Making Attendance Everyone's Business in Redcar & Cleveland

Solutions Workshop

8th May 2024

Suggested focus for action linked to the intervention themes of:

Effective parental communication and engagement

Sharing attendance good practice and learning

Mentoring, coaching and peer support (this evolved to 'trusted person roles')

This Project is funded by Anglo American and managed by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

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www.skyblue.org.uk/attendance

The need for more trusted person roles in more schools and community contexts

Focus on the role of **'trusted person'** in different contexts; support these people, learn from how they affect attendance behaviours and then roll out this practice where it will work best. This could look different in each setting, for example, the **parental support advisor** role exists in some schools. In other contexts this might mean establishing, or making the case for, **dedicated family support officers** who are skilled to talk with families. This also means maximising the skills of people already employed in the Borough with these skills so they can be cascaded more widely in more schools recognising the finite resources available to professionals managing complex caseloads with young people and their families.

Step 1: Obtain and share the **parent support advisor role** and **family support workers** job specifications (DfE have been asked to support this task as well as finding out more about the role of **attendance advisors / mentors** [in Middlesbrough]).

Step 2: Identify how these trusted roles are or could be in place to work on parental engagement and communication in more schools across the Borough. We need to audit / understand better the availability of these and other roles in each school including **mentoring** [which we should also assess to see what is already going on, its impact, which schools use mentors for their pupils and staff] and **buddying** [language will be important here too].

Step 3: Develop support / training / development / community of practice and peer support for these different roles and / or make the case for investment in each setting where it is expected to make a valuable difference to attendance behaviours (e.g. include in any selected place based pilot where feasible).

Enablers: Staff to have specialist training to support children and families. ALL to have empathetic / trauma informed (better still trauma attuned) approach

'Scrap automated communications by schools to being human (again)'

Dilemma: communication – lost opportunities. Suggested solution: Pilot with a couple of schools who use text message / automated answering service for attendance to trial going back to a 'live' person to build a relationship – it will make a huge difference! Best case scenario: Better relationships through 'humanness.' Worst case scenario: Won't make a difference if not tried. Gut feelings: we have lost some of those relationships enjoyed in the past. Pluses and minuses: - + Reduce the 'reaction' of a text message approach to being proactive in approach with a live person.

Step 1: Revisit Laurence Jackson to find out how many / why the dedicated person to answer absence calls is not in place any more. Find out what worked well, what could be changed / improved and understand why it stopped.

Step 2: Two schools agree to a pilot programme to remove automated services and text messaging.

Step 3: Explore wider staff relationships and behaviours, and the first point of contact for pupils and parents/families in school) – what is the experience like? From the school crossing patrol to the receptionist to the teachers and tutors. Is the experience positive, welcoming, supportive and are barriers (perceived or actual) purposely and consciously removed. Pilot small scale 'visible consistency' approach to welcome / relationships at school.

Enablers: Staff to have specialist training to support children and families. ALL to have empathetic / trauma informed approach.

Attendance drops-in / clinics

Extend the concept of attendance surgeries across Redcar & Cleveland where schools and local authority services/ professionals / VCSE sector come at a set time to 'pop in and discuss any concerns together; and how to maximise inclusive approaches. Attendance surgeries / clinics / drops-ins might look different because they will need to be mixed methods – face to face, in school, away from school and virtual. The attendance drop-in for a parent or child who doesn't want to talk with their school because the relationship has broken down between them may look different to an attendance surgery between school staff and professionals, for example in the RCBC attendance and welfare team.

This idea might be further extended to simply imagining that any parent or family member or child has a concern – and it includes their attendance, perhaps a parent worried about lots of things, but they are worried about their child's risk of not attending school in future – where do they turn, who do they reach out to, especially if school isn't their preference? How is the current information system organised to cater for this eventuality, or if it exists in another form e.g. a parent is worried about their child's mental health, what are the professional prompts in place to proactively seek out signs of potential absence from school in future? There is said to be good practice of a similar nature in place for SEND children so how can that be applied to this wider system for school absence prevention? Solutions:

1. Attendance surgeries to engage parent in school; RCBC attendance surgeries to offer good practice on resources at ground level; and community surgeries
2. Being more inclusive to encourage engagement e.g. electronic communication (website easy to access and understand and being mindful of low literacy levels in some parts)
3. Mentoring groups - engaging with young people / parents
4. Inviting secondary school parents / families into school to promote pride

Enablers: Consistency in school of staff (lower staff turnover; continuity of relationships for young people and families). Worst case scenario: Non-engagement of families and a lack of feeling of belonging.

Inspiring conference to celebrate and share best practice

A mix of activity is required to extract and share the best practice found inside and outside of Redcar & Cleveland that will reduce the risks of and reverse the levels of persistent and severe absence. In every school, college and learning setting there should be a predisposition to share the positive work of students regularly. Whilst interactions between school staff and professionals could involve scoping conversations to share and celebrate good practice. RCBC attendance surgeries could be facilitated in each school to offer good practice on resources at ground level and include a face to face meeting at the start of next term. To bring visibility to the many ways in which persistent and severe attendance could be reduced and reversed it is proposed that an inspiring event should be hosted in 2025; the ambition being to showcase what we're already doing well in the Borough but with a clear ambition to identify schools / settings / system partners – 'champions' - willing to try something new.

Step 1: Plan a conference with inspiring keynote (e.g. Paul Dix to talk about 'visible consistencies' and belief that 'when the adults change everything changes') and good practice workshops linked to effective interventions. Step 2: Advertise / plan for 3 follow up research projects – 'all have to sign up for one'.

Enabler ('wish-list 'would be nice...) : Introduce an Attendance Co-ordinator for the Borough building relationships within the system for the long-term and making this activity the norm in all settings.

Transitions: Proactive and preventative attendance support before they happen

Transitions happen at different stages of the child and family life course. It is most often thought of as the change for a child moving from their primary school to secondary school, but any transition is a point of vulnerability where attendance and other negative behaviours can be catalysed such as mid-year or managed placements / moves. Transitions are more commonplace, and therefore solutions appear to be better known and practiced for service children and young carers (e.g. passports or equivalent processes and techniques of care and support).

Step 1: Speak to schools / academy trusts about current transitions support practice with a focus on preventative actions to reduce the likelihood of a child becoming persistently / severely absent

Step 2: Gather this practice through a face to face Attendance Network meeting to build relationships and deeper understanding and exchange of the ways to adopt practical actions that can work in more schools

Step 3: Explore and strive for a consistent approach for schools to ease transfers and transition for pupils

Step 4: Support transition (mid-year, managed moves) with (educational psychology expertise to support) 'pushes and pulls' models alongside the creation and availability of a 'transition pack' for all schools

Step 5: Invest in / implement trial 1 in the 2024/25 academic year with a willing school/s

Inclusion and flexibility

More generally, there was a feeling amongst some of the workshop participants that even more needs to be done to promote inclusive practice across the system. Flexibility was also thought to be important in being able to cater for those children and young people more likely to be at risk of persistent and severe absence – not just in schools, but across the professional system too. This becomes problematic though we find when each part of the system has duties to comply with prevailing legal frameworks.

> "Some schools are too rigid on adapting timetables after extended periods of absence. More than one participant felt some schools have been inflexible, strict and draconian. Following push back from communities it is now felt that they are slowly changing and adopting a Thrive model."

In suggesting 'flexibility,' we may need to dig deeper into this topic to discover what this means in practice, what flexibilities are possible and what their effects might be on the overall attendance – and subsequent safety and wellbeing of every child and young person and family members. Ideas included:

1. **Truly accessible attendance and welfare meetings e.g. a**ll Attendance Case Conferences (ACCS[1]) offered virtually? – check acronym with Grant. Worst case scenario: No show meetings offered virtually.

2. More flexible application of policies and procedures to 'not one size fits all' or graduated approach.

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[1] a formal meeting which begins the process following attempted and unsuccessful solutions…