



Attendance Action Alliance

Notes of meeting held on 9th March 2023, 14:00-15:00, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings and virtually via MS Teams.

Chair

The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP Secretary of State for Education and The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister for Schools.

Attendees

- Ade Adetosoye OBE – Children and Families Spokesperson, Solace **[AA]**
- Steve Crocker OBE – President, Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) **[SC]**
- Dame Rachel de Souza- Children’s Commissioner **[RDS]**
- Anna Feuchtwang – Chief Executive of the National Children’s Bureau **[AF]**
- Professor Peter Fonagy- National Clinical Advisor on Children’s Mental Health, NHS England **[PF]**
- Professor Dame Clare Gerada-President, Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) **[CG]**
- Lee Owston - Acting National Director of Education, OFSTED attending in addition to Amanda Spielman **[LO]**
- John Pearce in addition to Steve Crocker OBE – Vice President, Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS)
- Commander Catherine Roper- Wiltshire’s Chief Constable, Forums & National Police Chiefs’ Council Children and Young People portfolio Manager. **[CCR]**
- Mrunal Sisoda - Co-Chair National Network of Parent Carer **[MS]**
- Amanda Spielman – HM Chief Inspector, OFSTED **[AS]**
- Sir Peter Wanless CBE- - Chief Executive, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) **[PW]**

Apologies

- Geoff Barton- General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
- Leora Cruddas- Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST)
- Susan Douglas CBE – CEO, Eden Academy Trust represented by Paul van Walyck
- Tina Emery – Co-Chair National Network of Parent Carer
- Rob Tarn CBE- CEO, Northern Education Trust (NET) represented by Michael Robson
- Isabelle Trowler- Chief Social Worker for Children and Families represented by Richard Gill **[RG]**

- Paul Whiteman- General Secretary, National Association of Head teachers (NAHT)

Officials in attendance

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

- Juliette Cammaerts – Director Policy, Planning & Delivery, Children’s Commissioner’s Office [JC]
- Sophie Taylor – Director, Vulnerable Children Strategy & Educational Engagement [ST]
- Simon Blake – Deputy Director, Attendance Division [SB]
- Officials from Families Analysis Division [FAD] and Attendance Division [AD]
- Katie Simkins- Chief Social Worker for Children and Families Office
- Private Secretary to Secretary of State

1. Welcome from the Secretary of State

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

The Secretary of State introduced herself and thanked the members for attending. She highlighted the importance of the Alliance working together to tackle obstacles to attendance.

2. Persistent Absence data item

Owner: Families Analysis Division official [FAD], Department for Education

FAD presented data trends comparing daily data for Autumn 22/23 compared to Autumn 18/19 to Alliance members. The Key insights included:

- So far this year (up to 10 February) the rate of persistent absence is 23.4%.
- From pre-pandemic to Spring term 2021/22, persistent absence approximately doubled in primary and secondary schools and increased by around 50% in special schools.
- There is a component of increased unauthorised absence contributing to the high persistent absence rates, particularly in secondary schools, where unauthorised absence rates in the Autumn 2022/23 daily attendance data appear to have been around double those from the Autumn 2019/20, the last pre-COVID school census figures (3.1% vs 1.6%)
- Pupils may reach the overall 10% persistent absence threshold for one or multiple absence reasons (e.g. for illness alone, for both illness and unauthorised absence or for a combination of absence reasons combined).
- From pre-pandemic to 21/22, persistent absence due to unauthorised reasons nearly doubled and for authorised reasons increased (mostly due to illness absence). Persistent absence due to illness appears to have fallen slightly in Autumn term 2022.
- The persistent absence pattern is echoed when looking at overall absence rates. Unauthorised absence (including holiday and unauthorised ‘other’ reasons) in the daily data appears to be higher so far this year than both pre-pandemic and last year.

In commenting on the persistent absence item, AS noted a shift in attitudes towards attendance generally and the great need to change the narrative on the importance of attendance.

MS talked about the impact of mental health on attendance, highlighting that many children struggle with confidence in school after the pandemic.

RDS commended the high sign up of schools to the Department's daily data project, and highlighted the huge impact it could have on early support. She voiced her concerns around persistent absence and the need for promoting the importance of attendance and the benefits of children regularly attending school.

CG highlighted the importance of the data sharing between schools and GPs, and asked whether more can be done to link health and education data.

RDS stressed the need for a unique child identifier, but recognised it as being a challenging area. She urged the Department to take first steps towards achieving this outcome - highlighting the possible benefits that might result.

SC reinforced the need for promoting the importance of school attendance and talked about ADCS's work in this space. The impact of attendance on child's future attainment was reiterated.

AF highlighted the need for protocol on how to achieve multi-agency data sharing safely. She also expressed her concerns about the impact of bullying on a child's attendance.

MS urged messages to parents to be nuanced to ensure that additional needs are recognised.

PW talked about the role of attendance in safeguarding children. He highlighted the need for promoting the message of schools having a positive impact on children's mental health and wellbeing.

PF urged caution when it comes to children experiencing "normal but difficult emotions", and that it is important to discourage over-medicalisation where possible.

Actions- RDS to support with comms to parents on attendance.

Actions- DfE to investigate the data sharing question raised by CG.

3.Children Missing Education

Owner: Attendance Division official [AD]

The Secretary for State introduced the topic of children missing education highlighting the vulnerability of this cohort. She handed over to the Minister for Schools and once again thanked the members for their continued support. The Minister for Schools invited Nichola Vasey to present this item.

Key insights presented by AD included:

- Children Missing Education (CME) are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at school and are not receiving suitable education elsewhere.
- CME are at risk of negative impact later in life of:
 - o underachieving

- being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation,
- becoming NEET (not in education, employment, or training).
- Ways in which children become CME:
 - Children registered at school who come off roll.
 - Children who have never been on a school roll but are known to other services:
 - Children who have never been on a school roll and are not known to other services.
- Existing challenges regarding CME:
 - Data on how many children are CME, who they are and why they become CME is limited.
 - Practice to identify and support CME across LAs and schools is varied.
 - There is limited understanding of what works to prevent, identify and support CME into education.

RDS emphasised that although small cohort in size it is where you find the most vulnerable children.

AA talked about the work the work done by Solace and ADCS on the issue of CME and data sharing between different agencies.

AF highlighted the importance of finding out who CME are and why they are missing. She reemphasised that children who go off the school roll are the ones at risk. AF talked about the research carried out and the biggest drivers of CME.

AS talked about children who leave secondary school to be electively home educated. She highlighted the need for extra support for parents who home educate a child with special needs.

Ade highlighted the need for finding out pathways that children take to become CME and the ways in which we achieve this.

Action- RDS to produce a report on the range of journeys that children take to become CME.

4. Commitments of action from Alliance members

Owner: The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister for Schools

The Minister invited Alliance members to update on the action they are delivering against their pledges.

CG talked about the paper that sets out principles for general practitioners in relation to school attendance, which is due to be taken through UK council in June.

LO talked about a series of webinars that OFSTED is running, and how CME could feature as part of this.

AA talked about how SOLACE and ADCS has helped to amplify best practice in relation to persistent absence.

Action- OFSTED to conduct a webinar on securing good attendance, tackling persistent absence and CME best practice, and promote the importance of attendance during inspector training.

5.Closing remarks

Owner: The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister for Schools

The Minister thanked the members for attending the meeting, their continued support for the Alliance and emphasised the importance of making attendance everyone's business.

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