

Attendance Action Alliance

Notes of meeting held on 17th January 2023, 11:15-12:00, Sanctuary Buildings, London and virtually via MS Teams.

Chair

The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education

Attendees

- The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP - Minister of State for Schools
- The Rt Hon Baroness Barran MBE - Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
- Dame Rachel de Souza - Children's Commissioner [**RdS**]
- Julie McCulloch - Director of Policy deputising for Geoff Barton [**JM**]
- Matthew Cooke - Chair, National Association of Virtual School Heads and Virtual School Head for Suffolk [**MC**]
- Professor Peter Fonagy - National Clinical Advisor on Children's Mental Health, NHS England [**PF**]
- Sir Martyn Oliver - HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted [**MO**]
- Anna Feuchtwang - Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau [**AF**]
- Tina Emery - Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums and South West Regional Steering Group Member [**TE**]
- Sarah Clarke - Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums and East of England Regional Steering Group Member [**SC**]
- Sir Peter Wanless CBE - Chief Executive, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [**PW**]
- John Pearce - President, Association of Directors of Children's Service [**JP**]
- Warren Carratt - Chief Executive Officer, Nexus Multi Academy Trust and The Evolve Trust [**WC**]
- Ade Adetosoye OBE - Children and Families Spokesperson, SOLACE [**AA**]

- Paul Stride, Portfolio Coordinator, Metropolitan Police deputising for Catherine Roper **[PS]**

Apologies

- Isabelle Trowler - Chief Social Worker for Children and Families **[IT]**
- Rob Tarn, CEO, Northern Education Trust **[RT]**
- Chief Constable Catherine Roper, National Police Chiefs' Council Lead Children and Young Person's Portfolio, Wiltshire Police **[CR]**
- Dr Rowena Christmas, Chair, Royal College of General Practitioners Cymru Wales **[RC]**
- Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts **[LC]**
- Russell Viner, Department for Education, Chief Scientific Advisor **[RV]**

Officials in Attendance

- Justin Russell, Director General, Children and Families **[JR]**
- Sophie Taylor, Director, VCSEE **[ST]**
- Simon Blake, Deputy Director, Attendance Division **[SB]**
- David Simpson, Head of Families Analysis Division **[DS]**

1. Welcome from Secretary of State

Secretary of State welcomed Alliance members to the meeting. She brought attention to her recent school visit in Liverpool.

Minister Hinds shared his uplifting school visit in Stockton.

Baroness Barran discussed a granular approach to data analysis in identifying specific patterns of absence and praised the work of attendance advisers she met recently.

Secretary of State celebrated that overall attendance was up at the end of last term, down from last autumn term and summer term and thanked head teachers for their efforts. **Secretary of State** drew members' attention to the expansion of the mentor and attendance hubs programmes, which will see 18 new attendance hubs across 6 regions, bringing the total to 32 and will help nearly 2,000 schools to tackle persistent absence, and the launch of the national communications campaign on attendance.

Secretary of State welcomed Sir Martyn Oliver, HM Chief Inspector at Ofsted.

MO emphasised the importance of fostering a positive culture and implementing incremental steps to enhance school attendance. He highlighted the pivotal role of regular attendance in shaping student behaviour and learning outcomes.

2. Update on national communications campaign

Owner: Strategic Communications and Campaigns official **[SCC]**

Secretary of State thanked Alliance members for their support and contributions on the national communications campaign.

SCC reported that compared to last year, there has been an increase in visits to the NHS guidance page on mild illness. **SCC** invited members to reflect on the campaign start.

There was discussion of the campaign's focus on avoidable days lost due to mild illness and mild and moderate anxiety and the importance of ensuring that children and parents with absence linked to more serious need understood it was not targeted at them.

PW flagged the range of online reaction and the need for continued work with the sector, and refinement of messaging.

TE agreed with **PW**'s observation and discussed the difficulties children with ADHD face in accessing medication and school inclusion.

RdS emphasised the importance of inclusivity and support for families and children who need it.

MC reflected the campaign was surfacing the stories of families with more complex absence stories, and that shining a light on the support needed for those families is also important.

PF reiterated his view that there was a public health need to address the absence levels in schools. He emphasised the importance of bringing out a clearer distinction between mild and severe anxiety in the campaign's evolution.

Action: **PF** to support officials on defining mild, moderate and severe anxiety.

WC emphasised the need for nuanced messages around pupils with SEND and their attendance and discussed the importance of incremental increases in attendance for those children e.g. those recovering from operations. He supported an inclusive visible representation in the campaign.

Action: Officials to collaborate with **WC** and other members to plan future communications directed at children with SEND.

AF announced her ongoing literature review on ways to foster a sense of belonging among children.

Action: **AF** to share the results from her literature review on student belonging with officials, to integrate findings into future comms work.

RdS discussed the correlation between meeting the needs of students and their happiness in school. She emphasised the importance of understanding the barriers to attendance and noted that children with SEND who attend school regularly are often happier than their peers who do not.

Action: Continue to develop and refine campaign messages, with continued attention to inclusivity and understanding the specific needs of all children.

3. Review of Autumn term attendance data and international comparisons

Owners: David Simpson, Families Analysis Division **[DS]** and Attendance Division official **[AD]**

DS provided an overview of the attendance data from the Autumn term, noting a more positive trend in primary schools compared to secondary schools and highlighted regional trends and improvements.

AD discussed international attendance comparisons, observing similar absence trends and responses in other countries since the pandemic.

4. Attendance data tools

Owner: Attendance Division official **[AD]**

AD discussed the new daily data system introduced in May 2022, and the importance of the effective use of data to improve attendance.

MO expressed interest in comparing primary data with Year 6 and Year 7 data to identify any significant drops and potential culture changes in that transition.

RdS thanked the data team for their impressive work and discussed the importance of understanding the reasons behind Year 7 and 8 drop off.

Action: Officials to initiate discussion around back to school communications

MC reflected on the power of the data tool and its potential impact on the Children in Need cohort.

PS noted the APCC's strategic endorsement to facilitate the promotion of data.

JC discussed the potential link between data tool patterns and attendance hubs.

MO highlighted that attendance isn't addressed in specialist NPQs.

Action: Attendance officials to flag to the NPQ team the place of attendance in the NPQ framework.

PF proposed that mental health support teams should have access to share relevant attendance data.

SB clarified that local authorities, as data controllers, can share data with mental health teams where appropriate.

JP emphasised the need to understand the overall picture of the community, particularly the vulnerable cohorts. He expressed his interest in collaborating with LAs.

Action: Officials to work with JP to share effective practice in the use of attendance data amongst LAs.

5. Closing remarks

Owner: The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP - Minister of State for Schools

Minister Hinds expressed his gratitude to all members for their ongoing support. The next meeting is scheduled for 21st February.