



Attendance Action Alliance

Notes of meeting held on 28th April 2022, 15:00-16:00, Secretary of State's Office, Department for Education and virtually via MS Teams

Chair

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP, Secretary of State for Education

Attendees

- Ade Adetosoye OBE (Children and Families Spokesperson, SOLACE)
- Steve Crocker OBE (President, Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS))
- Leora Cruddas (Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST))
- Dame Rachel de Souza (Children's Commissioner)
- Mrunal Sisodia (Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums & East of England Regional Steering Group Member)
- Amanda Spielman (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector)
- Rob Tarn (CEO, Northern Education Trust)
- Isabelle Trowler (Chief Social Worker for Children and Families *represented by* Lauren McCrum, Private Secretary to the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families)
- Sir Peter Wanless CBE (Chief Executive, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)

Apologies

- Geoff Barton (General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL))
- Susan Douglas CBE (CEO, Eden Academy Trust)
- Tina Emery (Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums & South West Regional Steering Group Member)
- Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau (NCB)
- Professor Peter Fonagy (National Clinical Advisor on Children's Mental Health, NHS England)
- Professor Dame Clare Gerada (President, Royal College of General Practitioners)
- Commander Catherine Roper (Head of Profession, Crime Prevention, Inclusion and Engagement, Metropolitan Police) *represented by* DS Claire Graves, Staff Officer to Commander Catherine Roper
- Paul Whiteman (General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers)

Officials in attendance

- Juliette Cammaerts – Director of Policy, Planning and Delivery, Children’s Commissioner’s Office
- Caroline Cane – Attendance Division
- Lauren McCrum – Private Secretary to Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families
- Indra Morris – Director General Children’s Services, Comms and Strategy Group
- Sophie Taylor - Director for Families Group and Senior Responsible Officer for Attendance
- Jocelyn Shaw – Deputy Director – Attendance Division
- David Thomas – Secretary of State’s Policy Adviser
- Nichola Vasey – Vulnerable Children’s Attendance Team
- Matthew Woodcock – Vulnerable Children’s Attendance Team and Secretariat
- Private Secretary to the Secretary of State

1. Welcome

Owner: Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP, Secretary of State for Education (Chair)

Secretary of State welcomed Alliance members to the meeting and congratulated Steve Crocker OBE on his new position as ADCS President and welcomed him to the Alliance.

Professor Becky Francis and Jon Yates who were speaking on behalf of the Education Endowment Foundation and Youth Endowment Fund were also welcomed to the meeting.

The minutes from the March Alliance meeting have been published and all pledges and actions are progressing. The new pledge under development from Commander Catherine Roper was highlighted, which will be focusing on all Chief Officers across England Wales to ensuring that their schools and youth engagement officers are aware of the vulnerabilities of children missing from school and understand how to progress safeguarding mechanisms.

The Secretary of State re-iterated that the work of the Alliance is of vital importance to the Department and wider Government.

2. What is working to support Children in Need’s attendance

Owner: Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families

Isabelle Trowler welcomed the opportunity provided by the Alliance to focus on the attendance of Children in Need and children with a social worker. She emphasised that we need to deepen our understanding of what works in this space to improve attendance, with there being promising signs of great partnerships and practices between social workers and schools.

She gave a progress update on her pledge, with key highlights being:

- Webinars have been hosted by Lincolnshire and Camden Local Authorities. These were attended by between 200 and 300 social workers, which received excellent feedback from social workers on helping them to understand ways in which they can support pupils' attendance
- More webinars are being scheduled, with visits by Isabelle to social workers and schools also being planned
- They will be publishing a 'top tips' document with the WhatWorks Centre, which is to be published in September 2022 to support the wider efforts on the return to school.
- An award at the Social Worker of the Year Awards to recognise the work of social workers working alongside schools to boost attendance has been introduced, with the first award to come later this year.

Isabelle also highlighted the types of practice which are showing early promise in boosting the attendance of children with a social worker:

- The 'Circle of Adults' approach was discussed, which brings together school and social care professionals together to support complex cases in a multi-agency way.
- The LinkEdUp approach from the Royal Free School in Camden, which works with young people who have not fully returned to school to deliver an online education programme. This has helped pupils to decide to return to school.
- The Emotional Based School Avoidance programme was highlighted in Camden, which involved educational psychologists working with individual young people to identify strategies to help them increase their attendance.
- There has been a strong focus on attendance within Senior Social Worker meetings, with Minister Walker supporting this focus on attendance.
- The Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation's (RNCSF) has been broadening access to education for looked after and vulnerable children.
- There have been campaigns within Local Authorities, such as the use of straplines and email signatures stating 'Every School Day Counts', developing an understanding of the negative consequences of missing even a few days at school.
- There have been reservations around whether all Trauma Informed Practice is underpinned by strong evidence.

Isabelle then focused in on a case study of a child named Banquo Jr from the charity ShiFT, highlighting how the interventions from this charity have helped to transform Banquo's life and educational outlook. This case study highlighted the need to continue tackling challenges for children such as Banquo, and the impact this can have.

The Secretary of State thanked Isabelle for her presentation, noting the excellent work that the Springboard programme has done.

Action – The Department is to work with Isabelle Trowler's office to publish examples of these successful interventions into boosting the attendance of children with a social worker

Peter Wanless spoke about the roundtables he has hosted with charities, which highlighted how exclusions were not assisting in boosting the attendance of children like Banquo Jr in the long term. The Secretary of State raised ongoing work in Blackpool where all schools have worked together to reduce exclusions.

Action – The Department is to look at how messaging and guidance around exclusions can be clarified

Steve Crocker raised a point regarding simplifying the admin around attendance, stating that on the Isle of Wight, all parents and professionals were given one email address to contact regarding attendance problems, which streamlined processes.

3. Children’s Commissioner Attendance Audit – what children told us about what works

Owner: Dame Rachel de Souza, Children’s Commissioner and Juliette Cammaerts, Director of Policy, Planning and Delivery, Children’s Commissioner’s Office

Rachel de Souza summarised the Attendance Audit, which aimed to understand the cohort of children who were not attending school regularly and those who were missing from education altogether. As well as surveying all local authorities (LA’s), a deep dive into 10 local authorities was conducted. Over 300 children, more than 40 parents and carers and over 100 professionals in LA’s, health, schools and family hubs were spoken to. Mainstream, Alternative Provision, Youth Group and Home Education settings were visited, among others.

Juliette Cammaerts presented the deep dive results of this attendance audit, along with what should be done to help boost attendance. Main findings included:

- Schools should work with children and their families to make decisions about their education. Best practice in good attendance cultures needs to be published, and attendance policies need to be published in formats and languages which are accessible to children and their families.
- All schools should be part of a ‘family’ of schools in order to have the capacity to offer the correct support to pupils. This should include AP settings. Pastoral strategies should also pull together safeguarding, mental health, SEND and behaviour policies for a coordinated approach
- Exclusions should be ‘teachable moments’ and children should receive targeted support following exclusions or suspensions. Thoughtful and supportive use of AP and part-time timetables should be used where appropriate so that children do not lose the support network of their home school. Children should also be placed in AP immediately if excluded rather than having to wait 5 days.
- There should be extra support for young carers and other children in need, with information sharing between and across schools, LA’s and wider partners helping to make sure that information on children’s caring responsibilities is not lost in transition.

A Unique Identifier would also help to identify children with additional needs so that support can be consistent for them

- There should be clear roles and responsibilities in dealing with attendance, with attendance needing to be everyone's business – from school leaders to LA's. Schools should also be equal safeguarding partners, so that teachers and leaders have a voice in safeguarding arrangements

Juliette briefly mentioned the Commissioner's Help at Hand scheme and how it is helping to support children not in education, with over half their cases involving children not in school.

Action: The Department is to continue working with the Children's Commissioner's Office on their policy recommendations ahead of the publication of their report in June

Rachel de Souza called for the Alliance to back a national campaign to support the return to school in September, given how critical this moment is. The Secretary of State gave his full support to this.

Action: Alliance members are to share what they can do in supporting the return to school in September, including giving their views on what an effective communications programme would be and giving evidence on where programmes such as this have worked.

Action: The Department is to work with the Children's Commissioner's Office to identify and initiate links with external partners as part of the back to school campaign

4. Education Endowment Foundation / Youth Endowment Fund – strengthening the evidence base

Owner: Professor Becky Francis and Jon Yates

Professor Becky Francis thanked the Alliance for the opportunity to present, highlighting their new funding round. She agreed that exclusions should be reduced and that early interventions for pupils are key. However, she noted that reducing exclusions should not be done to the detriment of other pupils.

The EEF and YEF have conducted a rapid evidence review which identified 72 studies into attempts to reduce absence. However, the present evidence into what works is relatively weak and mostly consists of studies from the US. There are no interventions that have proven strong effects, but there are some indicators of promising interventions. Becky presented the approaches of the studies they identified, the impacts these had and the strength of evidence for each of them.

Jon Yates then spoke through their new round of funding to evaluate interventions into attendance. This will be focused on children at the highest risk of absenteeism and/or exclusion and will seek to increase children's presence in school or college. It will also aim to look at interventions which are able to improve attainment and reduce the likelihood of violence. They are also launching a round of data analysis to evaluate practices within schools, such as relative impact of differing practices on attendance. This will be called

School Choices, and will enable the EEF to test and compare existing school/Multi-Academy Trust driven approaches.

The EEF / YEF will be focussing on the following types of intervention to build their evidence base – Anti bullying programmes, Classroom behaviour management programmes, Internal Alternative Provision interventions, Needs-led attendance interventions, Social and emotional learning interventions, Targeted family engagement interventions and Parent/carer communication interventions.

For the general round of funding, applications close in mid-May 2022, with selections confirmed in February 2023 ready for delivery beginning in September 2023. For the School Choices funding, expressions of interest opened on the 25th April 2022 and close on the 27th May 2022, with full submissions and launch in July 2022.

David Thomas highlighted that there is as much value in finding out what does not work in boosting attendance as well as what does work and would like to see how this could be communicated to schools ahead of the EEF/YEF evidence being available. Jon Yates reiterated that disincentives, such as fines, were known to not work in boosting attendance. The value for money of bespoke parental engagement in boosting attendance was discussed.

Action – The Youth Endowment Fund and Education Endowment Foundation are to investigate publishing an early insight into their initial evidence review.

Action – The Department is to work with the Youth Endowment Fund, Education Endowment Fund and the Children’s Commissioner to write to MAT leaders to encourage them to share examples of what has worked to boost attendance within their trusts

Leora Cruddas invited the Secretary of State to speak at the upcoming CST annual conference regarding attendance

Action – Secretary of State’s secretariat to ensure that the Secretary of State can present at the CST annual conference

Steve Crocker raised the possibility of aggregating the funding which is not used when children are out of school to trial new ideas in boosting pupils’ attendance

Action - The Department is to investigate the possibilities around funding to trial new ways to boost pupils’ attendance with Steve Crocker

Action – Alliance members are to highlight suggestions of what works in boosting pupils’ attendance to the Youth Endowment Fund and Education Endowment Foundation

5. Closing remarks from the Secretary of State

The Secretary of State thanked Alliance members for their time and expressed that he is looking forward to meeting again on May 19th.