Great Expectations Case Study
The Marlborough Science Academy - Attendance

Focus Area

This case study will focus on attendance as for us, in most year groups there was a significant gap between the disadvantaged students and others within their cohorts.

Aims/Rational

Our issue regarding attendance had not appeared out of the blue. For a number of years we had tried all sorts of incentives (some with the usual flaws) to raise the profile of good attendance and encourage staff to take more responsibility. We had introduced initiatives such as;

- Pizza Friday for the tutor group with the best attendance
- Gift tokens, some of significant monetary value, for those with 100% attendance over a period of time
- Mentions in the newsletter
- Parents evenings
- The addition of attendance figures on our grade cards
- Holiday requests having to go through formal meetings with the head/deputy head teacher
- As always focused use of our attendance improvement officer (AIO) which became less effective as the hours dedicated to Marlborough significantly dropped.

Our aim was to further develop our procedures, analysis of data and to further engage all our community, supporting our most vulnerable students through a more forensic approach, as well as through the appointment of our own in school full time home AIO. It has been well documented by the department for education, in their document 'the link between absence and attainment at key stage two and key stage four' as well as their 'improving attendance at school'.

Background Context

Whilst situated in what would be considered an affluent area we are on the edge of a super output area with high levels of deprivation including; high levels of poverty, high levels of cultural deprivation, lack of aspiration and lack of parental engagement. One such ward that serves our school is in the top 25% nationally for low income and crime.

Marlborough is an oversubscribed mixed school with 1280 students on roll. In terms of our inclusivity Daniel Sobel (Chief Executive Officer of Inclusion Expert, author of Leading on Pastoral Care) said that:

> "If 'child wellbeing' and an environment that was a place of belonging to the most vulnerable and challenging children and families' were the top Ofsted criteria, then this school would be obviously outstanding."

Numbers at Marlborough have increased considerably over the years, particularly first choices and our last two Ofsted inspections were judged as good. On a recent school improvement partner visit we were judged as being amber. To reach outstanding we know we need to increase our progress eight and in particular diminish the difference across a number of areas.

We recognised that one of the main barriers for our learners was attendance to school and, through investment in improved technologies such as Edulink and Mint Classrooms, which allowed quick and easy communication and sharing of information alongside the employment of our own full time attendance officer, we aimed to remove some of these barriers. Prior to the introduction of the home AIO, attendance was (we have chosen to focus on Year 11 only here)

Whole School attendance	Year 11 attendance	Persistent Absentees	Disadvantaged students attendance	Disadvantaged students – persistent absentees
94.4%	92.9%	13.5%	90%	31.5%

The Story

In January 2017 we appointed, through pupil premium funding, our own home AIO. The role is line managed by the deputy head teacher and weekly line management is used to discuss the impact of work completed with individual students and the impact of strategies undertaken. Utilising the data we have at our finger tips, our appointed person is able to be deployed quickly to attend meetings with parents, contact/visit students at home or in school helping to identify and remove any barriers that may stop a young person from attending school.

It was crucial that in order to improve attendance everybody understood its importance in supporting our young people to help them improve their life chances and have access to high quality teaching and learning enabling them to achieve their very best.
How did it change? (teaching and learning).

After endless interventions and a fairly rigid approach to expectations in the classroom, which wasn't having the desired impact for change, almost in an epiphany moment, we reviewed everything we were doing and decided (with support from our governors) to just do what we thought was right for our children, it was called work smarter not harder. In brief, its introduction was launched through the head teachers 'state of nation'. We introduced the following; No set way of teaching a lesson - take risks, use your personality, passion and love of teaching to motivate and inspire. It works (for us) within the context we are in. Line managements were shifted about to inspire new thinking. The labelling of children with targets was abandoned – we just asked that you taught all children to be at the very top of their game whatever their ability.

We introduced 'fun' teacher learning activities such as, 'poundland pedagogy' and the 'wow factor' both covered by the SecEd which really got staff talking about creative learning. We stopped formal learning reviews, which were in essence like faculty Ofsted's and instead placed the onus back on heads of faculties in terms of 'daily diet' feedback. We now conduct learning walks with positive postcards sent to staff highlighting good practice and ideas to think about. We look at our curriculum in a more forensic way and we always talk to our children about their learning and why they weren't at school. The results were in some cases the usual, (dislike a particular subject), but some were real eye-openers e.g. students who were carers, lacking in money for bus fares or suffering from genuine undiagnosed illness. If we were to capture this all in one word it would be 'freedom'. The freedom to teach your subject knowing you are utilising technology creatively to enhance learning.

In September 2016 the strategic overview and line management of attendance moved from an assistant head teacher to a deputy head teacher, further raising the profile and importance of whole school improvement. The deputy head teacher not only has weekly line management meetings with the attendance team, but is also in daily communication with them, reviewing registers, absent students and actioning or agreeing to action plans.

Through performance management conversations in regards to staff development and career opportunities, an existing member of the pastoral administration team expressed an interest into moving into an unexpected attendance vacancy, enabling a whole new approach to attendance to develop without major financial implications. Two members of the administration team, who had previous experience of the attendance role from previous primary schools were used to offer advice and support our attendance officer as well as helping to create a bespoke attendance report that tracked individual weekly attendance.

This report helped to flag weekly improvements or slips in attendance and was colour coded for students who wavered around persistent absenteeism, the reasons for absence were also clearly highlighted. The reports used are constantly being amended and evaluated, and are viewed and discussed as a weekly agenda item at the senior leadership meeting and as a standing agenda item at the governors' personnel committee meeting. We are now looking at students' attendance on Fridays for example to pick up if there is a pattern of 'extended weekends'.

(The table below is taken from the data end of the weekly SLT reports which have every students name and reason for absence included upon it, tracking trends through either a green or red arrow and through a generated formula, turning persistent absenteeism attendance red. The data provides a great deal of information and more importantly allows you to ask why attendance dropping)

	% Present up to 14/12/2018	Trend	% Present up to 21/12/2018	Trend	% Present up to 11/01/2019	Trend	Comments from SIMS 07/01 - 11/01
Student 1	92.5	⬆ 0.6	89.4	⬇ -3.1	90.1	⬆ 0.7	
Student 2	97.0	⬆ 0.2	96.5	⬇ -0.5	90.1	⬇ -6.4	
Student 3	88.7	⬆ 0.9	89.3	⬆ 0.6	90.0	⬆ 0.7	
Student 4	92.5	⬆ 0.6	92.1	⬇ -0.4	90.0	⬇ -2.1	10-11/01: upset stomach
Student 5	89.5	⬆ 0.9	90.1	⬆ 0.6	89.5	⬇ -0.6	07/01: Unwell

The deputy head teacher worked with the data manager to create several new attendance reports to look at and analyse trends. The first report, (see table below) follows a similar format to old RaiseOnline reports, each year group's attendance for all students, male, female, disadvantaged, non-disadvantaged and special educational needs and disability (SEND) students as well as persistent absentee figures for the same categories.

Absence						Persistent Absence				
	Year 11	All	3.6	96.4			Year 11	All	25	13.4
	Year 11	Male	3.1	96.9			Year 11	Male	13	14
	Year 11	Female	4.1	95.9			Year 11	Female	12	12.8
	Year 11	DS	6.6	93.4			Year 11	DS	12	27.3
	Year 11	Non-DS	2.6	97.4			Year 11	Non-DS	13	9.1
	Year 11	DSEN	5.8	94.2			Year 11	DSEN	5	25
	School	All	4.4	95.6			School	All	110	10.6
	School	Male	4	96			School	Male	54	10
	School	Female	4.7	95.3			School	Female	56	11.3
	School	DS	7.3	92.7			School	DS	51	23
	School	Non-DS	3.5	96.5			School	Non-DS	59	7.2
	School	DSEN	6.8	93.2			School	DSEN	31	20.3

The table shows overall attendance and percentage attendance at 90% for each group category: This makes comparing time periods easy to do and helps to track year groups and vulnerable groups throughout their schooling.

Two further formula generated, colour-coded reports have been created which are circulated to the heads of faculties (HoFs) and directors of learning (DoLs), looking at attendance for specific days and periods of the day along with subject lesson attendance. This data has been very useful to help support conversations with students about any potential barriers to learning and possible solutions:
(This table shows individual students colour coded attendance for each curriculum subject)

	1Mon:5	1Tue:1	1Tue:2	1Tue:3	1Tue:4	1Tue:5	1Wed:1	1Wed:2	1Wed:3	1Wed:4	1Wed:5	1Thu:1	1Thu:2	1Thu:3	1Thu:4	1Thu:5	1Fri:1	1Fri:2	1Fri:3	1Fri:4	1Fri:5
Student 1	1	1	1	1	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	7	4	4	3	3	3	3	5
Student 2		1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	7	3	3	1	2	1	1	1
Student 3													1								
Student 4	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1										

(The table below shows individual students colour coded attendance for each lesson period missed)

	Ar	Dr	Dt	En	Fr	Gg	Hi	Hu	It	Ma	Mu	Sc
Student 1	100	94	97	100	100	100	100		100	100	100	100
Student 2	100	100	100	98	100	70	100		100	98	94	100
Student 3	93	100	79	92	93	62	93		89	94	100	87
Student 4	79	80	83	87	83	94	94		82	86	92	82
	94.9	94.4	95.5	95.3	95.2	80.9	95.3	63	95.3	95.8	95.1	95.6

To support the daily tracking of student attendance SIMS home screens were configured for the deputy head teacher, attendance and pastoral staff to show attendance for the whole school, individual year groups, disadvantaged and SEND students as well as the previous day's attendance, week to date, last week and year to date figures. Disadvantaged and SEND groups were created using SIMS Discover, this helped identify patterns and which families and students we needed to target.

Making sure registers are accurate and promptly taken is essential for safeguarding. Any member of staff who fails to take a register is immediately contacted and should any registers be missed staff are contacted directly by the deputy head teacher who tracks this and follows up through performance management and line management. Staff receive annual training to refresh how to track and view attendance history for students, allowing form tutors in particular to have a far more active role. Our AIO also holds daily check in sessions with students as well as group meetings with students and parents/careers, no stone is left unturned. Laptops and data dongles have been purchased to reduce anxiety for students who have not been able to do home learning, or are unable to access it at home, plus high decibel alarm clocks have been purchased for students who oversleep. Our AIO also works with the educational support for medical absence service (ESMA) to support students who are absent for medical reasons.

For students who have missed significant periods of education we have employed a primary school teacher who works in our reintegration room to help students catch up with any missed learning and return to lessons as quickly as possible.

Communication with parents in regards to attendance is key. We provide colour coded attendance information on all report cards sent home, our attendance webpage on the school website has been revamped to show links with attendance and attainment, a frequently asked questions section and graphs displaying key information about the impact missed learning days can have. In our newsletter to parents we report examination residuals for different attendance bands. All of these have helped raise the profile and importance of good attendance. We have also introduced the issuing of food vouchers for our local foodbank to 'encourage' attendance to meetings. We work hard to get parents into school for trips, to watch English classes, Math's classes and take part in reading classes.

Each week each member of the senior leadership team meets with eight students on a rolling programme. During these meetings discussions take place on what makes Marlborough such a great place to be a part of. Barriers to learning are discussed and each senior leadership team member is equipped with the students' attendance information so that this can also be discussed. We call these meeting 'learning counts' and our collated findings are discussed weekly at leadership and disseminated to staff. This has been instrumental in finding such vital information from our students and has been recognised and disseminated nationally by 'The Key'.

Results/Impact/Outcomes

As a result of a coordinated approach we have seen a significant increase in both whole school attendance and that of disadvantaged students, as well as seeing many of our young people move out of being persistent absentees and significantly reduced morning lateness: A huge part in the reduction of our PA figures is listening to our students and trying to remove as many barriers as possible and making sure our lessons are made irresistible, engaging and accessible to all.

Attendance Trends (%)
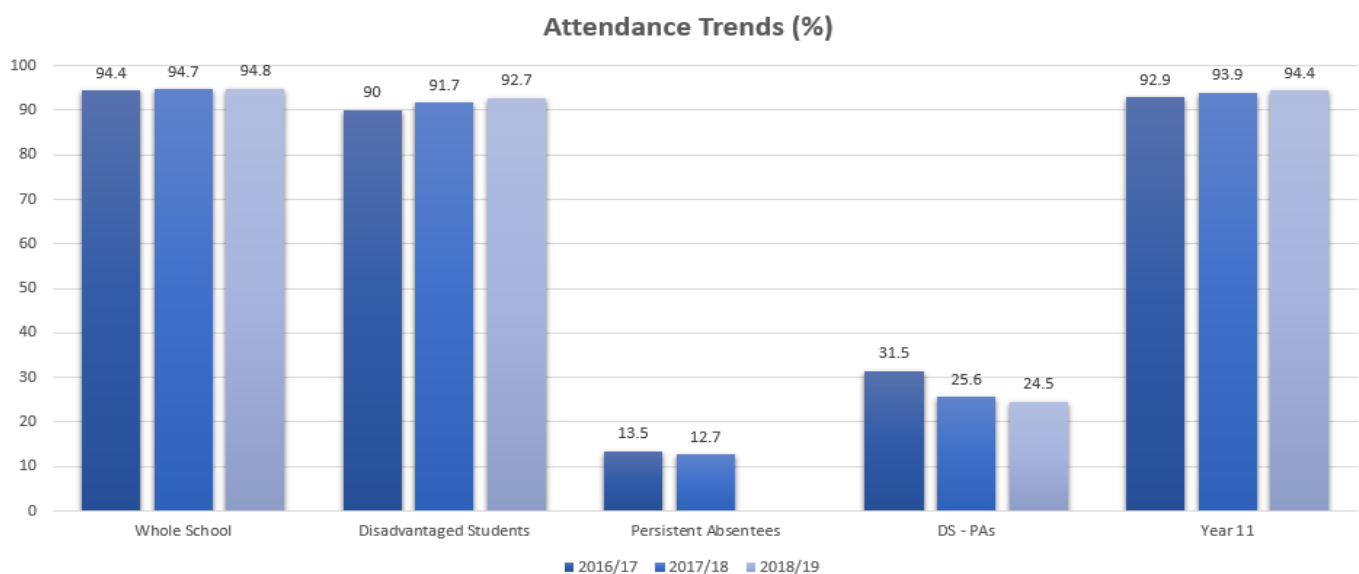
As can be seen from the graphs above whole school attendance prior to our AIO appointment was 94.4%, rising to 94.7% at the end of the first year and 94.8% at the end of 2018/19, with disadvantaged students' attendance for the same periods rising from 90% to 92.7%.

Year 11 had traditionally been our lowest attending year group but their attendance rose from 92.9% to 94.4%, which coincided with improved GCSE results. Those students with 95% or above attendance achieved 2/3 grades more progress than their peers. This information was shared with

our parents to further emphasis the influence attendance can have on attainment.

In March 2018 the following was reported in a Herts for Learning disadvantaged student visit:

> "There is a positive impact of strategies that the school has put in place to improve attendance. An attendance improvement officer, appointed by the school, has made a positive impact on a number of significant enduring attendance issues. These improvements have been facilitated by providing financial support for travel, positive engagement with parents, adjustments made to the curriculum and individual support packages for students based on need. (…) Disadvantaged students are encouraged to want to be in school through a variety of strategies such as paying for transport, home visits and bringing students in to school, purchasing uniform coats and shoes so that students come in to school in bad weather and are not embarrassed about their presentation, interviewing students to determine the main barriers and solving issues as quickly as possible."

Where parents have proved to be difficult to engage wioth, staff have persisted with calls, invites into school and home visits.
In the first year of appointment, as can be seen from the graph, disadvantaged student attendance rose from 90% to 91.7%. Two significant family cases saw one Year 9 student's attendance rise from 83.9% to 89.2%; this was accomplished through contacting home daily to support waking the student up, home visits, supporting mum with an ongoing court case and supporting medical appointments as well as careers information: **"Don't know how we would have coped" (parent).**

Another family saw attendance rise from 83.9% to 90.2%. Here our AIO liaised with the child adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), supported home with creating boundaries and resilience work plus collected the student from the car par every day: **"Support for (the student) has been great and you have gone above and beyond" (parent).**

Whilst there is still a gap, between DS and non-DS students its decrease has been substantial.

Next Steps

We have been delighted with the improvement of ds attendance and the increase raised profile of attendance and its support of teaching and learning. As a school however, we never stand still and there is still a job to do, not only further increasing attendance and diminishing the difference but also re- engaging some of our most vulnerable learners and families. To do this we have recently appointed our own family engagement worker who will be working with our most vulnerable students. Vulnerable students is also now a standing item at senior leadership team meetings.

We are also working on further enhancing our communication systems so that we can quickly send personalised messages to students and parents at specific times, to make sure they are well and feel part of the community. We will also be looking at using this system to send targeted wake up calls to students. We never stop evaluating our curriculum to make sure our students follow pathways that help them thrive and we are looking out how we can further raise aspirations looking at social mobility.

Mark Fitzgibbon
Deputy Head teacher