

# Challenging Disadvantage: Project Case Study

## School context

Woodlands Primary School is a large three-form entry primary school in Tonbridge with 22.3% Pupil Premium.

## 1: What problem were you looking to solve?

Our data analysis from previous years continued to show that our disadvantaged pupils suffered the most as a result of the pandemic. Attendance of Pupil Premium children is one of the biggest challenges we now face. During our Pupil Progress Reviews, teachers talked consistently about their concern for the attendance of many of our Pupil Premium children. Our attendance data since September 2020 indicated that attendance among disadvantaged pupils has been between 5% lower than for non-disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, lateness is affecting our pupils because they might be arriving having missed key aspects of our day e.g. phonics. The impact of this poor attendance on pupil attainment is dishearteningly clear. 18% of our Pupil Premium children across the school have SEND – their attendance is 86% collectively and the vast majority of these did not make expected progress in 2021-22. We wanted to achieve and sustain improved attendance and punctuality for all pupils, particularly our disadvantaged pupils.

## 2. What were the anticipated barriers/challenges?

Given recent recommendations from the DfE, we wanted to involve teachers in the process of improving attendance of our PP children more, which we knew would have workload implications. We also realised that some teachers would have some concerns around addressing the issue of attendance with certain parents, given the sensitivity of the subject matter and the potentially negative reaction of some. We also believed that our Pastoral Support Manager was already working closely with our families where attendance was a significant concern and the impact of this had been mixed. Consequently, we were unsure of which children we should focus on. Given the size of our school, the amount of children was also a challenging factor.

## 3. What did you do?

We were committed to involving our teachers more in supporting improved attendance because we know that they have a good knowledge of attendance for pupils and can support the child and family on a daily basis, as they are the person with most contact with the child and parents in school.

Knowing that we wanted to involve our teachers and that our Pastoral Support Manager was already working with certain families regarding attendance on a regular basis, we made the decision to narrow down our targeted pupils; consequently we identified pupils with attendance between 85% and 95%. We looked at these children, prioritised Pupil Premium children first and then added in pupils with SEND and also pupils with low attendance over a three-year period.

We wanted all teachers to meet with parents of the identified children to discuss attendance specifically. They would let the parent know that we had concerns for their child's attendance, discuss the issues causing this and then offer ideas for support to

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improve this going forward. To alleviate the worry about addressing these issues with parents face-to-face, where they may be a negative reaction, SLT wrote a suggested agenda, listed possible causes that may come up in discussion, as well as potential solutions to these. Although, there was no requirement to adhere to them, this was all written as a script for teachers to use as required. Teachers would set a target for attendance with parents in the meeting and would then meet the parents again six weeks later to review the outcomes. After we identified two or three children per class, we introduced our plan to teachers and then gave them a two-week period to have their meetings.

### 4. How are you monitoring the success of this intervention?

We have analysed our attendance of the pupils targeted six weeks after the meetings with staff were completed. Out of all children – 44 out of 47 had improved their attendance in this period, including 28 out of 29 PP children.

### 5. What is the impact of the project?

The impact of this project showed us that utilising teachers to support improved attendance is the right approach. The scale of the project in terms of numbers of pupils targeted was manageable. The challenge for next year, when we intend to roll this out, is scaling it up and ensuring follow-up meetings are held. Furthermore, although the majority of pupils' attendance improved, many still fell below 95%. This shows that the project would need to fit into a wider programme of support for parents and children where low attendance has been identified as an issue.

### Next steps:

- Create robust systems and processes to ensure attendance data monitoring identifies children with low attendance
- Encourage teachers to be more actively involved in monitoring attendance data
- Scale up this process tested in this project, so that it creates a year-long programme of intervention and support for improving attendance