations showed that while around 54% non-SEAM students had an attendance rate of 90% or higher, the proportion dropped to 31% for SEAM students. Conversely, 43% of SEAM students had an attendance rate lower than 80% compared to 19% of non-SEAM students. A similar pattern was also observed for 2009 attendance data although the proportion of students who had an attendance rate of 90% or higher was lower for both non-SEAM and SEAM students (45% and 25 % respectively).

The report indicates that the relatively poor attendance of SEAM children in Queensland is consistent across the whole year: the attendance rates were invariably lower for SEAM children than for their non-SEAM counterparts across all school terms in 2009 and 2010 (and this difference was generally highest in Term 3). For example, close to a 7% difference can be observed between SEAM and non-SEAM attendance rates for Term 3 in 2009. The greatest difference in attendance rates between SEAM and non-SEAM children in 2010 is similarly seen in Term 3 (4%). Results suggest a seasonal pattern in attendance rates can be observed in 2009 or 2010 where attendance rates for both years declined from the beginning of the year before increasing in Term 4.

A distributional analysis of attendance rates of SEAM and non-SEAM children in 2009 and 2010 found that while 64% of non-SEAM students in SEAM schools had an attendance rate of 90% or higher in 2009, this proportion dropped to 51 per cent for SEAM students. 25% of SEAM students had an attendance rate of lower than 80% during 2009 compared to only 13% of non-SEAM students. Similar to the NT, a slightly improved picture can be observed for QLD in 2010, with a similar proportion (65%) of non-SEAM students with an attendance rate of 90% or higher compared with an increase of 6% points to 57% for SEAM students. The proportion of SEAM students with an attendance rate less than 80% dropped to 19% in 2010.

New Zealand

Attendance Strategies used by Non-DTS Schools (Martin Jenkins, 2011)

This report discusses a range of interventions to improve attendance in schools.

Introduction

This report was prepared for the Ministry of Education. The research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of responses by schools not using District Truancy Services (DTS) to help reduce unjustified absence and the strategies used by these schools to deal with this issue. The findings may inform the development of good practice guidelines for attendance management.

This research follows up on the 2009 evaluation by Martin Jenkins which explored schools' use of and satisfaction with the services provided by DTS. That evaluation showed that over 46% of schools had not used DTS (or didn't know if they had used DTS) in the previous six months and indicated some reluctance by schools about using DTS. The finding that many schools were not using the service and were self-managing attendance issues facing the school was significant and the Ministry was keen to explore these issues more fully.

1.1.1.1 Role of School in promoting Regular Attendance

The majority of non-DTS schools undertook at least one initiative focussed on students, with only 13% identifying no student focussed initiatives. The survey noted that schools commonly expend considerable effort in achieving good levels of student engagement. While these activities are not captured here, they are also likely to have a positive impact on students continuing to attend school

The list of actions identified by non-DTS schools focussing on parents suggests that they recognise the role of parents in early intervention and almost all schools undertook at least one of these actions (only 5% identified none). The initiatives undertaken by non-DTS schools to promote good attendance focussing on students aimed to:

Encourage students and teachers to ensure attendance information is accurate
Make attendance information available to parents and students through various means (e.g. parents portals, school newsletter, in class)
Have clear, fair rules around attendance that are quickly and consistently applied by all staff
Communicate attendance rules to students at key times
Undertake social activities that help students build confidence and a sense of belonging in the school environment
Reward and recognise good student attendance
Provide food for students
Have in place a mentoring programme or student buddy system

The types of initiatives that were used included:

Encourage students and teachers to ensure attendance information is accurate
Make attendance information available to parents and students through various means

Have clear, fair rules around attendance that are quickly and consistently applied by all staff

Communicate attendance rules to students at all times

Reward and recognise good student attendance

Interface between Schools, the Home and the Community around promoting Regular Attendance

Initiatives undertaken by non-DTS schools to promote good attendance, focussing on parents, included the following:

To meet with parents to discuss learning expectations of their child

At parent teacher evenings or when meeting parents, discuss their child's attendance

Clearly communicate guidelines and rules for attendance at key times

A range of methods to report a student's absence (e.g. Free phone number to call, number to text, email address, paper note)

Education for parents about the impact of non-attendance on engagement and achievement

Interface between Schools and External Support Services and its effectiveness in Promoting Regular Attendance

The report shows that very few non-DTS schools undertake initiatives targeted at the community, with 77% of schools not identifying any of the listed initiatives. If initiatives at a community level were undertaken they were most likely to involve the establishment of working relationships with local agencies (e.g. police, Ministry of Social Development, other community groups) to support attendance.

The initiatives undertaken by non-DTS schools to promote good attendance, focussing on community were:

Meet with local agencies to discuss how they might work together with the school to reduce unjustified absence

Meet with the wider community to discuss how they might work together with the school to reduce unjustified absence

Work with local shops, businesses to reduce unjustified

Guidelines for Managing Your School – Understanding Attendance (Educational Leadership, updated January 2012)[62]

These guidelines provide a checklist of actions / strategies to consider in addressing poor attendance.

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[62] Accessed from: www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Managing-your-school/Guides-for-managing-your-school/Understanding-attendance

A good attendance system needs to be in place to support quality learning. Good attendance systems help create conditions for staff and students to work together effectively. In such a system, simple, clear goals and effective procedures are known and expected by all. Guidelines for dealing with poor attendance include:

- **Put in place a school-wide attendance focus**
    - **Daily recording** of attendance provides accurate and timely summaries week in and week out.
    - **Use the attendance data** as a basis for strengthening student engagement through **personalised approaches and systems**.
    - **Monitoring of attendance** data at least meets the criteria suggested in the Attendance Guidelines
    - **Regularly inform parents** about their children's attendance weaknesses and asked to play a key role in rectifying them.
    - Adopt a school wide process for **acknowledging excellence in attendance.**
    - **Apply absence and truancy procedures fully and consistently**.
    - **Recording of attendance and absence** is making full or increasing use of computer technology to reduce the dollar and human costs of school-wide monitoring.
    - At least every 6 months, reflect on the attendance issues that are of concern to teachers and, where necessary, **provide action based on the analysis of data collected from day to day**.

- **Emphasise teacher's responsibility for attendance**
    - **Reduce in-school variation in attendance**: Teachers taking responsibility for the attendance at their class will personalise messages to students about any lack of attendance. Such action is likely to bring improvement when combined with active work on engagement processes to provide "dynamic classrooms led rather than ruled by teachers"
    - **Target:** Clearly identify those students who are not meeting school expectations and require teachers to provide a focus on them. Such an approach will bring attendance improvement with another 5–15% of students as they respond to a more personalised education system.

- **Engage support agencies, counsellors, and other services**
    - Take responsibility for the truants and difficult cases by **participating in district support systems**. Be able to clearly identify who is in this group.
    - Truancy Service, Group Special Education, social welfare agencies, drug and alcohol counsellors, Kiwi authorities, and other social services may all play a role in working with the students who have the worst attendance.
    - Develop **effective communication systems with these agencies**. Ensure that daily information flows are working well, as required.
    - **Participate in district truancy initiatives and support any local committee**.
    - Recognise that at intermediate and secondary school level, **the complexity of working with truants is often beyond the resources of your school alone.**
    - Ensure there are **means to reintegrate students who have had lengthy absences** so the 'pull factors' of school can get to work.

RSM McClure Watters

C4EO for the sector from the sector

Examples of Initiatives in Schools to Improve Attendance

These examples illustrate a range of strategies adopted to improve attendance in schools.

Curriculum and Learning Needs: Rotorua Girls' High School[63]

The school was concerned about the number of girls who were seeking early leaving exemptions to study hairdressing and refusing to learn anything else, effectively becoming school refusers. The Principal realised that something needed to be done to engage the students and keep them coming to class. So hairdressing was introduced as an option at Years 10 and 11. Tutors are brought in from Waiariki Institute of Technology and students attend a block course at the institute in the final weeks of the year to complete assessments.

One outcome has been a big drop in the number of early leaving exemptions as the in-house hairdressing course takes away one excuse for leaving school. All girls accepted into the hairdressing course, and there are only 16 places at Year 10, have to meet regular attendance standards. That teaches them responsibility at an early age. To make sure such lessons are targeted for maximum effect, staff select those applicants for the hairdressing course they believe might be at risk of leaving early.

The course is not the only attempt to keep students at school. Legal studies, Mâori performance, adventure tourism and retail are among other courses the school has introduced in response to student and parent feedback from surveys and focus groups. The range of options and flexibility with timetables mean the school can develop individual study programmes for senior students, but only after they have tried the whole subject range.

A district approach: Taihape Area School[64]

Taihape Area School was formed in 2005 following a Ministry of Education network review. The decision to amalgamate the local primary and secondary schools was unpopular in the largely Maori community and this began to show in poor attendance, behaviour and NCEA results. Parents began sending their children out of the area to other schools. Productive "whanau-school partnerships" are resulting in better attendance, behaviour and academic results for the students of a once troubled rural school.

The arrival of a new principal and the help of a Ministry project called Te Kauhua aimed at providing schools with opportunities to address Maori student achievement, has begun to turn its negative statistics around. Schools involved in Te Kauhua use research evidence to develop professional learning models for their teachers. Key outcomes since the project started in 2001 include enhanced teacher effectiveness, improved social and academic outcomes for Maori students, changes in school systems to support a new way of working, and enhanced school relationships. In 2007 there were 12 schools in the project which amounted to 25 schools altogether since it was implemented in 2001.

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[63] New Zealand Education Gazette, September 2007
[64] New Zealand Education Gazette, August 2007

As a result of the programme there have been great improvements in student attendance and behaviour this year, although they are still areas that need to be closely monitored. The NCEA results from 2007 are expected to continually improve and develop an upward -trend over time. Another way that Taihape Area School wants to enhance school partnerships is to move away from the traditional reporting and interviewing cycle and include parents in a 10-weekly goal-setting and review of their children's progress. At each appraisal, parents, teachers and students will be involved in establishing goals for the student's over the next 10-week period.

A Teaching Practice Focus: Te Kotahitanga – Kerikeri High School[65]

Te Kotahitanga is a Ministry of Education research-based professional development project run through the University of Waikato. The professional development is centred on an Effective Teaching Profile that has been developed from extensive research and literature. It requires teachers to engage in observations of classroom relationships with professional support. It aims to enhance the quality of their interaction with their Māori students and improve the students' educational achievement.

During 2004 the project was implemented. This involved using strategies such as on-going observations in the classroom, one-on-one feedback meetings, and co-construction group meetings. Facilitators also observed the staff member in the classroom, and together they talked about the goals that the teacher wanted to set. The facilitator then shadowed and coached the teacher towards achieving those goals. Facilitators also work with groups of teachers around a target class, and again they set goals. At co-construction meetings groups of teachers who are working around a target class talk about shared goals for those target students. The facilitator will work with teachers on ways through which they might achieve those goals.

Evidence is available in recorded data that Te Kotahitanga is making a difference at Kerikeri High School. There are a number of fluctuations in the data however steady improvements in the school are clearly visible. An example would be Māori **students' attendance levels which have increased along with a significant reduction in stand-downs and suspensions**. There has also been an attitudinal change among Māori students with facilitators noticing that there is more on-task behaviour in the classroom, and that students are more engaged in their learning at a higher level. Most importantly, they are seeing an increase in academic achievement, and in some of those target classes the Māori students are rising to the level of the non-Māori students in the classroom.

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[65] www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Problem-solving/Digital-stories/Kerikeri-High-School

The Department of Education (DE) Research Report Series is designed to provide easy access to research findings for policy makers, researchers, teachers, lecturers, employers and the public. This reflects the high value which DE places on the wide circulation of research results to ensure that research has the maximum impact on policy and practice in education.

Research cannot make decisions for policy makers and others concerned with improving the quality of education. Nor can it by itself bring about change. But it can create a better basis for decisions, by providing information and explanation about educational practice and by clarifying and challenging ideas and assumptions.

Any views expressed in the Research Report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.