CASE STUDY – ATTENDANCE DATA

LONGDEAN SCHOOL, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

Background

Graham Cunningham started as Deputy Head at Longdean School in January 2007. The Head Teacher Mr R Bryant was appointed in September 2006.   Longdean suffers from the 'poor Bennett's End image' including low aspirations and expectations. The community perception was that 'it is a rough school' and 'that is where they go if you can't get into Hemel Hempstead School'. Buildings are tired, in need of repair but gradually some newer bits have been added and a gradual revamp of the decoration is taking place. This has been well received by the students and improved their motivation and desire to be there. Students have been involved strongly in developing the school environment.

One of the main issues they needed to tackle was a steady decline in attendance 2004 – 2006.

- o   The official attendance figure when Graham joined was 90% attendance, but with inaccurate use of data the actual figure was more like 88%.

- o   Attendance was below LEA target of 91.4% & 93% internal target.

- o   The school was allocated Persistent Absence status in 2006 with 128 students meeting the criteria, that was 11% of students.

- o   Large numbers of students were also persistently late to school and lessons.

- o   Internal truancy was also a problem. Students would register and then not attend lessons. It was particularly difficult to identify how bad this was due to lack of data & effective monitoring system.

- o   Lots of holidays were taken by parents in term time.

- o   There was no real system for monitoring or addressing attendance issues.

KS4 Data

2005   48%   5A* to C

Objectives

1. Improve levels of achievement through improved attendance data.

2. Remove school from 'Persistent Absence' status.

3. Raise the profile of Attendance by linking it to Attainment. Ensure the link is understood at all levels, Teachers, Pupils and Parents.

4. Develop a system for dealing with Attendance.

5. To become not just data rich but data literate.

6. Meet internal and external Attendance targets.

Implementation

The school worked with the LA Attendance & Behaviour Link to develop an Action Plan. This was supported by the RAG (Red, Amber, Green) document which was a very useful starting point in self analysis relating to what the school did well in relation to attendance, what people were doing in relation to attendance and where the school could improve. This plan eventually led to the creation of an 'Attendance & Punctuality Policy' for the school. Attendance has been one of the five key priorities in the last two years. Attendance is a Performance Management Objective for all staff from the Head, to SLT & to middle leaders and class teachers. Department Improvement Plans (DIP) and Pastoral Improvement Plans (PIP) also refer to attendance.

Longdean School appointed two Pastoral Managers and two Attendance Managers to track attendance both to school and in every lesson. Implementing Sims.net Lesson Monitor was identified as the system that would best enable them to monitor lesson attendance effectively. The implementation of Lesson Monitor started in 2006/07 with some staff taking registers electronically. The implementation happened before the policy was finalised and helped define the policy.

From September 2007 Lesson Monitor was implemented fully throughout the school. Every lesson is now electronically registered. Workstations in classrooms and teacher's laptops are used. Staff training has been run twice and teaching staff have in general found the system easy to use. Only two key areas presented difficulties, PE and Technology. Both these areas are currently using laptops or paper registers to register pupils. The school hopes to move to using Mobile technology for registration of PE in the near future. As well as recording lesson attendance teachers are now able to record:

o   Lates, and how many minutes late.

o   Comments e.g. homework not handed in, PE kit missing.

o   View a student's attendance pattern throughout the day – how many of the previous lessons had they been late to that day?

o   Behaviour incidents in the class could be recorded direct from the register.

    o Achievements awarded in the class could be recorded direct from the register.

The school were keen to raise the profile of attendance in the local community and ensure everyone was aware that they were actively tackling the problem. They would tell the local papers of any success stories e.g. 100% attendance over 5 years. Attendance data was shared with parents at every opportunity – e.g. through school reports and through school newsletter. They reward improvement and 100% attendance and ensure the rewards are worthwhile. Reporting Analysis provided by Lesson Monitor together with reports the school have designed themselves have proved invaluable.

Procedures

Procedures were set in place. The appointment of the two Pastoral Managers and two Attendance Manager ensured that those procedures could be adhered to. They knew that simply getting teachers to record attendance to lessons does not improve attendance; it is what you do with that data that matters. Making good use of the data they now had meant they could really begin to tackle the attendance issues.

A common theme has become a % target for attendance in lessons in each KS4 subject. This has played a major role in getting everyone involved in raising attendance. Attendance and behaviour targets are placed everywhere in school – everyone owns them.

> "*If I want information then I need to have it at my fingertips!! So we are data rich, know how to use the data and we make people accountable*"

Rules were defined:

    o Late in morning is 8.30am.

    o Any pupil late for registration is tracked throughout the day.

    o A list of regular truants were identified and tracked daily.

    o A general check is done daily on each Key Stage and Lesson and figures reported to Pastoral Manager and Head of year.

    o A sanctions system has been implemented, 3 lates out of possible 35 (25 lessons and 10 registrations) = one hour school detention.

    o All names on central Sims .net database, accessed by pastoral managers, Pastoral Director of Learning etc.

Reporting

The four staff appointed are key to the success of the attendance initiative. They control and analyse the data. They identify trends. They spot problems and intervene allowing teachers to be active rather than reactive when dealing with students and parents over attendance amongst other issues. They also enable the school to carry out their pledge to contact all parents on the first day of absence and also reply to any parent calls within 24 hours. They also offer the right mix of support and challenge for students.

- o Weekly reports showing Attendance data related to the same time last year, week by week, form by form, Year 7 against Year 7 BUT also critically Year 8 against when they were in Year 7.

- o Each year group and form are set targets. If year 7 achieved 95% last year and that is accepted as a job well done, then that is at least their target for Year 8.

- o Daily actions – First day response.

- o Weekly actions – Year & Tutor group data.

- o Fortnightly actions – Commendations, less than 90% letter, attendance league tables

- o Half termly actions – 100% attendance & improvement letters, interform competitions.

- o Analysis of reasons for absence in same half term last year.

- o Termly – Roll of honour board.

- o Attendance League tables in main school area– name and shame – students love it. The school are sensitive over some student figures for example a school refuser.

- o Assemblies – trophy for best forms.

Reward is a huge part of the school ethos and recognising and celebrating excellent or improved attendance at both individual and group level is a part of this. They reward every fortnight, every half term and every term. The students had a huge part to play in designing their reward programme through a strong student voice and they absolutely love it.

Linking Attendance, Achievement and Behaviour

By using the attendance data on pupils above and below 90% and linking this to departmental exam reports & analysis it was easy to see that students with more than 90% attendance achieved better than students with less than 90% attendance. This was very powerful for the Director of Learning as the difference was major!! The sharing of this data empowered staff to realise the importance of tackling poor attendance.

At Parent's Evenings they triangulate the Attendance, Behaviour and Attainment data and are able to clearly demonstrate to parents that poor attendance and behaviour is more likely to lead to poor attainment. Teachers will regularly use laptops at parents evenings so that the can share Sims .net attendance data and patterns with parent as well as behaviour data.

All parent evenings are used as an opportunity to display attendance and behaviour data on the welcome board. Here are examples of very powerful data that they use around the school, with parents and with students at re-integration meetings, assemblies etc

- o 93% attendance will give you a 73% chance of achieving 5A*-C in your GCSEs whatever your ability.

- o Below 90% will give you only a 27% chance of achieving 5A*-C in your GCSEs whatever your ability.

- o 90% attendance sounds good but one day in 10 over 5 years = 95 days = 19 weeks = ½ year!!

- o Average earnings of permanently excluded students = £9,000 against £32,000 of those who stay in school.

- o If attendance improves by 1%, attainment improves by 5/6% (DCSF).

The link between attendance, behaviour, achievement and earnings is plastered around the school. They take every opportunity to link attendance and behaviour to the Every Child Matters agenda.

All holiday requests are linked to the pupil's attainment, achievement and attendance record for the current academic year and the previous year. They reject any requests for students with attendance below 93% and send a letter to explain the link between attendance and achievement and attitude to learning grades.

Outcomes

- Attendance has improved from 88.6% to 92.7% in 5 terms.

- Persistent Absence rates reduced from 11% to 6.1% (128 to 56 students).

- No longer on Persistent Absence status.

- Punctuality no longer an issue with the number of pupils in detentions for punctuality more than halved.

- Almost all students know their attendance figure and are competitive over this with their peers.

- Recognised as a 'Model of Good Practice' and invited to speak at County & National Conferences.

- Identified groups of students with attendance issues e.g. Asian students taking holidays around Easter. Invite parents in to talk about this and emphasise the impact this will have on attainment and achievement

KS4 Forecasts for this year (2007 in brackets):

- 70%   5 A*-C (48%)

- 61.4%   5 A*-C Inc. English & Maths (43%)

- 99.5%   1 A*-G – only one pupil in over 200 not attaining (97%)

Graham Cunningham (Deputy Head) is happy to be contacted by other schools to discuss this case study and can be contacted at g.cunningham@longdean.herts.sch.uk

School IT Systems Support would like to thank Graham for his time in making it possible for us to compile this case study. We are happy to hear from other schools who would like to share their good practice in use of MIS data.