



Attendance Action Alliance

Notes of meeting held on 19th May 2022, 10:30-11:30, Permanent Secretary's Boardroom, Department for Education and virtually via MS Teams

Chair

Indra Morris – Ministerial Deputy and Director General Children's Services, Comms and Strategy Group

Attendees

- Ade Adetosoye OBE (Children and Families Spokesperson, SOLACE)
- Geoff Barton (General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL))
- Steve Crocker OBE (President, Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS))
- Dame Rachel de Souza (Children's Commissioner)
- 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)
- 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)
- Sir Peter Wanless CBE (Chief Executive, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)
- Paul Whiteman (General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers)

Apologies

- Leora Cruddas (Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST))
Represented by Steve Rollett, Deputy Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST)

- Commander Catherine Roper (Head of Profession, Crime Prevention, Inclusion and Engagement, Metropolitan Police)
- Isabelle Trowler (Chief Social Worker for Children and Families *represented by* Lauren McCrum, Private Secretary to the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families)

Officials in attendance

Official attendees updated to include only the names of Senior Civil Servants in attendance [February 2024]

- Laura Bond – Joint Head of Education Engagement and Serious Violence Unit
- Juliette Cammaerts – Director of Policy, Planning and Delivery, Children’s Commissioner’s Office
- Rose Mortada – Programme Director, Data Directorate
- 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
- Officials from Data Directorate and Vulnerable Children’s Attendance Team
- Official from VRU Programme Delivery Team, Home Office
- Private Secretary to the Secretary of State

1. Welcome

Owner: Indra Morris - Ministerial Deputy and Director General Children’s Services, Comms and Strategy Group (Chair)

Alliance members were welcomed to the meeting by Indra Morris, the Ministerial Deputy. Apologies from the Secretary of State and Minister Walker were extended to the group.

2. Attendance Data Pilot – Initial Results

Owner: Rose Mortada - Programme Director, Data Directorate

Jocelyn Shaw introduced the Department’s ongoing attendance data trial. Daily attendance data is being utilised by the department to gain a better understanding of what is going on and will be presented back to schools, MATs and LAs in an accessible format. The Department has also listened to Unions’ concerns regarding data privacy and is handling this carefully.

Rose Mortada thanked Alliance members for supporting this project, with over 60% of schools having signed up to share their data with the Department. A small number of schools have already received a data report. The distribution of these reports will be scaled up during May

and June to allow more schools, MATs and LAs to benefit from the analysis. These reports will also be adjusted based on feedback from the sector.

Data Directorate official demonstrated to the Alliance how the school-level data reports work, including how they can be filtered by pupil categories. Multi-Academy Trusts will also be able to look at the data for individual schools within their Trust.

Steve Crocker highlighted that in order for Local Authorities to effectively tackle attendance issues, they would need access to the attendance data from MAT schools from various trusts within their LA area. Rachel de Souza echoed this point and Indra Morris agreed that the Department would come back to the Alliance to highlight how this data sharing between LAs and MATs could be made possible in future iterations.

Action – the Department is to continue progress work on attendance data sharing between MATs and LAs

Rachel de Souza called for Children in Need's attendance to be highlighted on the data dashboard for schools, with Jocelyn Shaw confirming the Department is working with suppliers over the summer to overcome challenges with information management systems within schools to include a box for Children in Need's attendance in these dashboards.

Rob Tarn raised that it would be useful for schools to be able to compare their attendance data with that of schools with similar characteristics. This point was echoed by Geoff Barton, who also raised a concern that the data should not at this point include information about the National Tutoring Programme as that would be likely to undermine its appeal to schools. Jocelyn Shaw emphasised that the Department is actively exploring the best ways to enable useful data sharing for comparison.

Action - The Department is to investigate how to enable schools to see comparator data within the reports

Amanda Spielman raised that Ofsted would benefit from accessing this data prior to inspections, as it would assist with inspection prioritisation. Rob Tarn echoed that it would benefit schools to have Ofsted inspect live attendance figures prior to school inspections.

Dame Clare Gerada spoke of data sharing incentives within the health sector and asked the Department to consider how to increase parental and school confidence in sharing data this openly. Jocelyn Shaw reassured Alliance members that the Department's medium-term aim with this data collection is to make it publicly accessible.

Action – The Department is to investigate how to increase confidence and transparency with schools and parents regarding the collection and use of attendance data

3. Violence Reduction Units (VRU's) and Attendance

Owner: Laura Bond, Joint Head of Education Engagement and Serious Violence Unit, and VRU Programme Delivery Team official - Home Office

Laura Bond highlighted the data link between serious violence and absence. This showed that whilst only a small proportion of students who have been truant have become involved in serious violence (2%), amongst young people who have been cautioned/sentenced for a serious violence offence, 37% have been truant. This disengagement in education often happens in advance of a first offence, highlighting what an important protective factor school attendance is.

Action - Laura Bond is to share the full data pack summarising the Education, children's social care and offending: Descriptive Statistics with the Alliance

VRU Programme Team official spoke about the origins of VRUs, highlighting how they take a multi-agency approach to preventing serious violence, involving services such as healthcare, education and policing. 300,000 children have already been supported by VRUs, but due to a small sample size in each VRU, it has been difficult to see a statistical impact on serious violence. However, VRUs have been working very effectively with schools in Greater Manchester. The work of VRUs is also linked to the AP and SAFE taskforces which the Department is running.

Laura Bond spoke about the 22 AP Specialist Taskforces which we have funded to work in AP schools in violence hotspot areas which have been using engagement in education to prevent serious violence. This work is linked to one of the recommendations in the SEND green paper, which emphasised the importance of specialist support in mainstream and AP schools for pupils at risk of disengaging in education.

The Secretary of State wrote to all secondary schools in violence hotspot areas in the week beginning 9th March, asking them to tackle attendance ahead of the summer and to work with LAs to share data on exclusions, suspensions and pupils who are persistently absent, and to work with their local VRU to try and prevent serious violence. This letter also promoted Commander Roper's pledge on ensuring that all Chief Officers across England Wales understand how to progress safeguarding mechanisms.

Tina Emery requested that the Department investigate the child's journey into serious violence and what services they interact with as part of this journey in order to see how we can prevent this happening. Laura Bond and VRU Programme Team official confirmed that this mapping of the child's journey is part of the serious violence research programme that the Department is currently undertaking. Tina Emery also emphasised that a multi-agency approach towards decreasing serious violence and increasing attendance is required. This is especially in relation to accommodating SEND needs of children and young people, with Amanda Spielman noting the sensitivities of this work and the need to be careful with how we interpret the labels given to children.

Action - As part of commissioned research, the Department is to continue looking into the Child's journey into serious violence and the service interactions alongside this and the SV analysis team will be in touch with Tina to share more about this work, and to share their updated infographic on the research programme with the AAA once it is ready.

Steve Crocker noted the link between the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) and the work of VRUs, emphasising that more work needs to be done to engage older children in HAF programmes

over the summer. Indra Morris echoed the importance of this, and Laura Bond spoke about how VRUs are aware of this link and have been working with the HAF and with AP Specialist taskforces schools.

Action - The Department is to continue to make links between the HAF and VRUs, especially in relation to older children

Professor Peter Fonagy emphasised the important role that the voluntary sector has to play in reducing serious violence and improving attendance, highlighting the work of charities such as Safer London. The importance of peer support for young people in encouraging attendance and reducing involvement in serious violence was emphasised. Indra Morris would like to see how the Department can develop the role of this peer support within our back-to-school communications.

Action - The Department is to investigate how the positive role of peer support in increasing engagement in education can be emphasised within back-to-school communications

Rachel de Souza highlighted her work recommending unique identifiers for children and how this would help to track children as they move through different services and the education system, enabling better join-up between services. She also emphasised how it would be beneficial to see schools in safeguarding partnerships.

4. North Shore Pilot Scheme – the role of school peer support in boosting attendance

Owner: Rob Tarn, CEO – Northern Education Trust

Rob Tarn detailed the background of the North Shore Pilot Scheme, which is launching on Thursday 26th May. This scheme is being run by the North Shore Academy, which is part of the Northern Education Trust (NET). The North Shore Academy has improved from a 'requires improvement' Ofsted rating in 2018 to an 'outstanding' rating in 2021, and practices and policies which were used by the North Shore Academy will be shared with 77 schools who have similar characteristics as part of a pioneering peer-support scheme for boosting attendance within schools.

Rob Tarn established what the practices were within North Shore Academy which helped to increase its attendance. These included having effective systems and processes for attendance which were used consistently, as well as intervening into a child's attendance once it dipped below 97%. The leaders within the school also made sure that attendance was a priority of every staff member, and that the culture of the school made children feel safe and gave them a purpose in education.

Rob Tarn expressed his wish for a national attendance hubs programme to be established off the back of the North Shore Pilot Scheme. This would enable school leaders to discuss attendance within a self-sustaining partnership of 60-80 schools across a number of hubs. This could include creating partnerships for primary, special and AP schools.

NET have developed a number of training videos, and are sharing their letters and protocols, among other resources, to enable schools to see how excellent attendance policies are enacted on a daily basis on the ground. There will also be a question board for schools to ask questions.

Rob Tarn posed the question to the Department of how this pilot could be taken to scale, with Indra Morris noting that the Alliance would be keen to hear how the North Shore Pilot Scheme is achieving its aims at a future Alliance meeting and that it would be interesting to see how schools in different Local Authorities and different local contexts across England implement a set of best practice requirements

Action – The Department is to identify and agree upon evidence points which will be tracked in order to allow the Department to measure the success of the North Shore Pilot Scheme

Rachel de Souza expressed that she is incredibly impressed with the work on the North Shore Pilot, with the wider Alliance also echoing their thanks to Rob Tarn

5. Closing remarks from the Ministerial Chair

Indra Morris thanked Alliance members for their time and input. The next Alliance meeting will be on the 30th June, with agenda items to be delivered by Sir Peter Wanless and Commander Catherine Roper.

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