

# CASE STUDY: Difference Schools Partnership ACE Alternative Provision - Luton



**Avenue**  
CENTRE FOR EDUCATION

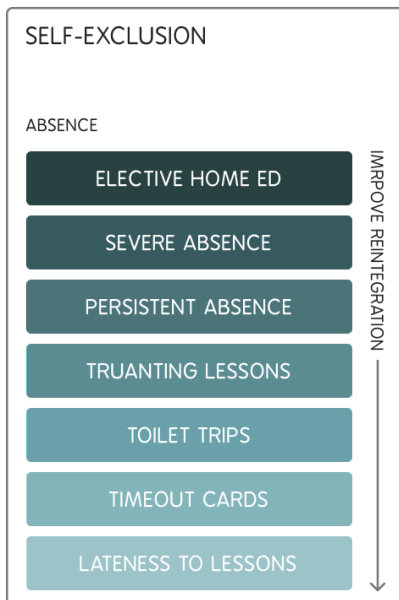
There was a time when, confronted with a question in class he didn't know the answer to, Freddie\* would - without drama - get up and walk out.

Across the country, [teachers have reported](#) an increase in internal truancy since the pandemic.

Freddie is a pupil at Avenue Centre for Education (ACE), Luton's Alternative Provision (AP) school for pupils who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream school, or who are on a placement there. Led by Headteacher, **Jeremy Dodd**, ACE are recognised as 'Good' by Ofsted, and offer pupils - some of whom have experienced significant adversity in their lives - the opportunity to re-engage with education. ACE joined ***The Difference Schools Partnership*** in 2024 seeking to change the story for pupils like Freddie.

## Assessing the picture

The Difference's Implementation Partner, **Will Moss**, and Assistant Headteacher, **Clare Murphy-Snape**, considered how truanting lessons is a form of self-exclusion that, when placed on a continuum, sits below absence from school and above more informal lesson absence like being late to lessons.



Although ACE Luton's attendance last year was 63% - above the national AP average of 59% - improving it further is a school priority.

As an AP, ACE works with pupils who often have not chosen to go there. Creating a sense of belonging is a significant and daily undertaking that the school has made real progress with in recent years. Nevertheless, when pupils were asked in a survey how often they feel like they "*belong at school*", the average response was '*sometimes*'. Seeing this data gave them a real mandate to invest in work in this area.

Will and Clare identified that improving the sense of belonging may not only help Freddie's engagement with school - and help reduce his level of internal truancy - but improving belonging for *all* pupils held the potential to improve multiple outcomes across the school, from punctuality to severe absence.

### Engaging with the drivers of self-exclusion

Clare began by engaging students in some voice activities to better understand what was driving the behaviour of Freddie and pupils like him. Some themes that came out were:

- Pupils not understanding the work in class
- not wanting to ask people for help in front of peers
- a sense of pessimism about passing the qualification the class was aiming for
- not seeing the value in the PSHE curriculum that took place in the afternoons.

With the aim of reducing internal truancy by 90% over a six month period, Clare decided to take an approach that addressed both **systems** - the deliberate steps that give our practice structure, and **practice** - the craft of our live interactions with children.

### System Development

Clare carried out a range of work, which saw immediate impact.

Action	Impact
Introduced more accountability pupils leaving class with the introduction of 'workslips'	Pupils who left class now have to meet the teacher at the end of the day to address lost learning
Arbor (the school's management information system) was adapted to record which pupils issued with a 'workslip'	Oversight over who was leaving class improved
The PSHE curriculum was entirely reworked and staff given training on the new programme	Pupils felt that their views had been taken on board
The system for sharing information about pupil's needs improved so that teachers are now consistently receiving information to plan with	Teachers better equipped to plan for the needs of pupils in their classes

### Practice Development

Taking learning that came from **The Difference** [\*Inclusive Leadership Course\*](#), Clare is now working with **Jayde Sarrington** on improving the interactions that take place in 'workslip sessions' between teacher and pupil. These have the potential to:

- build connection between pupil and teacher

- help the pupil understand what was required of them, and gain insight into what they found difficult in the moment
- help the teacher understand what was difficult for the pupil in the moment, and reflect on what they brought to the interaction
- Come together to find ways of working together in the future that make walking out less likely to happen in the future

To do this they are developing scripts and staff training to support these meetings.

### **Show, don't tell**

Committed to improving belonging, the school also introduced hot breakfast at school in the morning - which has improved punctuality to school. This, paired with the introduction of daily late detentions, has increased whole school attendance by 7%. Pupils who arrive after registration is closed stay behind after school on that day for the amount of time they were late. Prior to the introduction of this, ACE had on average 18 pupils who were late each day, for an average time of 48 minutes. Two weeks after the introduction of late detentions and hot breakfasts, the average number of pupils who were late had reduced to 9 pupils per day by an average of 17 minutes.

### **Impact**

Clare learned long ago that sitting with uncertainty was a crucial aspect of leadership. By helping Freddie feel a greater sense of belonging at school, he too is learning to feel more comfortable with the feeling of 'not knowing' - a normal part of the learning experience. And it seems to be working: since Clare began this work, Freddie is leaving lessons far less often. Moreover, internal truancy for pupils across the board is declining.

There is a positive correlation to other outcomes, too. Attendance is up this year to 77%, up 14% from the year before. And while the leaders at ACE would be the first to reflect that there's still work to do, they're pleased by the positive results they're seeing.

*\*Names have been changed for anonymity*