



Attendance – Positive Contagions

Written by Alan Pearson

Here we are in 2025 – A newish Government and a new push on attendance. We have new documents centred around improving attendance for pupils, from both the DFE and Ofsted and along with this we have a wave of bulletins and columns with an attendance theme so here is another one!

Do I agree? YES. Luckily enough attendance has been at the centre of everything in school since taking up my headship, many years ago. My thinking is, you can have the best team, the best teachers, the best support staff, the best curriculum, the best planning, the best Pupil Premium strategy, the best... but if the pupils are not here then; lack of progress, lack of belonging, wavering resilience... and more.



Attendance needs to be your core and strong attendance is vital for many things – positive outcomes, friendships, resilience and in my opinion, life skills. So the key message is; be here 100% and give 100% for both pupils and staff. And if this key value is supported by parents', children will thrive and flourish.

I'll start by saying that attendance needs to feature in your School Improvement Plan. You need to budget for it, much like you would do with trying to raise standards in maths or literacy. I would say even more so. It needs to be a whole school approach with all staff contributing to this improvement area. It needs to be constant, and revisited every year with new energy and fresh ideas. After ten years of near misses, we achieved our attendance target of **97.25%, (97.3%) for 2024/2025**. So for us it certainly wasn't a one year hit.

My advice would be to create a positive infectious culture and release Positive Contagions. Short term, medium and long term events are important and contribute to attendance improvement. Talk about attendance weekly, and at every opportunity, celebrate it with awards and prizes. Some of these can be from charitable organisations. Medium term events will allow you to keep it simmering or bring it to boiling point, such as a free raffle for every child who is here for a half term, a giant Easter egg, chocolate hamper or a BMX bike are great rewards! Yearly, celebrate and share success together, however you do it but share this crucial value. Consistent positive communication – Is attendance displayed prominently in your organisation? Does it communicate what it needs to do? Are there clear targets? Is it competitive? Is it appropriate for your age range so it can be accessed and understood?

Many of you will have children you are targeting for attendance, **however, as your attendance improves, a pupil/s or group of pupils with poor attendance will stand out like a fire in a forest.**

Like many targets you are trying to achieve it is not easy. Awkward conversations, meetings, acting quickly and decisively with support. Staff in the office are absolutely crucial, they are on the front line and need to be supportive however need to be straight talking and translate the school values. This is done with the child in mind, knowing that a child only gets 1 chance, and in many cases for long term sustainability it is **tough love that is needed.**

Attendance does cost time/money but it is worth every penny. Positive success can help break negative and repeating patterns and releasing positive contagions is the remedy for poor attendance.