



Governors Monitoring Visit - 2020/2021

Focus Monitoring Area: Attendance

Name of Governor: Jane Springham/ Rev. Jo Pestell

Names of Staff and Student Council member (if applicable): N/A

Date of Visit: 24/6/21

Focus Area for this visit: Attendance

Reference to School Growth Plan: Priority 2:

To maintain a drive for high attendance and positive attitudes to school from all children throughout the academic year.

- Review and implementation of the school attendance policy in light of COVID-19 specific changes to regulations and usual practice.
- Enhanced monitoring of attendance, particularly of key groups eg. SEND, vulnerable and those with a social worker – with necessary actions taken.
- Readiness focus at the beginning of each term to ensure children and their families are well prepared.

Documents looked at in preparation for visit:

Attendance policy

Headteacher reports from FGB 1&3 and attendance reports from FGB 2,4,6

Initial Planned Questions for this visit: See below

Findings and Evidence seen/discussed:

How has the monitoring of attendance changed over the year to take account of the requests from government and to help our children's needs during the pandemic? How are you tracking patterns of attendance for key groups?

- Tracey has worked through a very difficult year for recording attendance. Since taking on this post most of Tracey's experience has been overlaid by the pandemic. The DfE asked for a large amount of data, which Tracey and Luisa worked to correctly input each day. This has been an intensive task – but has become a little easier over time. School is back to using SIMS to help with this task now.

- Tracey works with Sandra Baldwin following up absences with phone calls each day, to ensure we are always on top of any absences.

- Tracey monitors attendance every day, knows the daily %, looks at patterns each 2-3 days to see if there are any areas of concern. Where there is a concern a home visit will be made if contact has not been made after 2 days of trying by phone. All our vulnerable children are carefully monitored for attendance along with other groups of e.g. Pupil Premium and Free School Meals. Also assesses data on attendance fortnightly.

- Tracey has developed her own spreadsheets to help her track attendance carefully across the school, which gives her lots of evidence to help her approach individual circumstances over the short and longer term. One example of this is how Tracey tracks how many children are on each 'stage' of our Attendance policy process.

This term has seen a sharp increase in unauthorised absence, mostly from extended leave requests which have not been granted.

However, the school's attendance overall has held up very well considering the extraordinary, ongoing circumstances of the year. (94.8% for terms 1-5 ,excluding reception and travellers)

What have been the difficulties or opportunities with the school having to work in bubbles? Have you been able to work with class teachers as much as you might have liked to? Have you found new ways of working with them?

- Whilst being unable to go into class/ see staff in the usual ways, Tracey has strong relationships with staff, and she has worked with them to ensure they alert her to any absences across the year, not just vulnerable children. The pandemic has brought to light some new/unseen issues for families we may not have encountered before.

- Tracey also stressed the teamwork across the school that gives attendance a high profile across school

What have been the biggest challenges for improving attendance this year - are they different from last year?

- One of the biggest strengths of having Tracey working as Attendance Officer especially this year is that she has strong relationships with our families. Tracey has made sure she is 'visible' by being at the school gate each day, welcoming families in, ready to talk about any issues and there as a re-assurance to families who may be feeling fearful/unsure about sending children in. This has been particularly important this year as the school has had to divide into 'bubbles' so that visits into classrooms and face to face meetings with families in school have been otherwise impossible.
- Tracey noted that perhaps the biggest challenge to attendance this year has centred around mental health issues amongst our parent population. Tracey along with other members of the Inclusion team have worked to help families, re-assuring them that school is as secure as possible. In the Autumn there were doorstep visits to encourage those reluctant to return and we saw attendance rise to normal levels. As cases rose, we saw attendance affected again. For some parents there has been a real struggle to balance how they feel they are being a 'good' parent, by either sending children in or keeping them off to protect them/family members. Again, there has been a sense of isolation for some families – perhaps cut off from their usual support networks and also unable to access outside agencies in the usual ways.
- We noted that Tracey's role as attendance officer dovetails into her Family Support Work and Safeguarding Designated Lead roles. As a key member of the Inclusion Team she has the experience to approach attendance issues on a very personalised basis and she has wide experience to draw on when dealing with individuals. We know that poor attendance is very often connected to other complex family issues.
- Tracey has a school mobile number which families can call her directly on. This is particularly helpful when there may be some reluctance on the part of an individual to call the 'office' number. This clearly illustrates the 'bridge of trust' Tracey has built with individuals/families.
- Some of our usual attendance approaches have been impacted by the pandemic – for example the successful 'Walking Bus'. It is hoped a revamped version of this will re-start when circumstances allow.
- However, Tracey also mentioned the positive approach used regarding attendance across the school. For example, Tracey has maintained the attendance boards in the playground across the year. She has maintained issuing rewards (stickers) for improvements in attendance and her genial, positive, friendly and straightforward manner is certainly an encouragement to families to attend.

How do you work with the wider Inclusion Team/ outside agencies to help improve attendance for individuals or groups in school?

- Tracey noted the importance of the Inclusion Team Forum that meets weekly and provides a space for the different team members to share information and pool their knowledge to help individual families. CPOMs is also used across the school to ensure sharing of information and consistent reporting.
- Tracey has good links with outside agencies. She works with the LA Inclusion Officer, who can offer advice, the CME (Children Missing from Education) Team, Will Beade who can advise around traveller issues (e.g. travelling for Business Purposes). Tracey works with colleagues in secondary schools who have siblings of our children to share information and check for concerns. She also maintains an awareness of how other schools are affected by COVID and looks at the regular COVID reports produced by LA/DfE

Looking forward to next year what do you think the priorities might be for attendance? Are there particular groups you might like to work with more?

- Tracey has lots of ideas for how she would like to make a further impact on attendance next year, hopefully when things are more 'normal'.
- Re-start on the planned work to address the 'lates' – we have a regular set of families who are late to school.
- Work more with our traveller community further building relationships to improve attendance for this group.
- Tracey also sees that there is a chance to work more with the SENDCO to help children with My Plans/My Plans+ to achieve their attendance targets.
- Two attendance improvement plans have recently started and Tracey anticipates using these more again when circumstances allow. This year penalty notices have not been used.

Have you been able to access any training this year to help you in your role?

- Tracey has not been able to access a lot of training this year as such, however, she is part of the GSP attendance monitoring network and completed DISCOVER, a course connected to SIMS (Schools Information Management System) and attendance recording.

Since our visit the impact of the third wave is being felt much more across school with several year groups having to isolate, which will obviously skew the attendance figures once more. Whilst we hear that 'bubbles' are no longer to be utilised from 19th July we do not yet know if there will be any further changes to the DfE's approach to attendance for September.

- Tracey felt Zoom access and laptops for children has been helpful with home learning whilst children have not been able to physically come to school.

- Jo and I thanked Tracey for her clear commitment, passion and enthusiasm for her post and her wish for all our children to benefit from as much time as school as possible so they can access a full education and enjoy the social element of school too. We very much agreed with her that she should be proud of her work this year in keeping our attendance figures up in such difficult circumstances.

Evidence of Christian Distinctiveness: Tracey's commitment to her work and our families shines through! By building up strong trusting relationships across our families Tracey is able to make a real difference to the lives of the children and families who are often facing complex difficulties which build barriers to learning. The role of the Attendance officer embedded within the Inclusion team shows the school's continued commitment to seeing education in a holistic light at Kingsholm.

Questions/follow-up points for discussion with headteacher and for future visits:

- Follow up on any further changes from govt re attendance
- Look at ideas to update attendance report to governors
- Follow up on Tracey's plans for next year
- Follow up on supervision opportunity for Tracey to ensure continuity here, and for her to be able to share her learning.

Date for next visit: TBC