



Notes of meeting held on 18th January 2022, 12:00-13:00, Department for Education (Virtually via MS Teams)

Chair

Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for School Standards

Attendees

- Ade Adetosoye OBE (Children and Families Spokesperson, SOLACE) **[AA]**
- Leora Cruddas (Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST)) **[LC]**
- 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]**
- 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) **[AS]**
- Rob Tarn (CEO, Northern Education Trust) **[RT]**
- 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

- Geoff Barton (General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)) Represented by Julie McCulloch, Director of Policy for ASCL **[JM]**
- Julia Kinniburgh (Director General COVID Response and Recovery Group)
- Commander Catherine Roper (Head of Profession, Crime Prevention, Inclusion and Engagement, Metropolitan Police) Represented by Superintendent Simon Rotherham **[SSR]**
- Isabelle Trowler (Chief Social Worker for Children and Families) **[IT]**

Officials in attendance

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

- Indra Morris – Director General Children’s Services, Comms and Strategy Group
- Andrew McCully – Director General for Early Years and Schools Group)
- Sophie Taylor – Director Schools COVID Response and Senior Responsible Officer Attendance) **[ST]**
- Alison Wilson – Deputy Director Attendance and Vulnerable Children Unit
- Rose Mortada – Programme Director, Data Directorate **[RM]**
- Attendance Unit official **[AU]**
- David Thomas – Secretary of State’s Policy Adviser
- Mark Lehain – Secretary of State’s Special Adviser
- Private Secretary to the Secretary of State

1. Welcome from the Minister

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

Minister Walker emphasised that the Alliance will continue their joint work raising attendance, ensuring that children who should be in school are as often as possible.

Minister Walker welcomed all members, including two new members to the Alliance, TE and MS. PWa, who could not attend the previous meeting, was also welcomed.

2. Progress Updates from Alliance members

Owner: Attendance Unit official (AU)

AU thanked members for their progress on their pledges so far. An overview of key progress and upcoming activities for all pledges was given and members were then invited to give brief, additional updates:

- PWa wrote to major children’s charities and spoke to Children England to mobilise their input and engagement at local level. He also asked for support from key players in the sporting world and would also be utilising research and insight from responses to inform how sector(s) can support attendance work in more detail.
- IT was not in attendance, but the group were updated on the to hold a series of seminars to showcase the best practice from local authorities (LAs) in supporting children with a social worker to attend school.
- AA and CR are working closely with IT to deliver their pledge. ADCS will continue to progress policy development at a policy forum for ADCS in the coming weeks and CR will provide Alliance members with an update after the forum.
- DCG highlighted positive progress in plans to support her pledge.

- PF updated that education mental health practitioners (EMHPs) in schools with a Mental Health Support Team (MHST) are trained in how to address anxiety in schools and about how anxiety impacts persistent absence.
- DRDS is working with LAs to understand children missing education. The initial survey of 10 LAs has been completed, and the data is being analysed.
- AS stated that the Ofsted attendance report was not published at the start of term but will be published shortly.
- RT has spoken to LC and SD about his pledge. He showcased a proof of concept including a possible website which would enable schools to access attendance best practice examples.

Action – RT to deliver a seminar to a range of schools on sharing best practice in improving attendance. RT, LC, and SD will then work together to identify further best practice from the full spectrum of school types and phases, including Specialist and Alternative Provision.

Action – all pledge leads to continue to progress their respective pledges.

3. Removing barriers to attendance for children and families with SEND

Owners: Mrunal Sisodia (MS) and Tina Emery (TE) – Co-chairs National Network of Parent Carer Forums

MS presented a summary of findings of a [flash survey](#) of its members (received 89 responses, representing 60% of forums) in late November 21. Relevant findings included:

- What local and national government could do to support children and families with SEND in relation to attendance, particularly reasonable adjustments (e.g. part time timetables and variations of school uniform policy) and for greater awareness of these adjustments to be spread within schools to accommodate children better.
- The need for a more holistic focus on wellbeing and valuing different academic achievements and looking beyond these to measure success.

MS commented that he felt the sector would benefit from consistent messages in relation to attendance and behaviour policy. Clear messaging around nurturing and support are needed.

AS commented that the support services, especially health services, that families relied upon had been impacted by COVID taking priority.

PF emphasised that Mental Health Support Teams are already equipped to deal with anxiety and support children with short term MH issues and gave an overview of work he can do in his role to support further training and awareness.

SD emphasised the need for a positive narrative around Alternative Provision (AP). AP has historically been seen as where pupils go when everything else has failed and this can be extremely damaging to a child's self-esteem.

Minister Walker stated that he was struck by an AP setting he visited recently and its excellent attention to specialist needs and tailoring interventions.

TE raised concerns about waiting lists for diagnoses and support. Some parents feel that finding support can be hard and the system is sometimes difficult to navigate.

Minister Walker noted that diagnosis should be given where needed and, in many cases, children are below diagnosis thresholds, so we need a whole system approach to supporting these children.

Action – DfE officials to hold further discussions with Prof Peter Fonagy on pledge 4 regarding the scope and timing of improvements to MHST training.

Action – DfE officials and pledge 5 leads to ensure that the work on good practice sharing also covers removing barriers to attendance for children with SEND and those in AP.

Action – DfE will ensure that the forthcoming SEND green paper and Schools White Paper are complementary and aligned in relation to supporting SEND children to attend school.

4. Daily Pupil Level Attendance Data

Owner: Rose Mortada (RM) – Programme Director, Data Directorate and Sophie Taylor (ST) – Director Schools COVID Response

ST set out thinking on timings and aspirations for the project. She outlined reasons for moving to daily data collection including more timely and better data shown to be important during pandemic, helping the system to better direct resources and aiding better policy making.

RM outlined the approach, informing the group that schools will be asked to share data, daily, on a voluntary basis. This would be an opportunity for improved collection, co-design and feedback would be used to further build the project.

GB agreed that this would be very useful but again said that to maximise opt in from schools the DfE would need to be clear that this wouldn't be used for accountability purposes.

5. Closing remarks

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

The Chair thanked all those in attendance for joining and expressed his gratitude for inputs. The data item will require follow up conversations, which will be arranged.