

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Tracking and improving school attendance

How Kirk Hallam Community Academy tracked and improved their attendance

Context of our anti-bullying work

Attendance has been a challenge for a number of years at Kirk Hallam Community Academy and has historically fallen below national average with a high persistently absent figure. This academic year, attendance has been placed as a high priority within the school improvement plans and there has been a complete overhaul of the approach taken to ensure that attendance improves, patterns and trends are spotted and effectively addressed, and that intervention is proactively driven and not reactive.

The key areas that have been identified as needing to be addressed are:

- Poor systems, structures and routines.
- Recording, tracking and monitoring systems are poor which has resulted in inaccurate data being recorded.
- A lack of staffing structure meant that there was an inconsistent approach to attendance.
- A lack of strategic direction.
- Ineffective training for staff and no training for students.
- Low expectations

Due to the vulnerability of our cohort, relationships and a collegiate approach remains a high priority and we strive to support our families and young people where attendance is a problem.

What we hoped to achieve

1. Improve the profile of school attendance amongst all Stakeholders
2. Improve attendance figures
3. Reduce persistent absenteeism
4. Establishing clear routines for tracking, monitoring and intervention with a focus on key groups (PP and SEND).
5. Prioritising early intervention.
6. Ensure we address the 'why' behind poor attendance and support families and students where factors such as bullying may be an issue.

The action we took

To improve attendance, we have focused on 5 key elements (ETIEE):

1. Expectations
2. Tracking and analysis
3. Identification and monitoring
4. Early Intervention and support
5. Escalation

This is built around the DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance flowchart found on page 8 of the document.

1. Expectation

A key drive this academic year is to increase the profile of attendance amongst all stakeholders. We want all members of our school community to understand the importance of good attendance and to know the role that they play in relation to that.

- Set high expectations for every pupil and communicate these frequently with all Stakeholders.
- Developed and maintained a whole school culture that promotes the benefit of high attendance.
- Ensured the attendance policy is clear, published, understood and details the key information outlined on page 11 of the DfE document, Working Together to Improve School Attendance.
- Visibly demonstrated the benefits of good attendance and punctuality throughout school life e.g. displays and assemblies.
- Communicated attendance priorities with SLT each week to ensure that the interplay between attendance and wider school improvements is recognised and that it is built into strategies on areas such as attainment, SEND and disadvantaged students.
- Communicated attendance priorities with Governors and NOVA Education Trust both through means such as the Head of School report but also through regular meetings.
- Ensured cohesion across key staff members including the Attendance Team, Safeguarding Team, Family Support Worker and Heads of Year.
- Communicated frequently with teaching staff to ensure that expectations are clear and ensure that appropriate and impactful training is provided to staff.
- Developed and imbedded a sensitively considered rewards system for attendance and punctuality that raises aspirations and reinforces resilience and commitment to learning.

2. Tracking and Analysis

Throughout 2023/24, we are improving the formality of our tracking, analysis and monitoring processes. This includes:

- Imbedded and formalised the admissions application process.
- Ensured that all staff understand the importance of taking registers in a timely and accurate manner. This is in accordance with the Professional Teaching Standards that states that staff should have "regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions."
- Tightened the rigorous application of the day-to-day processes to address absence and poor punctuality.
- Developed and imbedded a spreadsheet system for tracking that is clear, efficient and user friendly. Ensure that all relevant staff are trained.
- Monitored and analysed weekly attendance patterns and trends.
- Completed a thorough analysis of half termly, termly and full year data.
- Closely analysed and monitored key groups e.g. Pupil Premium and SEND.
- Provided frequent and accessible data overviews for Key Stakeholders, that are relevant to the audience and are useful.
- Benchmarked attendance data against local, regional and national levels.

3. Identification and Monitoring

Prevention and early and targeted intervention is crucial to our improvement drive as we know that poor attendance is habitual. Data analysis in silo is ineffective without purposeful actions that follow. The identification and close monitoring of key individuals and groups needs to be completed to ensure that the correct support can be implemented.

- AMG (Attendance Monitoring Group) meetings held weekly to discuss key students and groups of concern. During these meetings identification of students and key plans made to ensure interventions and actions are targeted.
- Meetings and discussions held with the key staff members such as Heads of Year, Safeguarding Team, SENDCO and the Family Support Worker to ensure that there is a cohesive approach.
- Communicated with and involve wider members of staff such as those that oversee Pupil Premium.

4. Early Intervention and Support

Through thorough tracking, analysis and identification, throughout 2023/24 we have ensured that we prevent rather than react where possible. We want support to be appropriate, collaborative and effective. This is achieved through:

- Building strong relationships with families, listening to and understanding the barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them.
- Share information and work collaboratively with all Stakeholders including external providers and the Local Authority.

We consider intervention at 2 key levels of identification:

a) Emerging Concern

This would lead to low level interventions such as:

- Addressing in school barriers e.g. groups, friendship challenges etc.
- Communication with the family.
- Parental tips providing support with ensuring their child is 'learning ready.'
- Utilising the form tutor as a key point of contact – creating a sense of belonging.
- Seeking to engage them with other areas of school e.g. mentoring work, external workshop, extracurricular activities.

b) Cause for Concern

- Utilising key external agencies that the school works in close partnership with.
- Elevated internal strategies including provisions such as the Glade and learning support.
- Invitations to parental support drop-in clinics where action plans between school and home will be developed.
- Voluntary Early Help Assessment.
- Formalised conversations with parents where consequences of persistent and severe absence is very clearly outlined alongside the supportive approach.
- Utilising the Local Authority Attendance Team.
- Home visits.

A key feature of our use of early intervention and support is our rigorous quality assurance processes to ensure that the strategies being utilised are effective and make necessary amendments should they be needed.

Impact and outcomes of the work

- Attendance is on track to improve from previous years.
- Persistent Absenteeism is on track to reduce from previous years.

- Attendance is now discussed amongst all Stakeholders, and all know its value in ensuring positive academic, social and emotional outcomes for our young people. A focus on the 'why' has been very important in helping improve understanding.
- Parents now know who to contact to discuss any attendance concerns and they know that this is a supportive measure.
- Due to positive relationships, we have built with our community, issues are generally raised quickly and therefore they can also be resolved more efficiently. This has led to a real increase in the trust between home and school.
- A strong tracking and monitoring system have ensured that we can spot patterns and trends and really drive to be more proactive in approach.
- Vulnerable children's meetings have ensured that there is good communication across the whole team from safeguarding to attendance to other areas such as the SEN department.

What we have learned

It has been evident that we have learnt that parental engagement is fundamental to ensuring a relationship based on trust. Where these relationships are strong, discussions around issues are more productive. We will continue to work on parental engagement through coffee mornings, video newsletters and after school events.