

St Mary's College, Derry

Ref No: 223-0081

An example of a comprehensive set of solutions – most notable of which is the creation of three distinct curriculum pathways.

Context:

St Mary's College is an all girls', Catholic, all ability school in new premises at Northland Road since in September 2010. It maintains its specialist school status for science and is one of only two Microsoft showcase schools in Ireland. In 2015 there were 865 pupils and 91 members of staff and a free school meal entitlement of 65%.

In 2011-2012 the school had a whole school attendance figure of 89.7%. During the lifetime of the previous school development plan (2011-2014) the school made improvement in attendance a priority. Strategies, which the school has implemented effectively, have resulted in a steady upward trend.

Intervention:

The school reports it has implemented in excess of twenty strategies aimed at raising pupil attendance. Those which it evaluates as bringing about the most significant improvement include:

- the creation of three distinct curriculum pathways (Blue, White and Gold) in direct response to different needs and interests as evidenced in variations in attendance and attainment;
- a Year 12 class improvement target and intervention which resulted in a class improvement from 81.9% to 85.2%;
- up-skilling in the role of the form teacher to support pupil attendance;
- monthly tracking of attendance figures and celebration by form class, year group and subject department;
- an attendance focus during Year 8 and Year 12 parent information evenings;
- Department of Education attendance letters complementing school reports; and
- parent attendance meetings with form teachers.

The school has well-established attendance systems in place which create a cohesive approach of internal and external roles. The school attendance officer, form teachers, heads of year, senior teachers and school-designated education welfare officer work in close and effective partnership.

The school makes use of the services of external agencies which include MAST meetings, AEP provision, the FACT programme, Community Hub, CAHMS and SAMS, whilst also providing tailored education programmes to overcome the barriers which individual pupils face.

The school uses an extensive evidence base to analyse and act on attendance patterns by pupil form group, year group, key stage level and whole school level.

The school has structures, which it keeps under continual review, to realise and to sustain improvement. These include:

- an effective use of SIMS to flag attendance which is at risk;
- a new reward system;
- enhanced involvement by the school student council; and
- attendance figures including in the assessment tracking for pupils month by month.

Impact:

From an attendance figure of 89.7% in 2012, attendance increased to 90.3% in 2015 and at the time of the case study (November 2015) had reached 92.6% against the school's target of 95% for 2015-2016.

The school demonstrates the positive impact of intervention by making a correlation between attendance and education welfare and by analysing attendance against attainment. Benchmarked at the 95th percentile for GCSE grades for similar types of schools, the results provide evidence of the positive impact on pupil outcomes. The school can clearly evidence a clear correlation between improved performance and upward trajectory in pupil attainment.

Academic Year	Attendance Figure	GCSE 5 A*-C inc Maths and English
2011 2012	89.7%	38.8%
2012 2013	88.7%	40.9%
2013 2014	89.9%	51.7%
2014 2015	90.3%	58.5%