

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Improving attendance and reviewing it as indication of bullying

How Outwood Academy Haydock introduced measures to improve attendance, and review absence as an indication of bullying

Context of our anti-bullying work

Outwood Academy is a small to medium secondary school in Haydock, St Helens. The area is known for its deprivation with it being in the most deprived 10% of all neighbourhoods in England. Overall St Helen's is ranked as the 26th most deprived local authority out of 317. The school is predominantly White British with increasing minority groups. In addition, 22% of children have SEND, 5% have an EHCP, 3.1% EAL, 1.8 % of children Young Carers 1.5% of children are LAC who are identified as being at greater risk of bullying as set out by the Anti-Bullying Alliance.

Attendance has improved recently. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND still needs to improve. Leaders and the school community recognise the need to take immediate action to improve the number of students in school; the school has a relentless focus on attendance for all students and these groups specifically and aims to improve attendance to above pre-pandemic levels.

Persistent absence is also still too high. The school has recently appointed an enhanced attendance team and has a rigorous and detailed trust-based plan to improve student attendance, with a specific emphasis on students with SEND and disadvantaged students.

We are a school with capacity which has meant that this academic year alone we have had over 30 midterm admissions, 90% of those who have historic attendance issues, including 3 young people who are yet to have attend a provision. These pupils have taken a significant amount of resources.

What we hoped to achieve

- To promote school attendance.
- To ensure bullying is not a factor in student absence.
- Increase the importance of attendance for pupils and parents.
- Offer parents support at the earliest opportunity as we know.

The action we took

- All staff have an appraisal target linked to attendance and supporting the attendance of pupils in school.
- Good attendance is promoted throughout the whole school and one form session per week is dedicated to promoting attendance and having conversations with those children who have been absent to ensure earlier barriers can be addressed quickly.
- Certificates/Postcards of celebration are given every 6 weeks with the Praising Star Reports not just for those with 100% but those who have worked hard to remove them from PA.
- Every child absent receives a phone call at the start of the day by their learning manager.
- Those with additional days off receive a visit from our attendance team to further explore the reasons why and offer support.
- Increased those staff members who were able to support families using the Early Help Assessment Tool and referrals to external support including Homestart.
- Appointment of an enhanced attendance team including an Educational Welfare Officer as well as buying into the local authority service.

Impact and outcomes of the work

- Pupils and parents know who to contact about attendance concerns, each are available daily working full time without a teaching commitment.
- Parents and children raise concerns more readily knowing there are multiple support frameworks they can access.
- Attendance has improved, however it still not where we want it, particular for those who are most vulnerable including SEND and DA.

What we have learned

It was necessary to escalate cases due to educational neglect and minimal social care support despite being open to a child protection plan.

We also offer parents the earliest opportunity to speak to staff and resolve any issues/concerns to minimise time lost.