**Attendance Report – September 2020 – December 2020.**



It is not surprising that our overall attendance in the Autumn term 2020 is down on last year. At any one day during this term we have between 10 and 40 students self-isolating across the year groups and towards the end of this period had whole year groups isolating. We also had from 8 – 15 families refusing to send their children into school for fear of coronavirus, without any known contact with positive cases, and although these absences were unauthorised, the authority made it clear to us in September when we enquired about one particular family’s blanket refusal to send their child in that they would be authorising penalty fines or pursuing prosecutions during this period. It is also unlikely that we would have started these proceedings ourselves. As governors can see – as we moved later into the term, so the effects of Coronavirus isolation grew and our December attendance was the lowest it has been for a long time.

Our Attendance Officers, Linda Jones and Lynn Davis have been inundated by calls from anxious families requiring advice and guidance about sending their child to school during the Autumn term, and at times those call have not been particularly pleasant as some parents have been unable to remain calm when enquiring about attendance rules.

Having said this, overall our attendance has held up pretty well given the issue that we are all aware of. There are two key areas to explain a noticeable decline:

1. LAC – we have only two looked after children in the school. One child in Y7 had 100% attendance. The other child in Y10 – had a mental health breakdown in September. Her attendance tailed off and the team supporting her, including the virtual school and social workers agreed that whilst she started on her Life Story therapeutic course, she should work from home. Up until December, she was unable to work at all, but has gradually started to be able to engage and is accessing our home school liaison tutor online. She and her foster carers have bi weekly calls from school. The reason why this breakdown was so complete was that she has just started on life story work, pushed for via LAC reviews. This work is supposed to be completed with LAC children by the age of 7, but we are finding more and more cases where this has not happened, as it is a long, painful and often broken process. We are hoping that this child will complete reintegration soon after lockdown ends, as she is certainly engaging well with the tutor and is staring to consider her online timetable. The life story work continues and may well be nearly over by the time we expect children to be fully back at school. The point is that this long absence would have happened with or without coronavirus.
2. Oasis – the attendance of the children to the Oasis is always fragile. This year it has been further hampered by the school’s need to limit access to the Oasis when Julie Pitkin has been required to shield due to her extremely vulnerable status. Although we have provided other support through our SEND team, change is not always conducive to help children already struggling to maintain their status at school. We also have 6 children connected with the Oasis, including the child described above who have required mental health hospital treatment for long periods of time, and/or who have significant social worker involvement in their lives. When it has not been possible to come to school, Julie has worked from home providing constant telephone and online support to these families, sending detailed notes to the safeguarding team and proving a mainstay of our overall safeguarding knowledge about vulnerable children.

During the new lockdown phase we are currently in – the Pastoral and Interventions team have seamlessly restarted their weekly vulnerable family phone calls. This is reported back and recorded on a spreadsheet – so that we are aware of the whereabouts and wellbeing of all of our children in this category. This involves around 20 staff – and the calls are often long and require intervention to make sure that those families are supported. I would therefore like to pay tribute to those staff as well – most of whom are not teachers but are fulfilling their support roles without question and often going above and beyond expectations of them as always.

Jenny Comerford: January 2021