



# TRANSFORMING ATTENDANCE IN CORNWALL



Dr Jennifer Blunden  
OBE, Chair of the CEP  
Operational Board

## Foreword

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Attendance is one of the most challenging post-pandemic issues being tackled in education today and in Cornwall this toolkit is intended to support and guide school leaders based on the emerging evidence for good attendance practice in our schools.

We are indebted to the authors and contributors to this toolkit, for sharing thinking emerging from research, local policy implementation and professional development to provide a practical toolkit to improve attendance for all.

One of the key points is that this toolkit is not seeking to replicate the work of the Education Endowment Foundation or the DfE Attendance Hubs but provides practical case studies of how strategies are impacting our Cornish schools in a positive way.

Importantly, positive relationships and a sense of belonging are central to the approaches shared in this toolkit to improve how children and young people and their families relate to school.

This toolkit is unique. We have had the privilege to work alongside a true partnership of education professionals in Cornwall to share and develop our thinking on how to tackle the issue of attendance and we recognise that there is no single solution.

Communities and families are unique and the strategies to ensure our children and young people attend school regularly and engage fully in their school-life, are equally diverse. This toolkit begins a dialogue of shared practice and experiences which is intended to generate rich and evidence-informed discussion and implementation in schools.

The Cornwall Education Partnership (CEP) aims to bring together representatives from all education providers to establish shared priorities to help support improvements across the county, and one of the first educational issues to tackle collectively has been attendance. This toolkit is part of the operational response to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence alongside a programme of professional development through the OneCornwall Teaching School Hub.

This toolkit will evolve and expand with the evidence of impact to improve attendance and we thank everyone who has contributed thus far.

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“Despite our considerable efforts, absence rates remain stubbornly high.”

Marc Rowland



SCAN HERE TO WATCH THE  
FULL CASE STUDY VIDEO

## **Marc Rowland** **Unity Schools Partnership / Research School**

Marc introduces the booklet, and how it has been built – using a mix of research evidence, local expertise and a test and learn approach to understand the impact of attendance and belonging strategies in Cornish schools, with Cornish families.









## About

This guidance has been developed in partnership with Cornish school leaders – building on excellence in our education community. The guidance has been developed over 12 months, with multiple (in person) meetings, discussions, and a number of reviews by colleagues within Cornwall and beyond. Leaders have given their time, energy, and commitment freely.

As a group, leaders have engaged and debated research evidence and good practice, seeking to revisit and refine approaches to addressing attendance challenges for pupils in primary, secondary and special schools.

The work has been supported, encouraged, and championed by the attendance steering group and the OneCornwall Teaching School Hub team. They have been steadfast in the belief that this guidance is for all Cornish schools, and all Cornish pupils. All voices have been listened to and heard. School leaders brought the voice of their pupils and families, as well as their staff teams. We have used case studies provided by schools in Cornwall to bring the guidance to life.

The guidance does not seek to tell school leaders what to do. It does not look to duplicate work already set out through DfE Attendance hubs. It should help school leaders to ask good questions and support the hard work of those in our schools and classrooms – to open up choice and opportunity for all.

Much of the guidance is based around the Education Endowment Foundation recommendations around attendance. But these are supplemented by our own findings from working on attendance and belonging within Cornwall and beyond. The recommendations are as follows.



## Audit questions for schools and Trusts

These questions draw on the work of the Education Endowment Foundation's 'Supporting School attendance' resources. In particular, the planning and reflection tool, which can be found here:



<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/leadership-and-planning/supporting-attendance>

### 1. Building a holistic understanding of pupils and families, and diagnose specific needs.

- Is your attendance data up-to-date and accessible, and do tracking and reporting systems support staff to understand and act on the data?
- Who is involved in monitoring and reviewing attendance data to identify patterns and priorities?
- What processes do you have in place to go beyond the headline data and 'dig deeper' into factors affecting attendance for individuals and families? As there are likely multiple staff involved, are these processes structured and consistent?
- Do school structures ensure that every pupil has an adult in school who knows them well, and is this knowledge used to support attendance?



### 2. Build a culture of community and belonging for pupils

- Are systems for managing behaviour clear and consistently applied?
- Is behaviour management data monitored and reviewed to identify patterns such as pupils being caught in a cycle of negative consequences?
- Does the school's approach to behaviour include explicitly teaching, modelling and reinforcing positive learning behaviours, and is this consistent across the school?
- How do you know if pupils feel safe, seen, understood and heard within the school?
- Does pupil voice represent the full diversity of pupils?
- How are achievements celebrated, and is this valued by pupils?
- Are there systems in place to track pupils' engagement with social and extracurricular opportunities, and are potential barriers to engagement understood and addressed?







### 3. Communicate effectively with families

- How frequently, and in what ways, is the school communicating with families?  
Does communication seem clear, helpful and supportive?
- How do you know if families feel positive about the communications received from school?  
Do families find communications clear, supportive and appropriate in frequency, timing, language, tone and medium?
- How are accessibility, literacy and language needs considered in the medium and language of communications?
- Are communications about attendance understood as you intend by families, or might there be misunderstandings? Are parents supported to understand and contextualise attendance data?
- Do families have clear and reliable ways to communicate with key staff, and do they feel they are heard and valued as partners in their children's school journey?



### 4. Improve universal provision for all pupils

- Do all teachers have a good knowledge of pupils learning needs, and how is this information shared regularly?
- Do teachers have the expertise and support to meet these needs in the classroom so that all pupils can learn successfully?
- Is professional development effective and structured in a way that supports staff to change and develop their practice? [See the EEF Effective Professional Development guidance report for more information about a balanced approach to effective PD].
- What systems are in place to hear seek and hear pupils' views about their school and learning experiences, and do you use this to help identify potential barriers to pupil learning an engagement?



### 5. Deliver targeted interventions to supplement universal provision

- Do you have a complete and up-to-date picture of local external agencies and services that may be able to support pupils and families?
- Do interventions precisely target a specifically identified need for pupils?
- Is there clear and consistent provision mapping, providing an accessible overview of which interventions are in place for pupils?
- Are the right people involved in delivering interventions, and do they have the necessary expertise to deliver the intervention[s] effectively?
- Is the intended impact of targeted interventions clear, and is this tracked, monitored and reviewed periodically so that you are confident interventions are effective or can adjust the approach if needed?

### We have also included sections on:

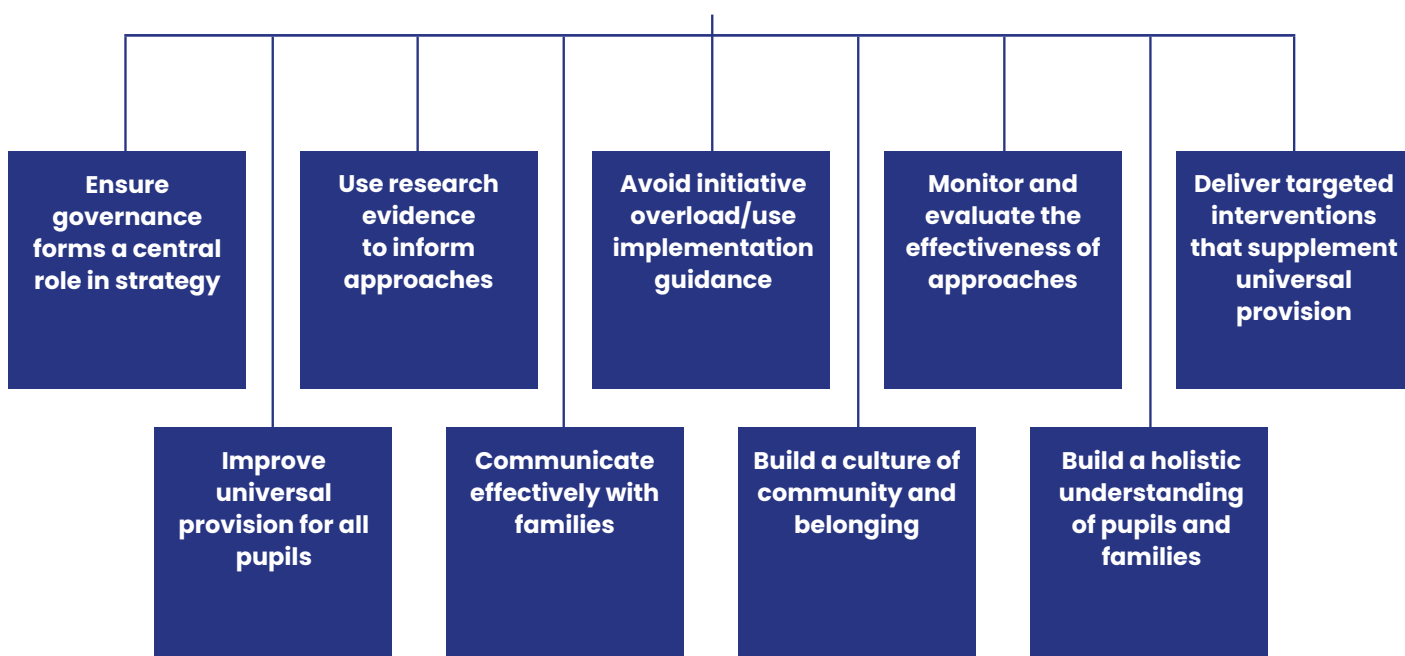
- The use of research evidence
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the approaches being adopted
- Avoiding initiative overload. Drawing on guidance on effective implementation
- The role of Governance in supporting attendance

We have drawn on national expertise to support this work. The guidance is "brought to life" through a model of 'disciplined inquiry' to create case studies which trial an approach to look to improve attendance to school and attendance to learning.



## Our Model

### Improved attendance to school and learning



### Disciplined inquiry to trial and exemplify approaches to improve attendance





We have exemplified this model with case studies from schools and Trusts where appropriate. Absence from school life is more than just coming into the building.

**There is:**

- Not coming to school (extended/inconsistent?)
- Coming to school but not attending [some] lessons
- Poor punctuality to lessons
- Exiting the lesson during challenging learning
- Coming to lessons but opting out of learning

**And:**

- Not participating in extracurricular activities, residential etc.
- Not participating in personal development opportunities – work experience, student leadership
- Not participating in wider school life – sports teams, music etc.
- Opting out of additional academic support

Poor attendance at school impacts on pupils academically and socially, with their personal development and their wellbeing. Proactive approaches, linked to pupils experiencing success, feeling like they belong and have strong relationships with adults and peers is critical.

In order to secure good attendance to school, and attendance to learning, we need:

- To have clear and consistent expectations, routines, structures. All pupils feel safe and secure when they are confident, they know what's coming. Structure liberates!
- To recognise that pupils are largely consistent in their behaviours and interactions with school and learning. The challenge comes when we, the adults, are the variable, when we are inconsistent. This may relate to recruitment and retention of staff; it may relate to micro interactions in the classroom / around school. We are the variable; we need to be the consistent.
- That background knowledge is the glue that makes learning stick. Build background knowledge to help pupils feel like they belong. Front load key knowledge pupils need to be successful at the start of lessons. Don't make presumptions about pupils' background knowledge.



## The current picture

### Headline facts for 2023

Overall absence rate

**7.3%**

during week commencing  
23 January 2023

Authorised absence rate

**5.0%**

during week commencing  
23 January 2023

Unauthorised absence rate

**2.1%**

during week commencing  
23 January 2023

Overall absence rate

**7.6%**

academic year to date

Authorised absence rate

**5.4%**

academic year to date

Unauthorised absence rate

**2.2%**

academic year to date

This is the baseline for our work in transforming attendance





## Headline facts for 2024

Overall absence rate

**7.1%**

during week commencing  
23 January 2024

Authorised absence rate

**4.2%**

during week commencing  
23 January 2024

Unauthorised absence rate

**2.9%**

during week commencing  
23 January 2024

Overall absence rate

**7.1%**

academic year to date

Authorised absence rate

**4.7%**

academic year to date

Unauthorised absence rate

**2.4%**

academic year to date

In 2023/24, we have seen some improvements, but much still needs to be done



Our ambition is for all children to be attending school, all their classes every day and for them to feel like they belong in school. In some cases, the challenges to achieving these aims are not fully in the school's scope – transport, some health issues, difficulties within families, etc.

However, this remains an aspirational aim – one that every school and Trust can unite around and address as they see fit. This guidance aims to support that work. It is needed because, despite the best efforts of school and system leaders, we are some way off from getting close to that goal.

**EEF research suggests:**

- There is a strong connection between school attendance and educational outcomes at all key stages
- In 2022–23, just over one in five pupils missed 10% or more of their schooling
- Pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were nearly twice as likely to be persistently absent than their classmates
- Pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with SEND have even higher levels of absence
- Attendance levels are typically worse in secondary schools than primary
- Schools in England use a wide variety of strategies to improve pupil attendance
- There is some evidence of promise for parental engagement approaches and responsive interventions that meet the individual needs of the pupils
- But overall, the evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches is weak, with very few high-quality studies taking place in English schools
- The interventions that show promise take a holistic approach in understanding pupils and their specific need, and which address the specific barriers to attendance that have been identified

Reference: EEF. (2022). Attendance Interventions: Rapid Evidence Assessment. London: Education Endowment Foundation.





## Attendance and safeguarding

School attendance is a safeguarding issue. Regular, frequent attendance at school helps ensure the safety, well-being, personal and academic development of pupils.

When a pupil is absent from school frequently or for extended periods, it can be an indicator of underlying problems that may put the pupil at risk.

### **1. Visibility of the pupils**

Schools provide a structured environment where children are regularly seen by teachers and staff who can observe their well-being. Any issues between pupils can be picked up within that structured environment.

### **2. Early Identification of issues**

Trained teachers and school staff are trained to identify early signs of concern. If a pupil is frequently absent, it can hinder the ability of staff to spot these signs and intervene early.

### **3. Monitoring physical, emotional and mental Well-being**

Schools play a critical role in the physical, mental and emotional development of children. Good attendance allows school staff to recognise changes in behaviours, mood, or social interactions that could indicate struggles or concerns.

### **4. Access to Support Services**

Schools provide access to key support services like counselling, social and emotional support or additional help with academic learning. Poor attendance may mean that a pupil misses out on essential support that addresses need.

### **5. Preventing Risky Behaviour**

Pupils who are frequently absent from school may become vulnerable to risky behaviours or exploitation, especially if their absences are not well supervised. Pupils talking about risky behaviours can be more readily picked up if they are taking place in school.

### **6. Enables good communication and understanding**

Good attendance enables teachers and support staff to communicate effectively with pupils and families and other agencies. It enables staff to understand any challenges pupils are experiencing beyond school, and put support or contingency in place. Knowledge of a pupil and their lived experiences enables schools to play their role in keeping children safe.

# Building a holistic understanding of pupils and families. Diagnose specific needs.



## **1. Building a holistic understanding of pupils and families, and diagnose specific needs.**

- Is your attendance data up-to-date and accessible, and do tracking and reporting systems support staff to understand and act on the data?
- Who is involved in monitoring and reviewing attendance data to identify patterns and priorities?
- What processes do you have in place to go beyond the headline data and 'dig deeper' into factors affecting attendance for individuals and families? As there are likely multiple staff involved, are these processes structured and consistent?
- Do school structures ensure that every pupil has an adult in school who knows them well, and is this knowledge used to support attendance?

We need to properly understand the drivers of attendance issues before taking any action. Issues with attendance to school and attendance to learning are a symptom of issues, rather than the issue itself. 'In school drivers' need to be addressed alongside working with families to ensure sustainable success.

### **In school drivers can include:**

- High turnover of staff – leadership and classroom
- Poor staff attendance – academic and pastoral
- Several changes in governance approaches – e.g. re brokering
- Inconsistencies in quality of teaching and learning and pastoral care
- A lack of clarity within school about roles and responsibilities for addressing attendance challenges
- A lack of knowledge and understanding about individual families
- Judgemental, inconsistent, or inaccessible communications about attendance
- Decisions based on labels, rather than need
- Lack of (inclusivity)

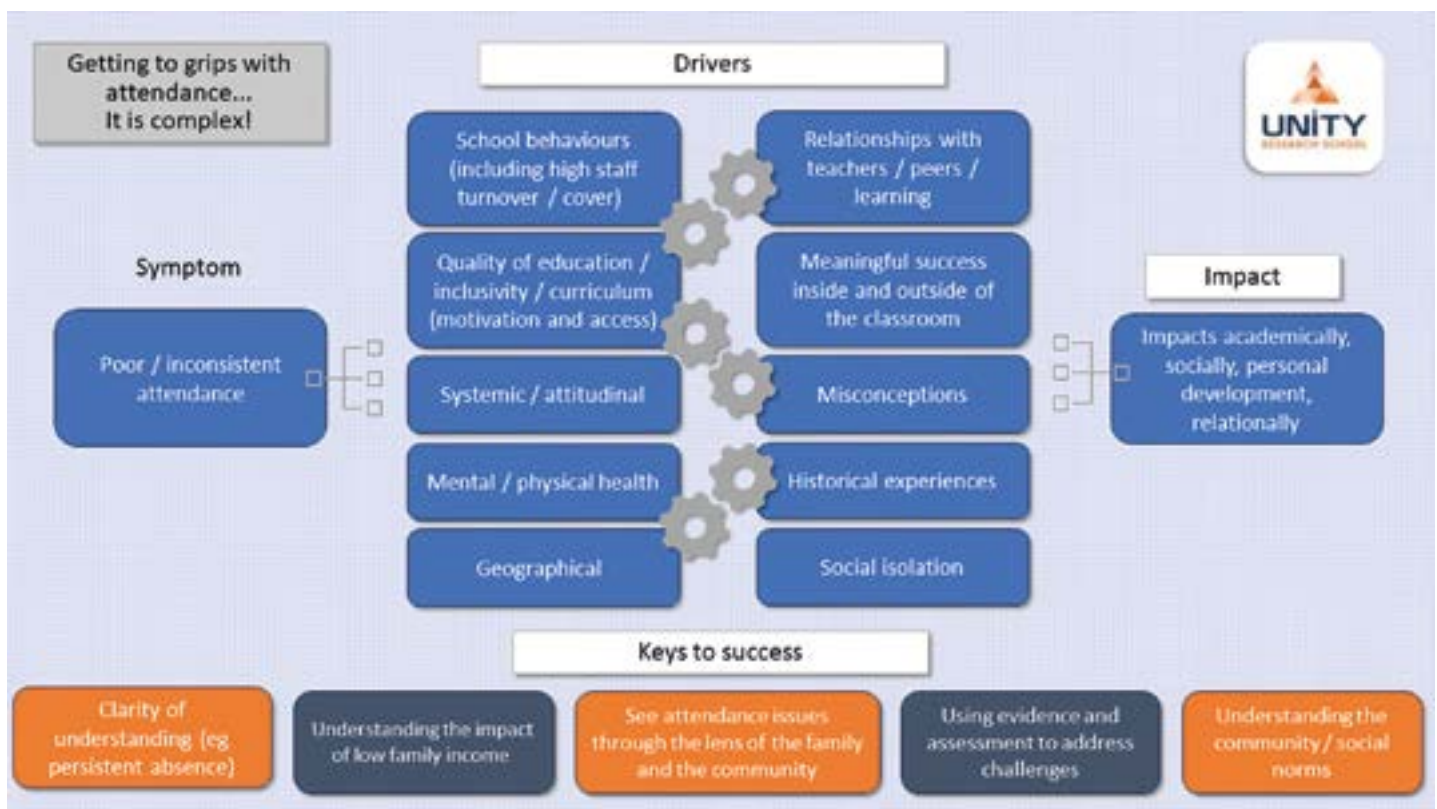
### **Community drivers include:**

- Geography – transport, population density, local interest (e.g. coastal)
- Local housing
- Curriculum relevance
- Employment levels
- Careers opportunities
- Mobility
- Housing
- Levels of education in the community
- Provision from community services – e.g. health, social care, sport, and culture enrichment



### Pupils and families' drivers include:

- Systemic / attitudinal issues (e.g. term time holidays)
- Low current attainment, impacting on confidence and motivation and relationships
- Poor reading skills / attainment
- Poor behaviour / learning behaviours
- Pupils not experiencing success beyond the classroom – e.g. student leadership, sports
- Narrow friendship groups
- Socially isolated families
- Low income and its impact on pupils inside and outside of school
- Misconceptions about school attendance in the family
- Historic experiences within the family



**These issues impact pupils academically, in their personal and social development.**

Understanding the drivers for poor attendance is key to effective mitigation. A video about understanding the drivers can be found here:



<https://vimeo.com/900841929/6e529b5e30>





### **How does disadvantage impact on attendance to school and attendance to learning?**

Long-term disadvantage will have a greater impact than periodic disadvantage. The only way to find out which pupils fall into this group is to know your families. Once identified, you can overtly ensure that their needs are prioritised. This will have particular significance during periods of transition.

### **Criteria that will further disadvantage pupils may include:**

- High mobility between settings (housing insecurity, school moves, exclusions)
- Long-term health conditions and vulnerabilities. See the documented link between poverty and health issues
- Being a Young Carer
- Negative family experience of education

In addition, consideration should also be given to the impact of SEND, Multi-language or any potential for discrimination linked to a protected characteristic.

Further, disadvantaged pupils who are also Low Prior Attainers (LPA), particularly in reading, may face a broader range of challenges. The lower the starting point for each educational phase, the greater the challenge in making sufficient progress to close the gap. Progress achieved with learners with this profile should be particularly recognised.

### **Low family income may present as one or more of the following:**

- Food insecurity
- Housing/fuel insecurity
- Transport difficulties
- Social isolation
- Few opportunities outside of school
- Family/carer short-termism as a result of a crisis cycle
- Lack of social networks limiting access to cultural capital, wider aspects of personal development and opportunities, for example, work experience, travel, clubs, and activities
- Difficulties with the cost of school life (even very low-cost items or activities)
- Societal challenges – uncertain income and unemployment risks
- Particular judgements, beliefs, and assumptions
- Negative feelings of self-worth, anxiety and its impact on future agency and aspiration





### **What might we mean by disadvantage?**

Pupils are not at risk of poor attendance because they are 'Pupil Premium.' They are at risk of poor attendance because of the impact of socio-economic (and other) disadvantages on their lives over time. This is a process, not an event.

Many pupils may experience a number of challenges which potentially impact on their learning, wide school life and their experiences beyond the school gate. These pupils may be at greater risk of poor attendance. They should be a priority for early intervention, support and have maximum opportunities for working with high quality, expert practitioners.

Diagnostic and formative assessment should shape strategy and activity, not labels. Taking time to ensure assessment is meaningful and useful to teachers and leaders. Schools should ensure that assessment is used to adjust teaching responsively. This enables staff to respond to, and address, gaps in learning. Learners then develop belief in themselves through experiencing success in the classroom and in wider school life. This helps them to become successful learners.

Assessment, not assumptions, should inform approaches. Properly understand the impact of disadvantage on attendance. Poorly identified need leads to poorly identified activity, which leads to weaker outcomes and initiative fatigue. It can lead to a reactive approach to supporting learners.



**How might low family income impact the school experience? This can be broken down into three parts:**

**Pupils and families:** Oral language, vocabulary, language comprehension, gaps in background knowledge, self-regulation of cognition and emotions, dispositions towards learning, motivation, gaps in learning due to poor attendance and access to resources. Social isolation can be an important factor in the impact of disadvantage on learning: the more people we meet and interact with, the broader our vistas.

**Community:** It is important to consider the impact of growing up as a disadvantaged pupil within each school's community. Cost of living challenges. Geographical isolation. Employment, transport, housing.

**School:** Cost of the school day/term/year. Beliefs and assumptions. Limited access to high-quality teaching, a failure to address the expectations of pupils and their families, high turnover of staff, lack of clarity in understanding the issues being addressed, initiative overload and poor implementation can be in-school factors that disproportionately impact disadvantaged pupils.

This is not an exhaustive list. They are generalisations. Have school leaders accurately assessed and understood pupil needs in respect of how disadvantage impacts learning? Is there a collective understanding of this across the school?

The key questions to address, when considering the attendance of cohorts, classes and individual pupils is: 'If the attendance and wider outcomes for this (group of) pupil(s) is not improving, what will:

- **Be done differently?**
- **What will be improved?**
- **What will be paused/stopped?**





## **Case study – A specialist school approach**

### **Lucy Stocker – CHES Academy**

CHES Academy is a medical provision academy that provide education for children and young people with complex medical and/or mental health needs which prevent them from attending school. We pride ourselves in providing pupils with access to high quality education, ensuring they are thoroughly prepared for the next stage in their learning journey. Personalisation is the cornerstone of our pedagogy; the curriculum is bespoke, and programmes are crafted to meet individual needs which demands a totally flexible and adaptable approach to teaching and learning from all involved.

Read the full case study on page 70





# Building a culture of community and belonging for pupils.

## 2. Build a culture of community and belonging for pupils

- Are systems for managing behaviour clear and consistently applied?
- Is behaviour management data monitored and reviewed to identify patterns such as pupils being caught in a cycle of negative consequences?
- Does the school's approach to behaviour include explicitly teaching, modelling and reinforcing positive learning behaviours, and is this consistent across the school?
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A maturing culture of inclusivity (From Addressing educational disadvantage (2021))

Our system should mature in its inclusivity over the duration of the plan, from that which:

- Identifies pupils as separate, requiring different resources and strategic approaches
- Uses diagnostic labels to inform strategic planning
- Sees labels as an anchor on attainment
- Plans for 'most' and then 'some'
- Uses bell-curve thinking
- Focuses on operational compliance
- Relies on individual experts
- Relies on individual ownership of pupil groups

Moving to a system that:

- Recognises difference
- Adopts inclusive pedagogy for all
- Adopts a strengths-based discourse that celebrates difference
- Expects to be surprised by pupil potential
- Sees all pupils as their responsibility
- Considers accessibility for everyone
- Sees the purpose of education as social justice through better attainment
- Focuses on inclusive teaching and learning
- Develops system-wide knowledge, responsibility and expertise
- Develops collective responsibility and ownership of pupil groups

To support pupils learning, and in wider school life, there needs to be a more consistent, collective understanding of inclusion and inclusivity. Our work found that this was variable in both theory and practice. To help address this, our guidance sets out a maturity index and better proxies for inclusion.

It is important to be wary of potentially poor proxies for inclusion:

- Assigned responsibility
- Pupils are in lessons with their peers
- Pupils are being supported by a staff member
- Pupils are busy and engaged
- Work is differentiated
- Pupils working in smaller groups
- Work has been completed; there are answers in pupils' books
- Additional interventions are provided
- Nurtured vs attainment false dichotomy
- Staff training has taken place

Better could be pupils participating in and being successful with challenging learning over time through:

- Teacher expertise: subject knowledge and inclusive pedagogy
- Relationships and high expectations
- Background knowledge (subject and pupil)
- Modelling, scaffolding and worked examples
- Collaborative learning strategies
- Oral language strategies where pupils' contributions are valued
- Consolidation and checking understanding (not rushing through content)
- Assessment for learning
- Evidence-based intervention

A strength-based discourse around pupils and families is key to building a culture of inclusivity.

The most effective strategies for addressing the attendance challenge focus on giving teachers and wider staff the capacity, expertise, and development to meet the needs of their learners. To improve them as learners and help them to thrive in wider school life. Teacher and wider staff agency and buy-in are fundamental to success.

Developing culture is a continuous process, not an event. It should not be thought of as something 'to be achieved.' A shared language around efforts for supporting attendance is vital. From governance to the classroom to external support, staff should speak with one voice. Belief in learners matters.

Schools are encouraged to be outward facing, engaging, and being challenged by research evidence. They should also be inward facing. Pupils should be listened to – about their sense of inclusion in school life.

Recruitment and retention of high-quality staff, with expertise in the challenges faced by pupils is key. Learners need maximum opportunities to work with high-quality, committed, and stable staff.

## High expectations

- All schools and staff should have the highest expectations of all learners and families. They should understand and be empathetic to those who, for any number of reasons, may find it more difficult to engage with school life.
- For multiple, complex reasons, some may find learning more difficult. Be mindful of not lowering expectations and aspirations for these learners. Nurture and support all learners to take pride in their individual achievements. Learners' contributions to lessons and wider school life should be encouraged and valued.

## Needs, not labels

- Disadvantaged learners, those with SEND, and those that are multilingual should not be treated as a homogenous group. Labels can create unconscious bias and set limitations on what learners can achieve. Strategy and activity should always focus on pupil need.
- Employ a proactive approach, anticipating future challenges and addressing them through early intervention. Early intervention is what we do in the moment, at the start of the school year... It's about caring and responding to the day-to-day experiences of disadvantaged pupils in the classroom and in wider school life. Early intervention is not just about Early Years or Year 7.

## Relationships

- Efforts to support learners will stand or fall based on the quality of relationships we forge. Relationships between adults and learners, and between learners' matter. To be successful, learners will need to feel like they belong in our schools and in our classrooms.
- Multiple studies –have shown that where relationships across schools are strong, the most disadvantaged learners will thrive. Learners do well when teachers know them well and hold them in high regard.

## Relationships as drivers of human development:

### Positive supportive contexts Osher et al, 2019

Relationships between and among children and adults are a primary process through which biological and contextual factors influence and mutually reinforce each other. Relationships that are reciprocal, attuned, culturally responsive, and trustful are a positive developmental force between children and their physical and social contexts. Such relationships help to establish idiographic developmental pathways that serve as the foundation for lifelong learning, adaptation, the integration of social, affective, emotional, and cognitive processes and will, over time, make qualitative changes to a child's genetic makeup.

*Bornstein & Leventhal, 2015; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006.*

Good relationships should enable open, reflective discussions about the quality of the learning experiences of all learners in our schools. Relationships should enable open, reflective discussions about the quality of personal development and pastoral care. They should enable discussions about any targeted academic support.

Any 'interventions' where learners are away from the classroom and their peers should be of exceptionally high quality, be rooted in research evidence and be a better learning experience than 'business as usual.'





Colleagues should work together, and engage in conversations that may feel challenging, for the benefit of learners.

Staff with the privilege of influencing the education of our most disadvantaged learners have to be their champions every day. They are a voice and an advocate for those learners in all aspects of school life.

Subconscious bias is something we should always consider. The impact of a pupil's background, behaviours and personal presentation can still play too big a part in the assessment outcomes allocated in teacher assessments.

In any given mixed population, the children who experience the highest level of success in school have:

- Cultural capital
- Social capital
- Financial capital

Schools are well placed to support pupils who do not necessarily have all of these advantages.

Pupils thrive in school when there is a collective responsibility for a high-quality educational experience underpinned by the highest of expectations in all aspects of curriculum provision, learning and personal development opportunities.

The drivers of poor attendance should inform the approaches adopted. The following are examples of how we can be responsive to particular drivers, recognising that some pupils experience multiple drivers. The following examples overleaf may be helpful:

### **Driver: Physical / mental health Activity**

- Class teachers, tutors building relationships: 'I can't wait to see you tomorrow'
- Carefully modifying language to avoid judgement
- Offering soft starts / flexibility
- Ensuring that pupils have strong friendships and are supported in unstructured times
- Consistent, trusted adults
- Ensuring pupils are given opportunities in enrichment, student leadership
- Collective, rather than individual rewards
- Rewards for improvement, meeting thresholds, rather than the highest
- Preventative support


### **Driver: Systemic / attitudinal Activity**

- Class teachers, tutors building relationships 'I can't wait to see you tomorrow'
- Carefully modifying language to avoid judgement: 'we want your child in school – let's work together'
- Highlighting social norms: pupil attendance compared to classmates
- Highlighting wider challenges arising from poor attendance – beyond academic learning: friendships, participation in sport etc
- Consistent, trusted adults
- Attendance induction for families – including problems arising from short termism: messaging about valuing educational expectance, clarity over consequences, high expectations
- Use of text messaging rather than letters
- Reducing jargon
- Rewards for improvement, meeting thresholds, rather than the highest
- Requirement to speak to a person, rather than leave a message to report absence
- Pre-emptive support

### **Extrinsic rewards**

Extrinsic rewards can have their place as part of a wider attendance strategy. Collective, rather than individual rewards may be more effective. Whilst 100% attendance rewards are good for celebrating good attendance, they are unlikely to drive behaviour change for inconsistent attenders, as they do not address underlying drivers. Further, once pupils miss a day, they no longer have an incentive to attend. With 100% attendance awards, we also need to be wary of the 'reward and relax effect', where pupils / families feel they have earned a 'day off' school when attendance has been good over time. Rewards for consistent attendance, as well as improvements can be helpful – both in terms of a culture, and for good attenders to be 'noticed.'



A portrait of Marie Taylor, a woman with brown hair, wearing a black cardigan over a black top with orange and white floral patterns. She is standing in a room with colorful bunting in the background.

**Case study – whole school approach linked to a trust wide strategy.**

**Marie Taylor – St Columb Major Primary Academy**

Attendance and belonging are at the heart of all that we do. It is high priority, from leadership to the classroom.

Read the full case study on page 72



# Communicate effectively with families.



## 3. Communicate effectively with families

- How frequently, and in what ways, is the school communicating with families?  
Does communication seem clear, helpful and supportive?
  - How do you know if families feel positive about the communications received from school?  
Do families find communications clear, supportive and appropriate in frequency, timing, language, tone and medium?
  - How are accessibility, literacy and language needs considered in the medium and language of communications?
  - Are communications about attendance understood as you intend by families, or might there be misunderstandings? Are parents supported to understand and contextualise attendance data?
  - Do families have clear and reliable ways to communicate with key staff, and do they feel they are heard and valued as partners in their children's school journey?
- 
- There is a strong association between parental engagement and good educational outcomes. However, research evidence about how to influence it is less strong. Evidence varies, depending on the age of the pupils
  - Key to success is defining what constitutes success with parental engagement
  - Defining the aims of any strategy is vital. What does success actually look like?
  - Pupil success (in the classroom and wider school life) is a good driver of parental engagement

High impact approaches which may be less complicated to implement may include working with families to:

- Speak positively about school and learning
- Encourage showing an interest in school and learning
- Encouraging good attendance, punctuality, and behaviours

This article from Town End Research School exemplifies how all staff can play a role in supporting good attendance through communication with families:



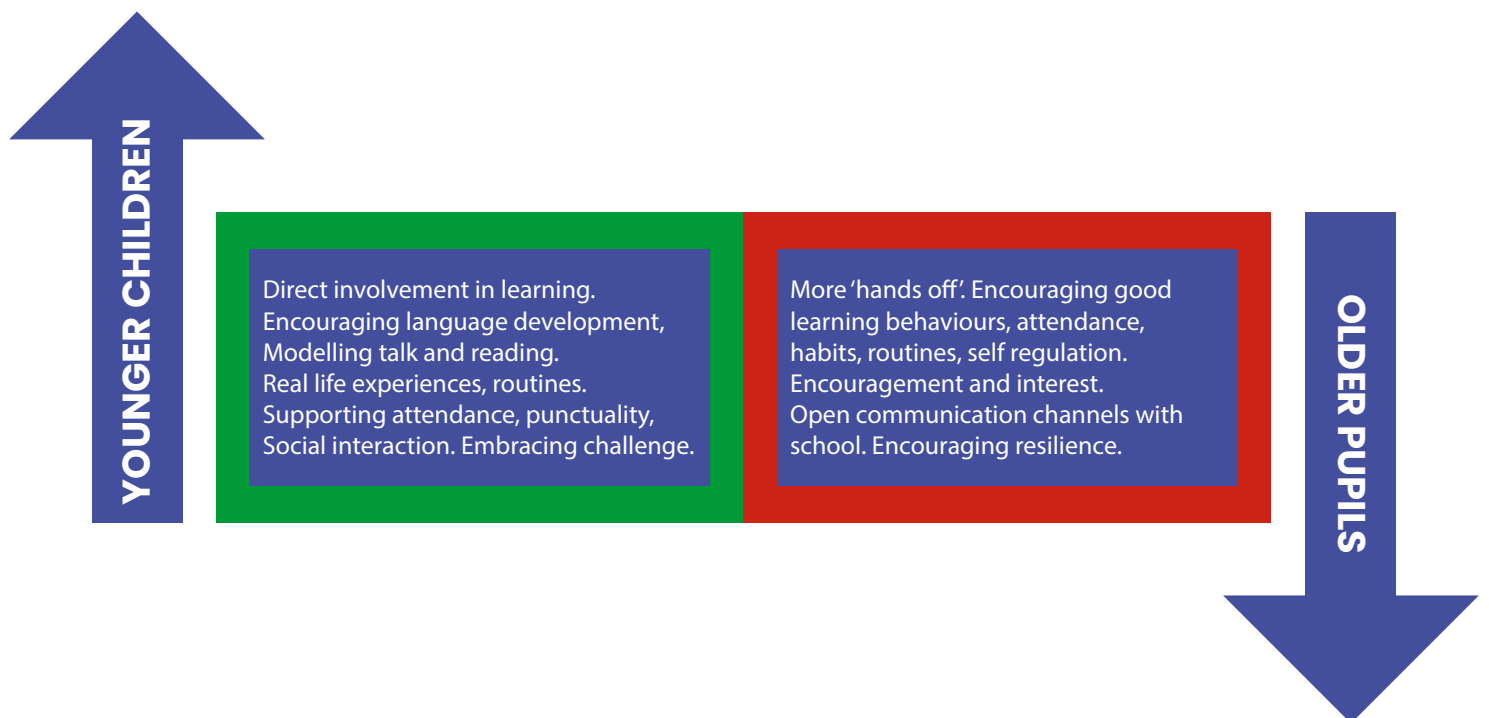
<https://researchschool.org.uk/news/think-it-through-thursdays-supporting-pupil-attendance-through-staff-communications>

*'Everyone who works in schools, in any role, has some connection to attendance. Everyone plays a part in supporting school leads to improve attendance, whether or not they are employed in a role directly linked to the management of attendance or attendance-related interventions.'*

*Supporting attendance is a whole team effort and it's important to empower all staff members to help in this shared endeavour.'*



Effective parental involvement evolves over time, depending on the ages of the pupils.  
The following model should help:





## Gill Main, University of Leeds, 2018

### Children who were in a low-income household were:

- 4.5 times more likely to have not eaten or not eaten enough when they were hungry
- 5.6 times more likely to have had to wear old or poorly fitting clothes or shoes
- 5.2 times more likely to have pretended to their family not to need something
- 6.7 times more likely to have pretended to their friends that they did not want to do something that cost money
- 6.7 times more likely to feel embarrassed by a lack of money
- 4.4 times more likely to miss out on social activities

Their parents were 7.9 times more likely to have gone hungry. This points not only to the devastating impacts that poverty has on children, but also to the pervasive nature of ideas which suggest that poor people themselves are somehow to blame for their situation in life. Perversely, they are made to feel ashamed because they don't have the resources to have the same things and engage in the same activities as their better off peers.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023

A number of disciplined enquiries being carried out by schools in Cornwall look carefully at adapting communications with families.



The EEF guidance on working with parents also provide more resources:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/supporting-parents>

Stephen Tierney, formerly a system leader working in coastal Blackpool has shared some high-quality resources on communicating effectively with families about attendance issues.



Ore can be found here:

<https://leadinglearner.me/2017/07/02/absences-matter-and-you-can-help/>





Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, published in 2023 highlight how families are increasingly poor and hungry, and consequently adopt 'short termism' behaviours. Short termism might mean families opt for payday loans, purchases on credit with poor interest rates, more convenient but less healthy foods. It leads families to focus on getting through day / week / month, as opposed to planning for the long term.

When a family is experiencing destitution, or indeed, other significant challenges or multiple priorities, they may also prioritise other issues over attendance to school or attendance to school work, particularly home learning. I may recognise the long term academic and social benefits of a curriculum trip, but critically low funds at home means that paying for participating is not possible.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation research suggests that 5.7 million low income households were skipping meals in 2023:



<https://www.jrf.org.uk/news/57-million-low-income-households-having-to-cut-down-or-skip-meals-as-jrfs-cost-of-living>

The more stable a families' income stream, the longer ahead they can plan - whether that is health, wellbeing, social, educational. Families on higher income streams are better placed to save for holidays (in school holidays), save for a child's university place, pay for books / building social and cultural capital. Families can also buy long lasting, higher priced clothing, equipment etc which is more resilient. Families on the lowest income streams may be forced to by less expensive, but less robust equipment, shoes, cars etc. And have less access to cheap credit.

Food poverty also impacts negatively on self esteem, confidence, health and wellbeing and drives social isolation.

Telling a family that is struggling to feed their family that they need to plan for the long term may not always elicit a favourable response.

# Improve universal provision for all pupils.



## 4. Improve universal provision for all pupils

- Do all teachers have a good knowledge of pupils learning needs, and how is this information shared regularly?
- Do teachers have the expertise and support to meet these needs in the classroom so that all pupils can learn successfully?
- Is professional development effective and structured in a way that supports staff to change and develop their practice? [See the EEF Effective Professional Development guidance report for more information about a balanced approach to effective PD].
- What systems are in place to hear seek and hear pupils' views about their school and learning experiences, and do you use this to help identify potential barriers to pupil learning an engagement?

### Attainment and attendance

Pupils that attain well, attend well. Classrooms are about learning as part of a large group. It is therefore essential that pupils experience success with regards to both learning and being part of a group. Success leads to motivation. Learning becomes something to engage in rather than get through. Staff can create the conditions in which pupils are more likely to experience both academic and social success but can also unwittingly create invisible barriers if pupils' learning needs are not attended to.

### Do teachers have good knowledge of pupils' learning needs, and how is this information shared regularly?

When staff have good knowledge of pupils' learning needs, adaptations to teaching and interventions more closely hit the mark. What do pupils know? What do they need to know next? This knowledge and its deployment are a key part of creating psychological safety in the classroom, ultimately leading to pupils feeling that they are 'good at this.'

Assessment of pupils' learning needs is a broad domain, and leaders need to be clear that assessment, monitoring, and transitions systems give staff actionable data to support pupils. Here we can briefly explore one fundamental aspect – that of checking for understanding. Barack Rosenshine underlined that more effective teachers had strong checking for understanding protocols, asked lots of questions and evaluated pupil responses. He also outlined the wrong way to check for understanding: teachers calling on volunteers to hear their (usually correct) answers and then assuming that all of the class either understood or had then learned from hearing the volunteers' responses.

When teachers aren't investigating the difference between 'I taught it' and 'they learned it' many pupils can feel left behind and unheard. It is too often the case that pupils with a weaker understanding sit through lessons compliant but inhibited and fearing exposure. Pupils who regularly experience this may avoid coming to school.

Maturity index for checking for understanding:

**From...**

Pupils show evidence of learning (e.g. mini whiteboards, utterances) but there is too much information for the teacher to process or action

Teacher takes responses from the most confident pupils



**To...**

Teacher has clarity over what they are looking for and engineers checking so that this is revealed

Teacher uses different means of participation to illicit data which enables responsiveness

**Errors are difficult to respond to**

Correct answers are met with positivity, giving secret signals that pupils should only speak up when they are certain



**Errors are seen as valuable and interesting**

Teacher values thoughtfulness and effort. Contributions are met with emotional evenness

**Misconceptions can be left hanging.**

Learning as a linear process, covering the curriculum

Core concepts and knowledge are covered



**Misconceptions are exposed and responded to.**

Learning as a contingent process

Core concepts and knowledge are learned more accurately, rehearsed, discussed, and interrogated

Labels can get in the way of thinking about learning needs. A child with a diagnosis of autism who is also finding learning challenging might need glasses rather than positioning all his learning needs in relation to his autism. To quote Margaret Mulholland, we need to be experts in our pupils, not labels. SEND diagnoses must not cloud responding to observable, diagnosed learning needs (e.g. they now need to learn their 5x table, they now need support in constructing a cohesive paragraph).

**Do teachers have the expertise and support to meet pupils' needs? Does professional development enable teachers to continue to improve?**

More now than ever, we have descriptions of how to implement and sustain professional development, such as the work of Sam Sims et al. The 'what' and the 'how' of teaching are vast and complex, meaning that teachers' professional development needs are huge. It is imperative to use time impactfully.

Within professional development, teachers should be guided to prioritise key aspects such as reading diagnostics (phonic knowledge, fluency of reading) and the core mathematical concepts outlined in the DfE's Mathematics Guidance (ready to progress criteria). Backwards planning units of work is helpful in teachers grasping the journey they will take pupils on, and therefore what knowledge to prioritise and check along the way. Professional development should support teachers to avoid the trap of narrowing the curriculum as a result. Assessment tools are not a curriculum, and teachers should be supported to understand this difference.



## What systems are in place to seek and hear pupils' views? Is this used to help identify potential barriers to pupil learning and engagement?

The 'curse of the expert' makes it hard to stay conscious of how a novice learner will experience content for the first time. Failing to view our classrooms, learning content or paired talk from the perspective of pupils can mean that there are barriers to engagement of which we are unaware. We may be using words pupils don't understand. It may be that rather than I do > we do > you do, our pupils will feel that they really get it with I do > we do > we do > we do > you do. It may be something as simple as 'I can't see the board.'

## How do you ensure that you are successful in your learning?

### From...

I don't muck about



### To...

I ask for a better explanation

## How do you know that you have been successful in your learning?

### From...

I do well in a test  
I get a good grade  
I wrote a lot  
My lessons are fun  
I get rewards



### To...

I understood the teacher's explanation  
I checked my answers  
I used the example the teacher used on the board  
I asked a friend to check through my work  
I have asked questions

## What do you do when you find a task difficult?

### From...

I put my hand up and wait for the teacher  
I get embarrassed



### To...

I look at the example the teacher has used  
I use the times table grid to help  
I ask questions  
I go back through my book  
My teacher asks someone to give an explanation about how they got to their answer

## What more could teachers do to support your learning?

### From...

Make lessons more fun  
Give you rewards



### To...

Slow down  
Give clearer explanations  
Encourage me to ask questions.  
Tell me to be independent when I haven't understood  
Get pupils to explain how they got their answer.  
Not sit me by my friends

Without listening to our pupils, teachers may invest a great deal of time in preparing lessons which are ineffective without knowing why learning is failing.



[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230853009\\_Teaching\\_Functions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230853009_Teaching_Functions)

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/teacher-professional-development-characteristics>



<https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/Rosenshine.pdf>

<https://teacherhead.com/2021/10/17/check-for-understanding-why-it-matters-and-how-to-do-it-redsurrey21/>

Teachers and other staff should have a shared understanding of the components of inclusive quality first teaching, specific to their subject and phase. Subject and phase leaders should ensure that their daily practice, and that of the teachers in their teams, is inclusive and high quality for all.

There should be memorable, joyful learning experiences in which all learners, particularly the disadvantaged, are expected and encouraged to participate.

### Activity might include:

- Professional development for teachers and other classroom practitioners, focused on assessment of need

- Recruiting and keeping specialist teachers. Disadvantaged learners may be disproportionately impacted by a high turnover of staff or difficulties in recruitment, as well as inconsistencies in expectations, relationships, or knowledge of prior learning/experiences

All pupils thrive when there is a relentless focus on high quality teaching (and a shared understanding of what this is).

The Great Teaching Toolkit may be a resource that supports this work, alongside EEF guidance:



<https://evidencebased.education/great-teaching-toolkit-cpd/>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports>



## Personal development

High-quality enrichment opportunities may have a disproportionate impact on learners who may lack opportunity outside of school. It is important to ensure learners feel included and that families are supported.

School leaders should be intentional about disadvantaged learners being included in student leadership opportunities and playing prominent roles representing school in sports, music, and community work. Positive experiences at school lead to motivation and belonging.

Careers education should start early and be of high quality. The quality of careers education (especially work experience) should never be limited to personal connections. Understanding, and building upon and broadening pupils' career interests should be a priority.

Every moment in school matters. Approaches such as family dining builds friendships, increases social interactions, promotes equity and is a joyous shared experience for adults and pupils alike.

## Pastoral care

High-quality pastoral care is not an optional extra. It is fundamental to success. As with academic learning, it is important that assessment, not assumption, drives any strategic and operational approaches and that practices are high quality and rooted in evidence. Personal development and pastoral care should never be an afterthought.

## Transition

Transition points, particularly between schools, can potentially be a catalyst for changes in attendance to school and attendance to learning. The table below is designed to be a starting point for thinking about difficulties with transition, particular from the perspective of disadvantaged pupils.

Lower attainers	Both	Higher attainers
Reading	Knowledge of families	'What to do when I don't know the answer'
Background knowledge	Consistency of relationships	Comparisons to peers (holidays etc.)
Vocabulary	Not fitting into any category	Self esteem
Self-efficacy	Lowering of expectations, associated with labels: 'PP & SEND'	
Social capital	Issues with motivations / priorities (associated with child development)	
Perception of potential (staff)	Impact of the variable	
Behaviour	Routines and consistency	
Changes to routines		
Changes to relationships		
Issues with independence		
Child development – being 'successful'		

**At points of transition, note that:**

- Transition is a process, not an event
- Improving pupils as learners is the most effective strategy
- Keep things manageable\*
- Keep things realistic\*
- Prior attainment shouldn't be an anchor on future attainment
- Define what success looks like during transition
- Ensure staff know their role in achieving that success (primary and secondary, teaching and support staff)

\*from the perspective of staff, pupils, families

Professor Jessie Ricketts, from the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway argues that improving pupils reading attainment is key to effective transition in the long term:

"The connection between reading proficiency and learning new words might seem obvious, but this is the first time this has been demonstrated in a real-life context.

We show that, if we can help children to read more proficiently, then other benefits are likely to follow, such as better learning of new vocabulary and more time spent reading. Similarly, if reading proficiency is low, then children are going to be struggling to learn new words, which will disadvantage them in the transition to secondary school."

**Sharing an understanding of pupils needs and interests.**

Schools may want to consider how information about:

- Increasing SEND needs across school (not just EHCP information)
- Where staff can access CPD, networks about priorities
- Analysing who is / is not participating in extracurricular activities
- Gathering information / views from pupils have about extra-curricular / enrichment opportunities
- Gathering information about why pupils may be reluctant to participate
- How this information is communicated with key staff

# Deliver targeted interventions to supplement universal provision.



## 5. Deliver targeted interventions to supplement universal provision

- Do you have a complete and up-to-date picture of local external agencies and services that may be able to support pupils and families?
- Do interventions precisely target a specifically identified need for pupils?
- Is there clear and consistent provision mapping, providing an accessible overview of which interventions are in place for pupils?
- Are the right people involved in delivering interventions, and do they have the necessary expertise to deliver the intervention[s] effectively?
- Is the intended impact of targeted interventions clear, and is this tracked, monitored and reviewed periodically so that you are confident interventions are effective or can adjust the approach if needed?

### This might include:

- Evidence-based interventions, such as the Nuffield Early Language Intervention
- Small group/one-to-one tutoring
- Academic interventions to improve reading that can also be adopted in first-wave teaching.

Academic intervention should supplement high-quality teaching, not replace it.

Any academic interventions should help improve learners as learners. They should be linked to diagnostic assessment and teacher expertise. Be wary of interventions looking for learners, rather than interventions that meet the needs of the learner.

The effectiveness of any intervention should be measured by how any gains are sustained in day-to-day learning. Be wary of the pre and post-test fallacy, where learners make great strides, but the impact falls away. This links to dispassionate impact evaluation.

Targeted academic support away from the classroom may be less successful when:

- Transitions to / from lessons are disjointed – especially when pupils have missed teacher explanations
- Pupils experience curriculum narrowing and social isolation
- There is mixed quality and expertise of staff leading interventions. High-quality, well-trained teachers and support staff are critical here
- Disjointed from the curriculum – especially with chopping and changing: ‘we don’t want pupils to miss the same thing.’ It may well be better to be consistent and clear, so pupils feel safe and secure. Intervention staff are less likely to be redeployed when systems and routines are fixed. This ensures teachers are always clear about what learning has been missed when pupils are ‘out.’



**Chris Coyle-Chislett**  
**Penpol Primary School**

**Video 1**

Chris talks about the schools' focus on careers education, making a link between children's learning relevant to their ambitions and aspirations.

**Video 2**

Chris explains how the school is helping all children to thrive at school, and be proud of who they are. This has been done by building a better understanding of neurodiversity. Chris talks about how the school is adapting to the changing needs of pupils and their families.

**Video 3**

Chris speaks about the schools' nurture provision, and how it's helping pupils with their social and emotional needs. Chris explains how this adaptive provision helps pupils to get expert social and emotional support, meeting their individual needs - with a long term goal of children thriving in the classroom.



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FULL CASE STUDY VIDEO



## The use of research evidence

How evidence can help schools with decision making – John Rodgers, Cornwall Research School

As Prof. Becky Francis, Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation has said, *“Our leaders are more evidence-rich than a decade ago. But leaders face a clear choice about the ways in which they use it. Ironically, as the language of evidence proliferates, there is a risk that it loses its impact. Surface-level compliance is the biggest threat to any change in education.”*

Those of us in the Research Schools Network used to ask schools, “If you are not using evidence, what are you using?” But as the new EEF guidance report on implementation suggests, evidence use has proliferated throughout the system.

*“A culture shift is occurring in English schools towards widespread engagement with research, with evidence-based resources becoming go-to sources of guidance. Yet awareness of evidence does not necessarily result in improved outcomes: implementation is critical for turning engagement with research into tangible changes in school practices and pupil outcomes, including, crucially, for pupils experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.”*

*“Most robust evaluations of education interventions show little or no impact on pupil outcomes compared to existing practices. Making evidence informed decisions on what to implement in the first place is therefore vital.”*

Schools can significantly enhance their decision-making processes by systematically integrating research evidence into their practices. The use of evidence in education ensures that decisions are informed by the best available knowledge, leading to improved outcomes for students.



Alongside the cross-cutting behaviours that drive effective implementation and the contextual factors that influence implementation described in the new EEF Guidance Report

*“A School’s Guide to Implementation,” schools should look to use a structured process. By adopting a practical and tailored set of implementation strategies organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain, schools can apply the behaviours and contextual factors to their day-to-day work.*

An important starting point would be for schools to diagnose and identify the priorities and needs for their context precisely and accurately. Without accurate diagnosis, any strategy, intervention, or practice change may not address the root cause of the problem. This in turn could lead to wasted time, effort, resources in the push for improving outcomes for students.

When I was 10 years old, I fell ill. My symptoms were headaches, nausea, stiffness, and fever. My mother took me to the doctor who told her I had a flu like virus and bed rest and fluids should see me right. My symptoms persisted and my mother, being worried, took me back to the doctor. The diagnosis and suggested treatment remained the same. With her intuition as a mother, she took me back a third and even fourth time, insisting that I was really ill, until finally a second doctor diagnosed me with meningitis. I was rushed to the hospital where I stayed for a week, given antibiotics (it was bacterial meningitis) and after a range of drips, tests (including several, painful lumbar punctures) and treatment, I recovered and was sent home. **My point is this; that correct diagnosis of need can help inform us of the correct treatment, leading to the desired outcome.**

After carefully assessing the needs and context of their setting, schools should also consider assessing the approach. What does the research evidence say about interventions that match their needs and priorities? How might such approaches be implemented?

Schools need access to high-quality, relevant research to inform their decisions. This can be facilitated by subscribing to educational research journals, utilising online databases, and engaging with organisations like the Research Schools Network or the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) that synthesise research into accessible formats. The EEF’s Teaching and Learning Toolkit, for instance, provides summaries of the effectiveness of various educational interventions, allowing schools to make informed choices.

Schools can also foster a culture of evidence use in decision making. Creating a culture that values evidence is the foundation for effective decision-making. School leaders should champion the use of evidence and model this behaviour. This might involve encouraging teachers and staff to engage with research, providing time and resources for professional development, and fostering an environment where questioning and reflective practice are the norms. Celebrating successes and sharing stories of how evidence-based interventions have led to positive outcomes can further reinforce this culture.

Building the capacity of staff to understand and use research is critical. Effective professional development opportunities can focus on how to interpret and apply research findings. Workshops, training sessions, and collaborative learning groups can help staff become more research-literate. Schools can also appoint evidence champions or create research leads who can guide their colleagues in integrating evidence into their teaching practices.





When implementing an intervention schools must also monitor and evaluate its impact. This involves setting clear, measurable objectives and using data to assess whether these objectives are being met. Considering and planning to monitor implementation outcomes will help schools keep track of how well the implementation process is going, increasing the likelihood of the final outcomes of improving student outcomes being successful. This cycle of continuous improvement and reflective behaviour ensures that practices are improved, refined, and optimised over time.

Schools can benefit from participating in networks and partnerships that promote the sharing of evidence and best practices. Collaborating with other schools, local authorities, and educational researchers can provide new insights and help schools stay updated on the latest research. Such networks also offer opportunities for peer learning and support, which can enhance the overall capacity for evidence use.

Integrating evidence into school decision-making processes can lead to more effective teaching and improved student outcomes. By fostering a culture of evidence use, accessing high-quality research, developing staff capacity, implementing, and evaluating interventions, engaging in collaborative networks, and following implementation guidance, schools can ensure that their practices are grounded in the best available evidence. This strategic approach not only enhances decision-making but also contributes to a more informed, reflective, and ultimately successful educational system.

## References

- A School's Guide to Implementation guidance report | Education Endowment Foundation
- Using research evidence - A concise guide | Education Endowment Foundation
- Teaching and Learning Toolkit | EEF ([educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk))



**Rebecca Best**  
**Penpol Primary School**

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Rebecca, with Mabel the dog, explains how wellbeing walks are helping pupils to feel safe and secure at school. Rebecca highlights improvements for pupils with relationships, confidence, self esteem and more.



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## Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the approaches being adopted.

A robust process and impact evaluation framework should be adopted at the start of a strategy's implementation to enable school leaders to accurately assess its effectiveness. Changes and adaptations can then be made to practise and to the strategy where necessary.

High-quality impact evaluation is fundamental to better outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

Impact evaluation is about finding out whether activities and strategies have been successful, and why. It is not about proving that strategies and activities have been successful or finding evidence to justify decision-making. It is important to decouple evaluation from accountability. Trying to prove an approach has been successful is detrimental to improved outcomes.

Evaluation is fundamental to continuous improvement, for building a solid evidence base that will enable impact on pupils.

- Understand, not prove: decouple evaluation from accountability
- Objectivity is really difficult BUT vitally important
- Monitoring the enactment of CPD in the classroom is important. It is not enough to 'hope' that CPD will be enacted
- Improve pupils as learners and self-regulators
- Case studies helpful if chosen in advance – track five pupils over time rather than retrospectively
- Activity does not equate to impact

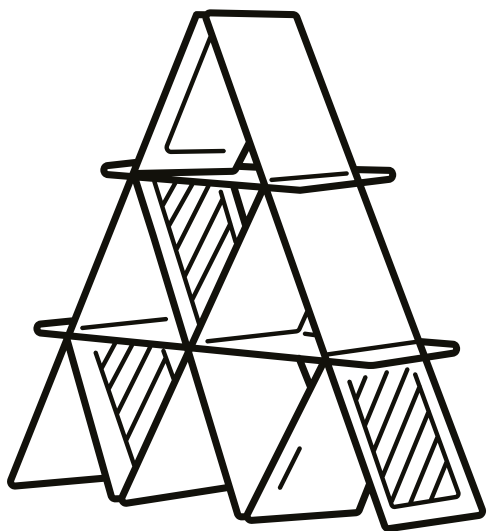
The following table includes a number of approaches schools can use for evaluation. They include qualitative and quantitative, and short / medium / longer term measures. All have limitations – as set out on the opposite page.



Success criteria	Short / medium / long	Qualitative / Quantitative	Strengths	Weaknesses	Improved by?
KST2 SATs outcomes	Long	Quantitative	Objective Directly comparable	Difficult to determine cause impact from a single activity. Responsive action difficult	
Observations of learning behaviours / language	Short / medium	Qualitative	Can inform improvements in practice	Can be subjective, especially solo. Requires understanding of the evidence	Clarity of focus. Observe pupils
Book looks	Short / medium	Qualitative	Can inform improvements in practice and interventions	Can be subjective, especially if without expertise	
Pupil Voice	short / medium	Qualitative / Quantitative	Can inform improvements in practice and interventions	Pupils can be swayed by influential peers. Surveys can be narrow	
Parental Voice	Short / medium	Qualitative / Quantitative	Can give different perspectives	Swayed by influential peers. Some find formal discussion hard. Surveys can be narrow	
Observations of oral language	Short / medium	Qualitative	Can inform improvements in practice and interventions	Can be subjective	
Vocabulary test scores	Short / medium	Quantitative	Can inform interventions. Directly comparable. Objective	Not standardised. Not academically validated	
Teacher interviews	Short / medium	Qualitative	Teachers as the 'expert' in the pupil(s)	Can be subjective	
In classroom assessments	Medium	Quantitative	Can inform interventions. Comparable. Objective	Quality can be an issue. Influenced by quality of teaching. Not standardised	
Pupil progress meetings	Medium	Qualitative / Quantitative	Teachers as the 'expert' in the pupil(s)	Can be subjective	
Standardised tests	Medium / long	Quantitative	Can inform interventions. Directly comparable. Objective. Academically validated	Influenced by quality of teaching. Content may not be taught	



## Poor evaluation – a house of cards



1. Base our evaluation of improvement on the weakest datasets, so that we can claim credit for any small improvements.
2. Base our evaluation of improvement on the reactions of those delivering the plan.
3. Base our evaluation of improvement on selected colleagues that were the most enthusiastic about the strategy.
4. Use vague outcome measures from the start, making success easier to claim
5. Use one set of favourable data or ignore any negative findings.
6. Use sets of data that avoid focusing on pupil outcomes.



Listening carefully to the voices of pupils – especially those that are struggling to attend school and attend to their learning – is fundamental to improvement. It is particularly important to provide ongoing opportunities to hear the voices of those pupils on the margins of school life, those whose attendance has improved, and those that have sustained good attendance.

Tracking these pupils – looking at their lived experience through the school day, or week, can provide invaluable insights, from their perspective. In particular:

- Are they working with high quality teachers and support staff?
- How often are they working with unqualified staff or supply staff?
- Do they get meaningful opportunities to interact with their peers?
- Do they get thinking time before engaging in questioning, discussion?
- What types of feedback do they get on their learning, their learning behaviours?
- How often are they late / out of lessons during learning time?
- What is their experience during lunch or break?
- What additional activities are they involved in?
- How does this compare to their peers and their experiences of school life?

Listening to the voices of pupils about their experiences at school – for those that struggle to attend, those that improve their attendance and those that sustain good attendance is key to long term success.





## Avoid initiative overload. Draw on guidance on effective implementation

The quality of implementation should be as important as the activities and approaches chosen. Poor implementation is likely to lead to weaker outcomes.

Prioritising and doing a small number of things well leads to shared ownership and understanding, gives time for approaches to be embedded and avoids initiative fatigue. Implementation should be treated as a process, not an event.

Always consider some of the things that may go wrong before any implementation. Over-optimism is a consistent feature of failed initiatives. We should be enthusiastic about what we might achieve, but sceptical about how much we can sustain.

The EEF has updated its implementation guidance. More details here:



<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/implementation>

**“A School’s Guide to Implementation” by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is a guidance report that provides evidence and resources for schools to effectively implement new educational approaches or practices.**

**The guide is based on a new review of evidence and suggests three key recommendations:**

1. Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation.
2. Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation.
3. Use a structured but flexible implementation process.

The process is designed to support schools to do implementation, while the behaviours and contextual factors help schools to do it well. Research has shown that the quality of implementation is a huge factor in achieving the desired, positive outcomes from approaches. Even as more schools engage with research and evidence-informed resources and practices, the need to implement things well emerges as a high priority.

Therefore, the guide is intended to help ensure that new approaches or practices have the biggest possible impact on children and young people's outcomes.

The guidance recognises that implementation and change is difficult and largely social in nature. Schools are complex systems in which it is vital that evidence-informed approaches are manifested in the day-to-day work of teachers, support staff and all who work in schools.

## **Recommendation 1 explores the crosscutting behaviours that drive effective implementation.**

**These behaviours are:**

### **1. Engage:**

Engage people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.

- i. Engage people so they have the potential to influence change
- ii. Engage people in collaborative processes
- iii. Engage people through clear communication and active guidance

### **2. Unite:**

Unite people around what is being implemented.

- i. Unite views and values
- ii. Unite knowledge and belief
- iii. Unite skills and understanding
- iv. Unite implementation processes

### **3. Reflect:**

Reflect, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation

- i. Reflect on pupil needs and current practices
- ii. Reflect on fit and feasibility
- iii. Reflect on implementation processes
- iv. Reflect on implementation barriers and enablers

Implementation strategies that schools employ should allow and encourage these behaviours to be manifested. When done well, these behaviours can drive effective implementation.

# Recommendation 2 suggests schools should attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation.

**These contextual factors are:**

## **1. What is being implemented:**

- a. Consider whether what is being implemented is:
  - i. Evidence-informed
  - ii. Right for the setting
  - iii. Feasible to implement

## **2. Systems and structures**

- a. Develop systems and structures that support implementation. They might include:
  - i. School structures such as timetables
  - ii. Logistics and processes e.g. data monitoring systems
  - iii. Resources, funding, equipment
  - iv. Time e.g. meeting time
  - v. Policies
  - vi. Roles

## **3. People who enable change**

- a. Ensure people who enable change can support, lead, and positively influence implementation factors that influence whether people can support implementation might include the degree to which:
  - i. They have the knowledge, skills, and expertise to help implement the intervention
  - ii. They feel empowered to act and can empower others
  - iii. They have agency

School leaders should also reflect on the implementation climate of their setting. How people feel about implementation can greatly affect their ability to influence effective implementation.

Recommendation 3 advises that schools use a structured but flexible approach to implementation. Without a structured process, the crosscutting behaviours and contextual factors that underpin and drive effective implementation may be hard to enact. The guidance lists many implementation strategies that could be used by schools as part of a structured and flexible process. Schools should recognise that effective implementation takes time. Doing fewer things really well is a good attitude.

Effective implementation is difficult, but research shows that by enacting the behaviours and attending to the contextual factors that drive good implementation, schools can achieve sustained, positive behaviour change that will improve outcomes for their children.





**Craig Follett**  
**The Roseland Academy Trust**

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Craig talks about how the Trust has made attendance and belonging a top priority at all levels. Craig explains how the Trust supports its schools to help pupils to thrive.



SCAN HERE TO WATCH THE  
FULL CASE STUDY VIDEO



## The role of Governance in supporting attendance – Fiona Fearon, National Governance Association

An effective whole-school culture of high attendance is underpinned by a clear attendance policy. Trusts and federations may wish to have one attendance policy which covers all their schools.

### **The policy should:**

- meet expectations set out in Working together to improve school attendance (section one)
  - be tailored to the needs of individual schools and the barriers to attendance pupils experience (as identified through analysis of school-level attendance data)
  - account for the specific needs of certain pupils and pupil groups
  - be easily accessible to staff, pupils and parents and published on the school/trust website
  - be sent to parents when pupils join, at the start of each school year and when it is updated
  - set out how the school/trust works with local partners to help improve attendance (for example, local authority attendance support teams, health care, police, and social care)
- Attendance improvement does not happen in isolation; it should also be prioritised in wider } policies and improvement strategies such as those related to:
- support for disadvantaged pupils
  - behaviour management
  - special educational needs and disabilities
  - wellbeing
  - safeguarding

**For example, a pupil premium strategy should address non-academic challenges that pupils may be facing, such as poor attendance and punctuality. It should work in partnership with families, highlighting that good attendance starts with close and productive relationships with parents and pupils.**





Governing boards should regularly (likely on a termly basis) review attendance data and improvement efforts at board meetings.

**This should include:**

- Thorough examination of recent and historic trends and patterns.
- Benchmarking against comparator schools within the local authority, region and nationwide.
- Paying particular attention to pupil groups that face entrenched barriers to attendance (specific to the school's context but may include vulnerable groups such as pupils who have a social worker, are from a background or ethnicity where attendance has historically been low or are eligible for free school meals).
- Checking that pupil's absence due to mental or physical ill health, their special educational needs and/or disabilities are given additional support where needed – whilst many pupils may experience difficulties, they are still expected to attend school regularly.
- Working with school leaders to set goals and outline areas for support and challenge.





## Disciplined inquiry

We have used the disciplined inquiry model to build an understanding of the effectiveness of approaches to improve attendance to school and attendance to learning.

Disciplined inquiry is the process of professionally pursuing a line of inquiry to improve provision and outcomes. Inquiries should have a narrow focus that gives an indication of whether a particular approach can be effective in a particular context. Inquiries are not the same as robust research trials.

Schools and Trusts worked together over a series of in person and online sessions to develop their inquiries. They also received peer feedback to ensure inquiries were well refined, well defined, rigorous, relevant and manageable.

### **The starting point for developing a question was as follows:**

- What impact does [approach] delivered over [time] have on [what outcome?] for [whom?]??

• For example: What impact does [free breakfast] delivered [daily] over [12 weeks] have on [punctuality, attendance and learning behaviours] for [30 disadvantaged year 8 pupils]? We encouraged schools to think carefully about the drivers (underlying causes) of issues, rather than symptoms, so that the approaches being adopted were not simply responding to symptoms of issues. This also helps categorise approaches, helping make the booklet more user friendly and the write ups of the enquiries focus heavily on implementation. Schools were encouraged to use qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate impact.

• What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference? The objective was a better understating of the effectiveness of approaches to improve attendance in schools in Cornwall. Approaches do not have the intended impact also provide useful information. This work has been carried out within a culture of 'system generosity', and in keeping with the ambition that this booklet reflects the work going on in Cornish schools and settings.

\*Some inquiries are still in progress. We will continue to update the handbook as enquiries are completed.

# Inquiry 1

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**School/Trust name:** Stratton Primary School

**Title:** Improving communication at EYFS induction into the school

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## Drivers

- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Misconceptions
- School behaviours
- Relationships with peers
- Relationships (pupils and families) with staff
- Social isolation

## Short commentary on drivers

We will be increasing the amount of communication parents receive at Ready Steady School sessions in June/July to prepare their child for starting school in September 2024, in areas such as physical health, wellbeing and social development. We aim to focus on the key drivers to attendance rather than attendance as a stand-alone subject.

## Inquiry question

What impact does increased communication with parents on health, wellbeing, and social development over the ready steady school sessions, have on attendance of Reception children in Autumn 2024.

## What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference?

Autumn 2023 attendance data

Autumn 2024 attendance data

Parental surveys Autumn 2023 and Autumn 2024.

## Challenges with implementation

We are always looking for improvements to our attendance procedures, so the impact seen may be as a result of other factors alongside this project.

We have a cohort of 36 starting in September; each child's data is going to count for more % data than in a cohort of 46 children (2023).

## Outcomes

Improvements seen in attendance for EYFS Autumn 2024 compared with EYFS Autumn 2023.

Longer lasting impact of this project on a cohort of children.

We may see attitudinal change/systemic change, if project successful and continued long term.

## Wider learning

Can we support the understanding of physical health and school attendance without patronising or undermining parent decisions?

**Does understanding the social impact to the children's development have an impact on the importance of attendance?**





**Cassie Pamplin**  
**Portreath Primary School**

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Cassie explains how small changes to the way school communicates with families - using family friendly language, presenting attendance data more clearly has had a positive impact.

Cassie also explains how talking to families about the social impact, as well as the academic impact of poor attendance has influenced behaviour change.



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FULL CASE STUDY VIDEO



# Inquiry 2

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**School/Trust name:** Portreath School, Crofty MAT

**Title:** Improving attendance through improved communication

---

## Drivers

- Low Family Income
- Physical Health
- Historical experiences
- Relationships (pupils and families) with staff
- Social isolation

## Short commentary on drivers

We felt that our letters to parents/carers referencing attendance were going against our 'helping everyone feel like they belong' agenda. We also wanted to make the impact of absence clearer through comparison as parents sometimes had misconceptions about the time off.

## Inquiry question

What impact does communication that is personalised, targeted, that uses inclusive language delivered during 12 weeks have on attendance and parental perceptions for children who are classed as PA at the end of Spring 1?

What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference?

The number of children who are classed as PA at both time points. A parental survey targeted at the parents of Spring 1 PA children.

## Approaches

Redesigned the letters sent to parents, reference attendance. They are much shorter using more inclusive language and personalised to the child. Those below 92% get a personalised graphic that compares how many days off their child has had, compared to the average number of days their peers in their year group have had off.

## Challenges with implementation

Workload to produce the letters, especially the first couple of times. Ensure there is a clear system to record which children have received which letters.

## Outcomes

So far feedback has been positive from parents, some have commented how they thought the comparison was helpful. Discussions with parents have been more positive. Number of PA children has decreased this term so far. This is being rolled out across the trust, so in time there will be more evidence about the impact.

## Wider learning

Building good relationships with parents is key and these letters help rather than hinder this. Personalised approach is more impactful and a focus on impact on friendships and social development appears to make more of a difference to parents rather than the focus on gaps in learning.

# Inquiry 3

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**School/Trust name:** Penpol Primary School

**Title:** Improving attendance through 'Child's Eye View' coaching model

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## Drivers

- Misconceptions
- Inclusion and access
- Quality of education (formal and informal)
- School behaviours

## Short commentary on drivers

As class teachers, we want all children to be actively engaged in all lessons at all times. We want to give teachers the opportunity to observe a small group of children in their class who find it difficult to be actively engaged and to develop personal strategies to help the children through a coaching model alongside another member of staff.

## Inquiry question

What impact does a 'Child's Eye View' coaching model delivered over 4 weeks have on effective lesson planning and active engagement for KS1 children?

## What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference?

Attendance (overall and changing patterns)

Pupil voice

Teacher voice

Classroom observations

Children's attainment

## Approaches

- Identify children in the class whose attendance is less than 90% and finds it difficult to engage in lessons
- Pair teachers together to form a coaching model
- The class teacher will observe and interact with the children identified whilst the coaching mentor teaches the lesson
- The class teacher and coaching mentor will develop strategies to support the children
- The class teacher will implement the strategies into their lessons
- The class teacher will observe the children identified whilst the coaching mentor teaches the lesson to see if there's an impact

## Challenges with implementation

Time for the class teacher and coaching mentor to have time to discuss before the observation, to do the observations and to reflect on the observations

Time for the class teacher to develop strategies to support the children

## Outcomes

We are currently in the implementation stage of this project.

## Wider learning

It is important to have opportunities to observe the children in your own class

It is important to have coaching mentors to develop CPD.

# Inquiry 4

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**School/Trust name:** Penpol Primary School

**Title:** Autism in Schools Programme – Young People Cornwall

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## Drivers

- Ambition and Representation of Opportunity
- Neuro-divergence

## Short commentary on drivers

We often identify a correlation between attendance challenges and neurodivergence and, in particular, children's whose differences in neurotype are newly or not-yet identified. These children may find that the social experience of school is exhausting for them. Feeling the need to 'mask' during the day, they sometimes unravel at home which further fuels a disconnect between home and school.

## Inquiry question

What impact will an Autism in Schools project, run across six sessions and facilitated by a colleague from Young People Cornwall, have upon neurodivergent pupils' positive experience of school and, therefore, attendance?

## What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference?

- Attendance (individual and group)
- Pupil voice
- Teacher voice
- Parent/Carer Survey
- Classroom observations
- Children's attainment

## Approaches

- Open invitation to children and families, not limited to children currently identified as autistic/neurodivergent.
- Targeting specific children where challenges exist socially or emotionally throughout the school day.
- School gradually stepping back from the running of the programme itself, allowing representative analysis of the Young People Cornwall initiative as it currently runs.
- Facilitator from Young People Cornwall leading six weekly sessions, supporting children to share lived experiences, celebrate successes and explore challenges. Over a course of sessions, working towards empowering a collective voice and aiming to affect change in systems school and/or beyond.

## Challenges with implementation

The self-identified group represents a broad range of attendance profiles. Some are strong attenders, whilst others exhibit more challenges currently.

Six weeks provide limited opportunity to affect meaningful change outside of school.

## Outcomes

We are currently in the implementation stage of this project.

## Wider learning

We are currently in the implementation stage of this project.



# Inquiry 5

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**School/Trust name:** Penpol Primary School

**Title:** Brilliant Club's Scholars Programme – Year 5 and Year 6 Groups

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## Drivers

- Ambition and Representation of Opportunity

## Short commentary on drivers

The children selected for this programme are almost all in receipt of the Pupil Premium. A range of prior academic attainment is represented, and the vast majority have no family members of who have previously been to university. Exposure to the opportunities presented by a university education are severely limited at our end of Cornwall.

## Inquiry question

What impact does The Scholars Programmed, delivered over 6 weeks, have upon individual children's perspectives of opportunities available to them and attendance for pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium in Years 5 and 6.

## What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference?

- Attendance (individual and group)
- Pupil voice
- Teacher voice
- Parent/Carer Surveys
- Classroom observations
- Children's attainment

## Approaches

- Children selected on the basis of readiness to undertake the level of reading and writing required and, almost exclusively, in receipt of Pupil Premium.
- Children placed in two groups of seven (Year 5 and Year 6 groups respectively).
- School allocated a doctorate student as our specialist tutor. In our case, a philosophy specialist.
- Within this specialism, a narrow area of focus is identified in the form of a question: What is fairness?
- This question is supported with course documentation created by The Brilliant Club and all children are provided with a course workbook.

## Challenges with implementation

Classroom space

Assimilating to a nationally defined timetable

## Outcomes

We are currently in the implementation stage of this project.

## Wider learning

We are currently in the implementation stage of this project.

# Inquiry 6

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**School/Trust name:** Penpol Primary School

**Title:** Improve attendance through wellbeing walks with the school dog.

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## Drivers

- Mental Health
- School behaviours
- Relationships (pupils and families) with staff
- Historical experiences
- Relationships with peers
- Social isolation

## Short commentary on drivers

We want all children to feel happy and safe coming into school so they will want to come in each day. We understand some children have historical experiences that can impact their self-esteem, behaviour, mental health, and social relationships. We believe if children have the opportunity to have a tailored wellbeing walk with the school dog, it can have a positive impact on the child.

## Inquiry question

What impact does wellbeing walks with the school dog, delivered over 6 weeks, have on attendance, social skills, and behaviour for pupils in KS1.

## What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference?

- Attendance (overall and changing patterns)
- Pupil voice
- Teacher voice
- Classroom and playground observations

## Approaches

- A school dog and a TA to lead the session
- Timetable sessions
- Identify the children with attendance below 90%
- Put the children into small groups of 3 or 4 for the walk with similar needs

## Challenges with implementation

- Communicate the intent and how we will implement the wellbeing walk with all members of staff in KS1.
- Ensure the wellbeing walks are timetabled at convenient times with the class teacher
- Facilitating the wellbeing walks.

## Outcomes

We have been running the wellbeing walks for 1 week so far and it's having a positive impact. The children are looking forward to their wellbeing walk with the school dog. The TA has noticed children feel comfortable to talk during the session and are feeling relaxed.

## Wider learning

If you can make children feel happy and safe, their attitude to school and learning will improve. It is important to share valuable resources (a school dog) with the whole phase, so children and teachers gain the benefits.

# Inquiry 7

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**School/Trust name:** St Ives Junior School

**Title:** Improving attendance and punctuality through a home collection minibuss service.

---

## Drivers

- Low Family Income
- Historical experiences
- Relationships (pupils and families) with staff
- Physical Health
- Relationships with peers
- Social isolation

## Short commentary on drivers

One of the primary drivers for implementing a home-school collection service is to improve overall attendance rates. A home-school collection service can help reduce lateness and absenteeism among students by offering a reliable and punctual mode of transportation directly from their homes to school. The implementation of a home-school collection service can specifically target vulnerable or at-risk students who may be more likely to experience attendance issues due to various factors, such as socio-economic status, health issues, or family circumstances.

## Inquiry question

What impact does a home collection service delivered over 12 weeks have on pupils' attendance rates, punctuality, self-esteem and overall wellbeing and engagement in school for 6 pupils?

## What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference?

Attendance of key children pre and post:

- Child A (EJ) - Pre - 74% Post - 100%
- Child B (HL) Pre - 77%. Post - 86%

(\*4 other children attend the Infant school, and we have no specific data on them)

## Challenges with implementation

Parents face difficulties in managing their morning routines and ensuring that their children are prepared for school on time. Children are consistently not ready for pickup or if parents fail to ensure their readiness. This can lead to disruptions in the transportation schedule, delays in arrival times, and frustration for both school staff and parents relying on the service. Parents may not fully understand the importance of ensuring their children's readiness for school or may face barriers to actively engaging in the process. Implementing and maintaining a home-school collection service requires resources and funding for transportation vehicles, staff availability, and administrative support.

## Outcomes

The home school collection service has significantly improved pupil attendance and punctuality, with a noticeable increase in self-esteem and overall well-being. By removing transportation barriers, students arrive on time, feel more confident, and experience greater engagement in learning, resulting in a positive impact on their academic and personal development.

## Wider learning

The home school collection service has positively impacted pupils' wider learning by facilitating access to extracurricular activities, such as breakfast club and educational opportunities.







# Inquiry 8

**School/Trust name:** Roseland Multi Academy Trust

**Title:** Raising attendance at The Roseland Multi Academy Trust through making students feel like they belong in our school community

**Drivers**

- Low Family Income
- Mental Health
- Misconceptions
- Historical experiences
- Quality of education (formal and informal)
- Inclusion and access
- Relationships with peers
- Social isolation
- Relationships (pupils and families) with staff
- Attendance

**Short commentary on drivers**

Research shows that students with high attendance perform better academically than those students with poor attendance. Furthermore, disadvantaged students and those with SEND have on average lower attendance than their peers. We feel it is our duty to close the gap academically and therefore as a Trust made the decision that this starts with attendance.

**Strategy**

Our strategy began with raising the profile of attendance within our school community. Attendance is the responsibility of everyone being our key strapline. The widened profile of attendance with students and parents through supportive newsletters, posters, social media etc where we purposely made it supportive rather than threatening. Our strategy is based on students feeling like they belong in school and in our school community. We looked at educating everyone on why attendance was important and looked beyond just academic outcomes. We shared information with parents and students regarding mental wellbeing, inclusion in friendship groups, not missing out on experiences that their peers would talk about for years to come.

We have a clear and transparent attendance strategy that includes who is responsible and what actions happen at each stage. Each stage centres around communication and

building relationships with our young people and their parents.

Headteachers lead a ‘High Impact Attendance’ meeting every week where all key stakeholders such as Heads of Year, Assistant Headteacher (attendance) attend and strategies shared, actions from previous meetings checked and impact analysed so that attendance remains a top priority.

Every week Headteachers share their attendance data in our weekly Headteacher meeting chaired by the Senior School Improvement Lead. The high profile of attendance is demonstrated throughout for all stakeholders to see. This meeting includes sharing strategies that are working and tracking our figures over time. The gap between Pupil Premium, SEND is discussed within this meeting as well.

Our systems have clear and transparent thresholds for stages which culminate in use of our EWO.

**Drivers**

- Low Family Income
- Mental Health
- Misconceptions
- Historical experiences
- Quality of education (formal and informal)
- Inclusion and access
- Relationships with peers
- Social isolation
- Relationships (pupils and families) with staff
- Attendance

**Short commentary on drivers**

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### **Challenges with implementation**

Our initial challenge was ensuring that all members' realised attendance was each of our responsibility. The clear and transparent strategy and raising of the profile ensured

staff were on board. The other challenge is getting parents and students to recognise the importance of attendance. It is safe to say that the biggest impact was when we discussed with parents that their child may miss experiences that their peers would talk about and look back on forever was more impactful than talking about the grade difference of attendance. The final challenge with attendance is that post-Christmas it is often difficult to recognise the impact that your strategies are having on raising attendance as the changes in overall figures become minimal.

### **Outcomes**

Whilst we still have work to do, attendance is improving. The mindset of staff and the community are beginning to recognise its importance and more students are in the habit of coming to school than they have been since the pandemic. Staff are asking questions about our attendance figures and are striving to help it improve. We feel like the work we have done this year, and the good habits means we should hit the ground running in September and we are currently building relationships with our new cohort of year 7's who were persistently absent at primary School to support the transition process. Students who develop a sense of belonging, form relationships with their peers and staff and attend extra-curricular activities subsequently attend school more frequently.

### **Wider learning**

Parents care about their child's happiness significantly more than how attendance impacts outcomes. Building relationships with parents and students will impact attendance most significantly. The system ensures everyone is crystal clear on their roles but that alone won't change people's habits.



# Inquiry 9

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**School/Trust name:** Poltair School, Cornwall Education Learning Trust (CELT)

**Title:** Creating a bespoke transition into Secondary school for a pupil with poor attendance and behaviour concerns

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## Drivers

- Mental Health
- Historical experiences
- School behaviours
- Relationships (pupils and families) with staff

## Short commentary on drivers

Student highlighted from Primary transition for poor attendance and behaviour concerns around flight risk. Enhanced transition provided establishing clear expectations and full orientation of school site and exposure to a range of staff in school. Appropriate setting and tutor were scheduled to establish key relationships and trusted adults in school.

## Inquiry question

The parent and student were struggling with past trauma and due to this, barriers to attendance were put up and it took consistency and a calm team approach to slowly remove each one. This student was our first and only student to be offered a Section 19 from County however the parent turned this down as it was solely online learning which they did not feel met their child's needs. Poltair could offer a more rounded package of support, detailed below.

- Clear instructions on how to support student on SEND Plan on Class Charts and highlighted within all staff briefing ensured consistent approach by all staff, teaching and support. Consistent delivery of teaching practice, implementation of the SEND Plan has ensured student is not dysregulated by differing approaches and messages.
- Use of emotion cards to communicate non-verbally with staff allows student to communicate more effectively with a range of staff, this allows student to remain in lessons, or for staff to use SEND Button for specialist support more easily and appropriately.
- The student was raised at CELT SENDCo Panel so advice sought from a range of professionals. The outcome was to refer the student to the Learning Centre.
- The Learning Centre provision was offered for 6 weeks with a plan of support and exit strategy to support student to return to mainstream lessons. This provides a quieter learning space, consistent staff and lessons in a significantly smaller group size but is still on the school site and expectations remain for uniform and school day timings. Parent did not feel this was working so we offered our CELT Hub package of intervention.
- Access to the Inclusion Hub via a 'Time in' card allows the student to take ownership of self-regulation when feeling overwhelmed. Safe environment of attending the Inclusion hub and building relationships with staff.
- Fidget toys to help regulate and aid focus. Detailed on SEND Plan so there is no challenge in classrooms for using this intervention.
- Adjusted consequence timeline has reduced the emotional load when sanctions have had to be given for behaviors. Time at home in the afternoon, with parent supporting with completing adjusted work on a topic of interest to the student. This allows the behavior policy to be followed when the student isn't meeting expectations but meets the individual needs of the student and parent.

- Bespoke package of 1-1 Intervention with the Autism Champion to explore the barriers the student has to school. This work would help to hear the students' voice and therefore make appropriate support available.
- Set changes offered to reduce cognitive load so that return to mainstream would be to a bespoke and nurturing environment.
- Neurodevelopmental pathway assessment referral offered.
- Support from the Integrated Education Officer from the Local Authority, Mr. Jason Toy, was sourced. Individual work was completed between Mr. Jason Toy and parent, and with student in order to integrate back into Poltair as an In-trust Transfer to another CELT School had been turned down by parent and student.
- Referral to Internal CELT Hub was made, online lessons offered with teachers across CELT in the Inclusion Hub, lessons are 40 minutes with 20 minute sensory breaks between, with a reduced school day from 8.50 -1.10pm as the CELT External Hub was turned down by parent.
- Regular Attendance and review meetings have been held in line with Attendance Policy. Parent refused to sign an Attendance Contract was issued with a First Warning as all professionals agreed that an extensive package of support was in place. Since this there has been increased engagement with attending the Inclusion Hub with the intention of reintegrating into mainstream lessons.

### **What are the pre and post measures that tell us the approach has made a difference?**

- The attendance certificate shows an increase in attendance and patterns of absence.
- Feedback regarding engagement from the CELT Hub lessons which are accessed via the Inclusion Hub.
- Parental feedback on students attitudes and behaviours from attending school.
- Professionals' observations when attending Inclusion Hub.
- Regular review meetings are in place due to initial PTT and now CELT Hub allows Poltair staff to communicate appropriately to support the student, conversations at Panel Meeting ensures that attendance and engagement with learning for this student are tracked and challenged appropriately.

### **Challenges with implementation**

Lack of parental engagement with solutions offered by school has led to student absences further impacting on timely success of interventions. Absences impact on the consistent delivery of the agreed intervention and outcomes are therefore delayed. Keeping open communication with parent has been heavily reliant on key staff to maintain.

### **Outcomes**

A blended timetable allows parent request for therapeutic intervention whilst funding available to run alongside establishing regular attendance and engagement in school in the Inclusion Hub. An agreed strategy for reintegration into the next academic year with trusted staff in school for both student and parent to ensure success.

### **Wider learning**

Whilst adhering to the Attendance Policy there needs to be timely referrals for support to ensure that there are not prolonged absences impacting on student outcomes. Clear communication with parents and hearing their voice within the process to ensure support around the student is consistent in and out of school.

# Inquiry 10

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**School/Trust name:** Luxulyan School, Cornwall Education Learning Trust (CELT)

**Title:** Dealing with post Covid related attendance

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## Drivers

- Low Family Income
- Mental Health
- Quality of education (formal and informal)
- School behaviours
- Relationships (pupils and families) with staff

## Short commentary on drivers

Coming out of the COVID pandemic with the school at a requires improvement level, we were keen to improve the mental health and quality of education for our pupils whilst ensuring that we continued to engage with our small local community.

## Inquiry question

Can we improve our attendance to at least 96% - in line with trust targets and ensure our disadvantaged pupils are at the same level as our whole school?

## Challenges with implementation

Our main challenges focused upon a small group of families who would take holidays during term time on a regular basis. Additionally, we had to build a culture of expectation of attendance through choice rather than the threat of punitive measures to ensure an authentic approach to engagement with our attendance policy.

## Outcomes

The school has steadily settled to nearly 97% attendance on average and sits in the top 10 schools in Cornwall and 10% of schools nationally. We have introduced a parent forum in which attendance is always discussed and engaged with parents proactively where there is a cause for concern, to explain why we are focusing upon this area of school life. We also celebrate attendance on a class basis each week in our celebration assembly. Our disadvantaged pupils are at least in line with whole school attendance figures.

## Wider learning

There isn't a quick win or easy approach to building attendance but relationships lie at the heart of it in my opinion. I am sure that many schools are doing exactly the same things as Luxulyan and I would encourage colleagues to 'keep going'. The ways in which attendance have been explained and why it is important have been our main successes and placing children at the heart of our intentions has also contributed to excellent attendance outcomes.







## Further Resources

### Acknowledgement of Research materials used

#### Further signposting:

<https://researchschool.org.uk/unity/news/pupil-premium-and-send-learning-without-labels>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-supporting-school-attendance-a-new-tool-for-reflection-and-planning>

<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/schools-and-education/education-welfare-service/#documents>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

#### Department Of Education:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

#### ImpactED:

<https://www.evaluation.impactgroup.uk>





Effective parental engagement is a crucial ingredient in both academic and social success, including attendance, especially for our most vulnerable pupils. Cornwall Council's Together for Families Directorate, supported by Parent Carer Cornwall, have developed a framework and toolkit to promote the partnership between pupils, parents, and school to help create a culture of mutual collaboration to support all learners to succeed.

This resource is designed to be a working document that supports education settings in the development of a parent carer engagement strategy and to be central to the work they do to raise aspirations and achievement. The resource includes:

- A framework based on principles and criteria for building the education setting's approach, structured around seven themes.
- A 'selection box' of practical resources and references that education settings can select from to support meeting the identified principles.

This Framework and Toolkit will be free to all education settings in Cornwall from September 2024. Schools across the Duchy will still have the option of purchasing support from the Education Effectiveness team for the implementation of their parental engagement strategy using the Framework. This programme can be accessed through service for schools <https://schools.cornwall.gov.uk>.





## Acknowledgements / Steering group

### **Steering group members:**

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# Case study – A specialist school approach

CHES Academy is a medical provision academy that provide education for children and young people with complex medical and/or mental health needs which prevent them from attending school. We pride ourselves in providing pupils with access to high quality education, ensuring they are thoroughly prepared for the next stage in their learning journey. Personalisation is the cornerstone of our pedagogy; the curriculum is bespoke, and programmes are crafted to meet individual needs which demands a totally flexible and adaptable approach to teaching and learning from all involved.

Our medical provisions provide personalised education through a combination of centre teaching, individual teaching and online learning. CHES has three teaching centres in Cornwall; Glynn House our school base in Truro; our Hospital School room in the Royal Cornwall Hospital and our Education Unit within Sowenna, the adolescent Tier 4 unit in Bodmin.

The school keeps attendance front and centre of its work:

- The School Development Plan has actions around attendance.
- Appraisals have actions for all teachers around attendance and engagement.
- Every student's attendance is discussed, and action plan recorded at weekly case supervision on Schoolpod (MIS). Every student will have a plan if needed in terms of improving attendance and engagement.
- Every student has a half termly review meeting with the referring school and medical professionals who referred the student to CHES. Attendance and barriers to attending and engaging are discussed and recorded. Action plans are discussed at weekly case supervision.
- Attending schools are made aware of all attendance concerns.
- Referring schools are sent attendance data weekly.
- PSM (Pastoral Support Manager) meets with Wave EWO to discuss attendance concerns on single registered students.
- We send postcards home for improvement and maintaining attendance and commendations are also given. These are rewarded throughout the year with vouchers (Love to Shop) for students to spend.
- PSM does a weekly attendance check on a Friday as an additional check and ensure that students who have not been in for a week have had a phone call, home visit, or confirmation they have been seen by another professional

## Example of an outlier

Student	% Attendance	Gender	Year	Actions	Next steps
IT Online school	29%	F	Year 11	Case supervision Working with referring school and CAMHS Pastoral worker – visit home and make weekly phone calls. Review meeting 4/10/23	Reduced timetable Provided laptop. Back in lesson– attendance risen for 22% last week to 29% this week. Pastoral worker –continue to make weekly calls home. Review booked 15/11/23



### **Outcomes, positive or negative impact**

When taking out the outliers, attendance is currently 81% attendance – this includes students in our Tier 4 CAMHS Hospital

As students have medical appointments which can be out of county, it can affect attendance. Some students also feel unwell after treatment, especially chemotherapy, which can mean a drop in attendance.

Students in the Tier 4 CAMHS Hospital have to be guided by the medical team and may not be well enough to attend lessons, especially at the start of their admission.

Difficulties arise due to medical health conditions that mean students cannot engage with our provision. Other problems arise when CHES is not a suitable provision for a student and needs an SEN placement. The delay in a student being given an SEN placement can mean a lack of engagement and low attendance with CHES

In most cases, because students have an individualised package of education with small groups or 1-1 lessons, they can engage with us

The Pastoral Support workers have a positive impact on attendance. Their work to visit families at home, provide support and encouragement usually means that attendance and engagement increases.

The student above has had some difficulties in her home situation which have impacted on her attending lessons. We have liaised with the main registered school, and they have been supportive around calls to the family and attending meetings. A laptop for lessons was provided to support engagement as the student is in the online school – student had their own laptop, but this was not working well- the laptop and support has increased attendance.

# Case study – whole school approach linked to a trust wide strategy.

## St Columb Major Primary Academy

Attendance and belonging are at the heart of all that we do. It is high priority, from leadership to the classroom.

### Proactive

- Attendance Clinics –the headteacher holds regular attendance clinics and follow up with a letter pointing out the importance of attendance/actions discussed and agreed. The attendance team includes the School Administrator, Headteacher, PSA & SLT. The team look for patterns, analyse and monitor attendance weekly.
- Weekly attendance reviews – produced each week by the school's attendance lead. They show the absences of all pupils. These are shared at weekly staff meetings with teachers. Teachers are asked to select a pupil to speak with child and or parents to identify any barriers and find solutions.
- Teachers regularly share examples of successful impacts of these actions. Some of these are recorded in staff meeting minutes. Daily calling – attendance lead always calls if no specific reasons has been provided for a child's absence. A message is left to contact school if no answer and a follow up dojo message to report absence. Home visits are then conducted to support children coming into school and supporting families if required.
- Proactive telephone calling – headteacher encouraged staff to make proactive telephone calls to encourage attendance. For example: Phone calls to families prior to return from holidays.
- Meet and Greet- The headteacher, SLT and PSA consistently meet and greet pupils at the start of the day and look for specific opportunities to welcome children and parents. Support is offered to parents through meet and greet to overcome barriers to attendance.
- High Priority/Focus – The importance of attendance is high and included an annual attendance agreement sent out to stakeholders.
- There is clear evidence to show that regular attendance is high profile in the school and parents know about the expected attendance level of 96%.

### Reactive

- EWO – penalty notices/holiday and fined/ –we involve the EWO to refer to regarding penalty notices for holidays. Phone calls are made by the headteacher to discuss each exceptional leave request and followed up with a letter. Termly meetings with EWO to discuss strategies/next steps-where issues are persistent.
- Parent School Advisor – full time member of staff who is also assistant for the school. She carries out face-to-face meetings with families giving practical advice to overcome barriers to attendance. She also provides summary reports on attendance.
- Tackling minutes lost in learning- SLT supports the office with conversations – how can we support a change to make a difference, Attendance leaflet for parents- there are provided to parents to inform them of the importance of attendance within the school.
- Breakfast club free places are offered to support attendance – reduced minutes lost or support with childcare to improve attendance.

- School minibus- our caretaker and PSA collects 15 pupils daily on the minibus to address persistence absences and improve attendance at school. Currently all of our pupils are DP on bus. Supports families, creates new routines and school patterns, shared partnership with parents to ensure children are attending school.

### **Strategy**

- Trust Policy- there is an agreed trust policy for attendance which the school adheres to where attendance at school is robustly monitored and implemented.
- Governors – Attendance is featured at all governor meetings and governors are clear that this is a major school priority. Each term the governor responsible visits the school reviews information, look at coding, discuss strategies and feed this back at governor meetings.
- Termly trust meetings with strategic attendance lead for trust. Ensure we are up to date with all information regarding attendance. Template letters agreed, trust guidance, leaflets.

### **Outcomes, positive or negative impact**

- School attendance is consistently at 94.9% YTD 2022-2023.
- Persistent absence is 12.3 % 2022-2023 YTD which is significantly below national (22.3%).
- Minibus & breakfast club provision made a significant impact on attendance of target pupils.
- Home visits and involving all parents with PR and extended families makes the difference. Knowing the families individually is key to making the difference.
- Robust, consistently embedded procedures for attendance means everybody is aware we will discuss, offer support but change must happen.
- Use of PSA and external agencies to support families made a big difference.
- All stakeholders understand and are aware of the importance of attendance.

### **Next steps**

- To develop independence for pupils and families who use our minibus transport to enable them to independently achieve this.
- Address incidences of term time holidays
- Further reduce persistent absences focused around health/illness.



# Case study – Trust wide approach

At Truro and Penwith Academy Trust, we have devised and implemented a Trust Attendance Strategy utilising a tiered approach to improving and sustaining good attendance. Our approach centres on strong relationships and high expectations – which means that families feel supported. But they are also clear about expectations. Strong relationships and consistent messaging mean we can have difficult conversations where needed. The approach is based on a consistently sharp focus on data for individuals, particularly watching for behaviour change and emerging trends and patterns. The focus on individuals – rather than pupil groups supports our strategic work centred on needs, not labels:

1. Who are our inconsistent attenders?
2. Are these inconsistencies one off, or more of a pattern?
3. Are pupils from low-income groups / SEND / other vulnerabilities?
4. What might the drivers be?

We have worked hard to ensure a consistency of approach which has been adopted across the trust, but also allows flexibility for individual schools, settings and families where needed.

**Tier one** – universal: an approach rooted in positivity: ‘it’s great to see you’ and ‘have you had breakfast’ (for late arrivals), ‘do you need any equipment’ rather than ‘where have you been.’ Avoiding sarcasm (many pupils don’t have the confidence to engage with sarcasm). Every member of the school needed to adopt this approach. Pupils arriving back in school after an absence is not the time for challenge on uniform or equipment, or an enquiry highlighting that pupil’s absence. Communication across staff teams here is crucial to promoting belonging for the pupils.

**Tier two** – We target resource centred on pupils whose weeks are broken by absence. Conversations with pupils and families re centred around: ‘we notice, we care, what can we do to help.’ Broken weeks are more complex to address than a fixed period away with illness.

Where pupils have three or more broken weeks in a half term, a pupil support plan (PSP) is put in place, this is with the engagement and agreement of the parent and child and centred around identifying and removing barriers to attendance. The support plan is put in place ensuring that adjustment and support is offered and evidenced. Hearing the child’s voice is central to this: we capture the child’s views on their lived experience at school to lead the pupils support plan adjustments and actions.’ Where necessary and for hard-to-reach parents, staff will go out to the family if that is helpful. The pupil support plans centre around the school and the family’s responsibilities to the child. Everyone is explicitly clear about this. All partners – school, family, pupil adopt a ‘you said – we did approach.’

**Tier three** – We use the tier 2 information to measure the parents’ engagement with the support offered. Where families are not engaging with the tier two support, the child is moved to tier three which initiates the statutory intervention process and the possibility of proceedings to enforce parents’ legal duty to ensure their child has regular access to education. All actions are discussed and communicated clearly with parents and carers before formal action is taken and the tier 2 pupil support plan’s adjustments and actions remain available.



**Rita Rowson**  
**TPAT**

Rita sets out how the Trust has worked to support all pupils and families, including the most vulnerable, to create a sense of belonging. The Trust approach centres on a tiered model which intervenes where the need is greatest – pupils who have ‘broken weeks’ of attendance. The approach targets resource and energy at pupil and family need, rather than at crude data.



SCAN HERE TO WATCH THE  
FULL CASE STUDY VIDEO

# Case study – Opening Schools Facilities funding improved attendance and behaviour in Cornish schools

## Active Cornwall

Attendance is an ever-growing priority for secondary schools across Cornwall. If children and young people do not feel like they belong at school and don't see themselves as being successful at something, they are less likely to attend. This is not the only reason for non-attendance but, having listened to many voices recently through our work with schools, children and young people, this is clearly a significant factor.

Whilst the Opening Schools Facilities (OSF) funding from the Department for Education was introduced to support schools in opening their facilities to increase levels of physical activity amongst pupils after school hours, it has achieved so much more. It's evident through our regular engagement with Heads of PE and school leaders that this funding is raising the profile and priority of PE departments due to the positive impact their after-school provision is having upon pupil attendance and behaviour.

## Impact has been seen across the following schools:

- **Bodmin Community College** invested their funding into mixed martial arts and cycling projects, providing students with the opportunity to be more active in less traditional sports. The teachers tracked several students with one Year 10 male with special educational needs (SEN) improving his overall attendance by 10% with teachers reporting an improvement in his focus during lessons and a reduction in the number of negative points during the same period. A Year 8 male (SEN and Provision Plan) who is a HUB student removed from the main site due to several factors, has been attending the cycling sessions and during this time, teachers have been able to have constructive conversations about choices and actions. Consequently, after 5 weeks of cycling, he is now working towards returning to the mainstream College full time.
- Matt Pound, Head of PE at **St Ives Community School** reported that, due to the success of their football project, four 'hard to reach' girls in Year 9 with an average attendance below 85%, started to never miss a Friday (the same day as football club). St Ives itself is a highly affluent area yet it also has high levels of deprivation and a lack of facilities for young people within the community. With no other pitch in the town, pupils were breaking into the school to use the field simply so they could kick a ball around. The school therefore used their OSF funding to create a community football hub and was able to report an improvement in whole school attendance of over 4% during the same time period as the project they delivered.
- **Saltash Community School** realised that attendance improved if the after-school provision offer was right. Previously, after-school clubs were primarily geared towards those students who were interested in representing the school in competitions, focusing on traditional sports, and consequently only a small number of students took advantage of these opportunities.

Head of PE Robert Hawkins has worked tirelessly to improve this, using the OSF funding to create a climbing wall, explaining: "The aspects of climbing that are intrinsic to the activity are also those that we would promote for a long, healthy life – be these physical or mental."



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Furthermore, the very fact that this activity is removed from the 'standard' aspects of competitive sport makes it appealing to many of our young people and allows us an avenue to promote healthy living, teamwork, focus and creativity without any of this seeming like a lesson". As a result, they now have an increasing number of 'non-typical' students attending their after-school activity club with a direct positive effect on overall attendance – one student specifically stating that she only comes to school on Thursdays 'because climbing club is on'.

- **Poltair School** which has the second highest number of FSM children in the county, has created a BLK Box gym for students to use before and after school, complimenting existing provisions such as breakfast club. This gym initiative has proven to be a transformative solution to addressing attendance issues with rates rising from below to above 90%. Scott McNally, Head of Year 9 has observed what a positive impact the project has had, noting the change in not only attendance rates but students' social skills and physical and mental wellbeing.

Having awarded OSF funding in 19 schools across Cornwall, prioritised according to deprivation and pupils registered for benefits related free school meals, Active Cornwall have observed the direct correlation between their opening school facilities provision with improved attendance, behaviour and general wellbeing. CEO Paul Critchley commented 'We are thrilled at the impact this programme continues to have across schools in Cornwall. A demonstration of how investment and partnership bring not only inspiration and activity but wider whole school outcomes to school communities.'

### **Key Learnings:**

- PE Department profiles raised within the school and senior leaders because OSF funded projects address whole school priorities.
- The appeal of the before/after school offer positively impacts overall school attendance.
- Increased participation in physical activity through OSF projects improves overall behaviour both at school and in the community.
- OSF funding has enabled PE departments to change their behaviour and practises to try new things to engage a new audience.



## TRANSFORMING ATTENDANCE IN CORNWALL

**This project is part of a continuing programme with OneCornwall. If you would like to contribute, ask questions or just be informed on how it develops please contact us:**

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