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Your ref:
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16th September 2003

Headteachers all Norfolk Schools

Dear Colleague

Pupil Attendance

I am writing to thank you for your responses to the letter I sent to you last term regarding future support from staff in the Pupil Attendance Service. The responses were wide ranging and have been taken on board as part of the future developments to promote pupil attendance at schools in Norfolk. I would also like to bring you up to date with our strategy to improve in this area.

Targets

As you know the DfES have set a target to ensure that the overall unauthorised absence for all schools in the county is no greater than 0.58% by May 2004. The current figure is 0.71%. The DfES have also stipulated that this target should be achieved without any increase in the level of authorised absence. Clearly this presents some challenges to us all.

In order to help us all achieve these targets the DfES have given the LEA an Attendance Consultant whose name is Linda Rundle. Over the past few months I and senior colleagues in the department, with support from our Education Social Workers, have met with her to consider ways in which the required improvements can be brought about and these are set down in clear action plans. To be more effective we will need to develop alternative and creative strategies with you.

To meet the overall DfES targets, we would like to propose a formula linked to the individual targets (DfES) set for each school. However this would result in some reductions in ESW time for many schools. To implement such a scheme would require further consultation with yourselves. We therefore propose to consult on this process with you this academic year. The current formula, which has been used for some years and needs to be revised is based on Special Educational Needs, Exclusions, Number on Roll, Free School Meals and Attendance.

Time Allocation from The Pupil Attendance Service

However I would like to reassure you that for the forthcoming year the allocation to schools will be similar to previous years with 10% being 'top-sliced' to enable some contingency hours to be retained. This will enable the Education Social Workers to respond flexibly to unpredicted needs which might arise during the year. This will include support to those schools identified by the DfES last year as needing to set specific unauthorised attendance targets over a two year period. It could also include specific support to schools where termly attendance data indicates a need for intervention.

Attached are the details of the allocation of Education Social Worker hours to High Schools and patches throughout the county. If you wish to discuss this further please contact Colin Spinks, Pupil Attendance Service Manager (Operational), on 01953 456545 or email him at colin.spinks@norfolk.gov.uk

I would also wish to remind you that the Norfolk publication "Improving Pupil Attendance Levels – Good Practice Guide" is available on Esinet. It gives good advice on strategies which schools can use in order to improve attendance levels. Similarly the DfES have in conjunction with a wide range of professional bodies recently published a document "Ensuring Regular School Attendance." Details of this will be circulated to you separately and like other publications it offers sound guidance for all those involved in ensuring regular school attendance.

I know I can rely on your continued support and co-operation towards ensuring that improvements are made in the levels of pupil attendance in our schools.

Yours sincerely

Dr Bryan Slater
Director of Education