

Position Paper: Promoting Attendance at Spaghetti Bridge

At Spaghetti Bridge, we believe that all children are naturally curious, enjoy learning, want to have friends and be a part of a community, and that attending schools is a way of meeting these innate needs. However, for many of our students, school has not been a place of learning, connection, and safety; instead, it has been a source of anxiety and has damaged their self-identification as someone able to learn. The result is often persistent absenteeism from school or behaviours that disrupt their school environments.

A common response to this non-attendance and/or behaviour is to seek to extrinsically motivate students to attend and behave through sanctions, threats, and rewards for compliance. However, this can lead to increased anxiety and pressure, resulting in the opposite of the intention and leading to extended periods of absence from school.

Instead of seeking to motivate students to attend school through extrinsic strategies, Spaghetti Bridge works to harness their intrinsic motivation to learn, grow, connect and thrive. Therefore, we have designed our school environment, relational practice, pedagogy, and curriculum in order to rekindle this love of learning and create a sense of safety and belonging in our school community, leading to increased attendance.

Some key characteristics of our approach to attendance are:

- Creating a desire to attend through fostering a sense of safety, connection, and belonging
- Reigniting each student's intrinsic motivation and desire to learn
- Beginning with their passions and interests before supporting them to engage with new and unfamiliar topics
- Building key relationships with a few trusted adults and then extending this to a wider staff group
- Slowly increasing demand and expectation through a model of high support, high expectation
- Working and building relationships with families as partners in promoting attendance

In short, we make school into a place where they want to be, not one where they are forced to attend.

References

Allen, Kelly-Ann. *The psychology of belonging*. Routledge, 2020.

Carr, Katie et al. Listening to, and learning from, young people in the attendance crisis. Impetus, 2025.

Corcoran, Shannon, and Catherine Kelly. "A meta-ethnographic understanding of children and young people's experiences of extended school non-attendance." *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 23.1 (2023): 24-37.

Education Endowment Foundation. Supporting school attendance: Build a culture of community and belonging for all pupils. 2024.

Engel, Susan. *The hungry mind: The origins of curiosity in childhood*. Harvard University Press, 2015.

Sims, Ciara. The drivers behind attendance: What we are learning about the importance of belonging, engagement, sanctions and support. Impact, 2024.