



Attendance Action Alliance

Notes of meeting held on 20th July 2022, 14:00-15:00, Minister for Children and Families Office, Department for Education and virtually via MS Teams

Chair

Brendan Clarke-Smith MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

Attendees

- Geoff Barton (General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)) **[GB]**
- Steve Crocker OBE (President, Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)) **[SC]**
- Leora Cruddas (Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST)) **[LC]**
- Susan Douglas CBE (CEO, Eden Academy Trust) **[SD]**
- Tina Emery (Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums & South West Regional Steering Group Member) **[TE]**
- Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau (NCB) **[AF]**
- Commander Catherine Roper (Head of Profession, Crime Prevention, Inclusion and Engagement, Metropolitan Police) **[CCR]**
- Rob Tarn (CEO, Northern Education Trust) **[RT]**
- Isabelle Trowler (Chief Social Worker for Children and Families) **[IT]**
- Sir Peter Wanless CBE (Chief Executive, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) **[PWa]**

Apologies

- Ade Adetosoye OBE (Children and Families Spokesperson, SOLACE) **[AA]**
- Dame Rachel de Souza (Children's Commissioner) *Represented by Juliette Cammaerts (Director of Policy, Planning and Delivery, Children's Commissioner's Office)* **[JC]**
- Professor Peter Fonagy (National Clinical Advisor on Children's Mental Health, NHS England) **[PF]**
- Professor Dame Clare Gerada (President, Royal College of General Practitioners) **[DCG]**
- Amanda Spielman (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector) *Represented by Christopher Russell (National Director for Education, OFSTED)* **[CR]**

- Paul Whiteman (General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers) [PWh]

Officials in attendance

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

- Lauren McCrum, Private Secretary to the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families
- Indra Morris – Director General Children’s Services, Comms and Strategy Group [IM]
- Jocelyn Shaw – Deputy Director, Attendance Division
- Officials from Attendance Programme Management Office [ATPMO] and Vulnerable Children’s Attendance Team
- Private Secretary to the Minister for Children and Families

1. Welcome from the Minister

Owner: Brendan Clarke-Smith MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

The Minister introduced himself, highlighting his new role as the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, his professional background as a teacher and the importance of attendance. The Alliance’s progress this academic year was commended, with the Minister looking forward to seeing how the Alliance develops in the future.

2. Introductions

Owner: Brendan Clarke-Smith MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

Members introduced themselves, highlighting their roles and the work they have done as part of the Alliance. Members highlighted cross-sector collaboration, a core focus on attendance and an action-oriented way of working as key success features of the alliance.

The Minister emphasised how important attending the first week of the new school year in September is, especially for the likelihood of children sustaining good attendance for the rest of the term. Support for children and families is essential in overcoming the attendance issues which developed during the COVID pandemic.

3. Back into school communications

Owner: Attendance Programme Management Office official (APMO) – Attendance PMO, Department for Education

APMO recapped the Department’s work with the Children’s Commissioner’s Office (CCO) and the Chief Social Worker (CSW) on Back into school communications and support in advance of September.

JC recapped the actions CCO are taking on the campaign, highlighting that there will be further resources over Summer to support SEND children and their families on the CCO website. The analysis model which CCO used as part of their [‘Back into school: New insights into school absence’](#) report is being published so schools can use this in their own attendance analysis. Schools are also signing up to the CCO’s young carer pledge and further resources are being made to help with school year transitions.

IT was keen to establish an equivalent Attendance Action Alliance, comprising Social Workers, to build on the work she and her team have been doing through her pledge and confirmed plans to publish an attendance top tips document for social workers.

Action – IT to plan and feed back to the Attendance Action Alliance on the possibility of a Social Worker Alliance

Confirmed communications contributions from Alliance members were discussed, such as a blog to GPs from DCG and communications to vulnerable families through Chief Executives from AA.

GB suggested that ASCL, NAHT and CST could help to promote a shared hashtag that schools can use when promoting the positive and exciting aspects of school at the start of term.

Action – The Department is to work with GB, LC and PWh on creating a shared hashtag and a positive communications push for schools.

RT stated that speaking about attendance in percentage terms is not helpful, with 95% attendance still equating to half a day of missed school per fortnight. He believes that we need to increasingly move towards communications which emphasise the importance of attending school as much as possible for children’s future life chances.

TE and AF urged caution about messages that may raise anxiety levels for children and families who want to attend school but feel they can’t, for valid reasons, highlighting insufficient school places and CAMHS support in some cases.

LC and SC noted that for the majority of children, emphasising that school was the most positive place and having high ambitions was correct, agreeing with GB’s point on positive communications.

PWa raised the important work the Department completed on identifying different drivers of non-attendance and the need to use these to tailor our communications and support, offering the help of NSPCC in sharing these messages.

4. Discussion on Alliance focus for the next academic year

Owner: All

The Minister asked members what they felt the Alliance should prioritise next academic year:

- JC emphasised the need to double-down on children missing from education, and that a continued focus on data by the group, and across the system, would be vital

- PWA would like to see the Alliance engaging third sector organisations more effectively, understanding that effective local charity practices are dependent on local contexts and cannot be easily scaled up nationally.
- SD would like to see more clusters of schools sharing best practice, as in RT's pilot, and would like to continue to see the voice of the child highlighted in the Alliance
- TE would like to see the Alliance supporting families whose children would like to attend school but who cannot and an increased focus on school-level blockers
- AF would like to see a renewed focus on mental health and wellbeing, adding that children will want to attend school if they feel safe and happy, and offered to disseminate back to school communications through the NCB.
- IM asked Alliance members to focus on how they can collaborate across sectors to address attendance barriers and amplify evidence and learning. She agreed it was important to look further into some of the blockers to attendance raised by Alliance members.

5. Closing remarks from the Minister

The Minister again thanked members for their work so far and emphasised that supporting children to attend school is a priority.

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