



Attendance Action Alliance

Notes of meeting held on 24th February 2022, 09:30-10:30, Department for Education (Virtually via MS Teams)

Chair

Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for School Standards

Attendees

- Geoff Barton (General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)) **[GB]**
- Susan Douglas CBE (CEO, Eden Academy Trust) **[SD]**
- Dame Rachel de Souza (Children's Commissioner) **[DRDS]**
- Tina Emery (Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums & South West Regional Steering Group Member) **[TE]**
- 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]**
- Charlotte Ramsden OBE (President, Association of Directors of Children's Services) **[CR]**
- Commander Catherine Roper (Head of Profession, Crime Prevention, Inclusion and Engagement, Metropolitan Police) **[CCR]**
- 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]**
- Paul Whiteman (General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers) **[PWh]**

Apologies

- Ade Adetosoye OBE (Children and Families Spokesperson, SOLACE) **[AA]**
- Leora Cruddas (Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST)) Represented by Steve Rollett, Deputy Chief Executive of the CST **[SR]**
- Mrunal Sisodia (Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums & East of England Regional Steering Group Member) **[MS]**
- Amanda Spielman (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector) Represented by Christopher Russell, National Director for Education for Ofsted **[AS]**

- Rob Tarn (CEO, Northern Education Trust) **[RT]**

Officials in attendance

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

- Juliette Cammaerts – Office for the Children’s Commissioner **[JC]**
- Julia Kinniburgh – Director General COVID Response and Recovery Group
- Indra Morris – Director General Children’s Services, Comms and Strategy Group
- Jocelyn Shaw – Deputy Director, Schools COVID Response Directorate
- Sophie Taylor – Director Schools COVID Response and Senior Responsible Officer Attendance
- David Thomas – Secretary of State’s Policy Adviser
- Officials from Attendance Unit **[AU]**, SEND Policy, Schools COVID Response Directorate
- Private Secretary to the Secretary of State

1. Welcome

Owner: Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for School Standards

Minister Walker welcomed all attendees and thanked them for their attendance and continued work in support of the Alliance’s aims.

2. Progress Updates from Alliance members

Owner: Attendance Unit official (AU)

AU summarised the progress on pledges.

PWa highlighted the types of circumstances affecting children’s absence. He mentioned the work that he has seen charities such as School-Home Support carry out in supporting families, children and young people to overcome barriers to attendance.

Action – a series of follow-up roundtables are being planned.

GB highlighted the need for identification of who the young people are needing our support as well as the scale of the issue. Fear of exams and poor mental health were both mentioned as barriers to attendance.

Action – GB and PWa to create a shared taxonomy to cover the range of reasons for absence.

CCR has asked policing colleagues nationally for best practice examples of school police officers supporting attendance.

CR said that attendance is one of the priorities for the next presidency year at ADCS.

3. Initial findings from the Children’s Commissioner on children missing education (CME)

Owner: Dame Rachel de Souza (DRDS) – Children’s Commissioner

DRDS talked about her work on the extensive deep dive work on CME. Initial headline findings were highlighted by JC:

- The way in which local authorities (LAs) estimated the number of pupils missing education was not consistent. Only a small number of LAs were able to estimate the number of CME in their area which was highlighted as a safeguarding issue.
- The importance of clear roles, responsibilities and governance structures around managing attendance was raised. Some of the work highlighted inconsistencies in attendance data collection, hampered by a lack of effective data sharing across different systems, agencies and platforms, and some LAs’ concerns over GDPR implications of data sharing.
- The lack of a consistent, effective way for LAs to identify CME was also apparent.

DRDS reiterated the importance of consistent and compatible data system design for schools to record attendance well.

Minister Walker highlighted work that the Department is doing, such as the Department’s daily attendance sharing scheme, which over 12,000 schools have already signed up to, as well as the work to produce a Children Not in School register.

AU emphasised that absence is often a symptom of other issues in a child’s life.

Action – AU agreed on the need for a clarification of the roles and responsibilities of schools and LAs when tackling attendance issues and reminded members that the Department was running a consultation on draft proposals.

AU highlighted the importance of home visits from special schools was emphasised, as well as the importance of supporting SEND children in transition school years.

CR welcomed greater partnership working on this, offering to support this work and engage in its next steps. PWh also offered to assist DRDS in this work.

TE said that we need to use data to better understand the reasons why some children are home educated.

Minister Walker drew upon the work that the Department showcased in the previous Alliance meeting on the voluntary sharing of attendance data. 12,000 schools have signed up to share their daily attendance data with the Department.

Action – Alliance members to provide further support to encourage schools to sign up to share daily attendance data.

4. Attendance Consultation

Owner: Attendance Unit official

AU reminded members that the Secretary of State had committed to attendance being a key feature of the white paper and gave a brief overview of the areas likely be covered. He also gave a short overview of the current attendance consultation.

DRDS stated that the Children's Commissioner's Office had been working closely with the SEND team to make a version of the SEND green paper which is accessible for families of SEND children. They raised that the Department needs to make the guidance easily understandable for parents and carers, detailing what the changes would mean. The Children's Commissioner's Office offered to discuss developing these child and parent facing communications with the Department.

GB supported the sense of urgency in the attendance work and highlighted the need for a police perspective in this.

Action – TE and MS to help the Department with the language of the SEND section of forthcoming guidance to make it more accessible.

Action – The Children's Commissioner's Office to work with the Department to develop a parent facing version of guidance.

DCG stated that she saw low school attendance as a public health issue. She offered to link the work on the Alliance in with the NHS Assembly.

5. Closing remarks

Minister Walker reiterated that raising school attendance remains a key priority for him and the Secretary of State, and thanked members for their time and support.