

South West Family Values has been providing an attendance service in Schools in Torbay since 2014. The Welfare and Attendance officer role was created due to a need identified by many schools to have workers on the ground who have specific skills and legal knowledge on attendance related issues. We are now in a position to be offering a service to the whole of Devon.

The strategies that we use to improve attendance can be flexible and can vary from school to school depending on need. Some of the strategies we have used to improve attendance include initial consultation to identify need and areas of concern; targeted casework, home visits, attendance at TAF/CP/CIN Meetings, advice and guidance around procedures, full data audit, action planning, preparing for Ofsted and door knocks to families where a child is not in school and there has been no contact. We are often the first to locate a child not in school and equally the first to hear about problems that a family are facing because poor attendance is such an early indicator.

An example of the work that we do with families; I worked with a family who were experiencing some difficulties around finances and inappropriate accommodation. Mum was under a lot of stress and at times getting up and getting her child to school felt like too big of a task. I met with Mum regularly, completed a parenting contract and undertook home visits. Ideas for changing the morning and bedtime routines were discussed; Mum was aware of what was expected of her and what to do if things became too hard to manage but also the potential consequences of not improving attendance were explained. Mum suffered with some anxiety but engaged well with all me, attempting to put into place all the things I suggested. Attendance improved from 82% in 2016/17 to 97% at the end of 2017/18.

In a recent review of the service, we asked Head Teachers to provide feedback. When asking the Head Teachers what our Attendance and Welfare team have done to improve attendance in their school, we were told that:
"Reviewing policies, tightening up on monitoring absences and sending letters home, written and helped carry out action plans, carries out meetings with parents to try and avoid deteriorating attendance, setting up parenting contracts where this does not work, challenging the school to be more vigilant in carrying out policy – fining, medical evidence requests etc, advising school, working alongside headteacher, pastoral lead and admin in their roles around attendance." *"It is the best it has been for a number of years. We are aware of patterns and concerns and its easy to report to Governors and concerned agencies."*

OFSTED place a huge priority on attendance data, particularly on vulnerable groups. Here are some comments made within published inspection reports about the work we are doing alongside Heads and Attendance Leads in schools. “Your actions to improve pupils’ attendance have been successful. Overall attendance of pupils is now above the national average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has also reduced and is now in line with the national average. There are encouraging signs of improvements”

For more information, advice or to discuss costs please contact South West Family Values on 01803 611760 or email info@southwestfamilyvalues.org.uk