

Notes of meeting held on 26th March 2024, 10:45-11:45, Sanctuary Buildings, London and virtually via MS Teams.

Chair

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

Attendees

- Baroness Barran MBE – Minister for the School System and Student Finance
- Andy Smith – President, Association of Directors of Children’s Services **[AS]**
- Rob Tarn – Chief Executive Officer, Northern Education Trust **[RT]**
- Sir Martyn Oliver – HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted **[MO]**
- Matthew Cooke – Virtual School Head for Suffolk and Immediate Past Chair, National Association of Virtual School Heads **[MC]**
- Professor Peter Fonagy – National Clinical Advisor on Children’s Mental Health, NHS England **[PF]**
- Isabelle Trowler – Chief Social Worker for Children and Families **[IT]**
- Russell Viner – Chief Scientific Advisor, Department for Education **[RV]**
- Leora Cruddas – Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts **[LC]**
- 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]**
- Warren Carratt – Chief Executive Officer, Nexus Multi Academy Trust and The Evolve Trust **[WC]**
- Dr Rowena Christmas – Chair, Royal College of General Practitioners Cymru Wales **[RC]**
- Paul Whiteman – General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers **[PWh]**
- Paul Stride – Portfolio Coordinator, Metropolitan Police deputising for Catherine Roper **[PS]**

Apologies

- Dame Rachel de Souza – Children’s Commissioner **[RdS]**
- Chief Constable Catherine Roper – National Police Chiefs’ Council Lead Children and Young Person’s Portfolio, Wiltshire Police **[CR]**
- Geoff Barton – General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders **[GB]**

- Peter Wanless – Chief Executive, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [**PWa**]
- Ade Adetosoye OBE – Children and Families Spokesperson, Solace [**AA**]
- Anna Feuchtwang – Chief Executive, National Children’s Bureau [**AF**]

Officials in Attendance

- Justin Russell – Director General for Families Group [**JR**]
- John Edwards – Director General, Regions Group [**JE**]
- Sophie Taylor – Director, VCSEE [**ST**]
- Simon Blake – Deputy Director, Attendance Division [**SB**]
- Juliette Cammaerts [**JC**] – Office of the Children’s Commissioner
- Officials from Attendance Division and Attendance Analysis Unit

1. Welcome from Secretary of State

Secretary of State welcomed members to the meeting and shared her excitement over the set of recent attendance announcements, including the revised version of Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance and regulations to mandate attendance data-sharing by all state-funded school. She extended a thank you to Rob Tarn for stepping into the role as new National Attendance Ambassador.

Secretary of State welcomed Andy Smith on, taking up his term as ADCS President and passed on her gratitude to John Pearce for his work over the past year.

2. Pledge updates & actions from the last meeting

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

AD thanked members for their continued work to deliver their pledges and their input on the Children in Need attendance improvement plan and back-to-school preparation top tips.

AD shared an update from **PWa** on his work with officials to capture children’s voices on attendance and use this insight to inform future engagement with young people.

RV reflected on the impact of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) Conference where young people emphasised the importance of their school attendance – and it being of equal value to them as their health (i.e. encouragement and support to paediatricians to organise medical appointments outside of school hours where possible).

Secretary of State echoed these sentiments, sharing her experiences from a recent visit to a special education school.

3. Progress to date: attendance announcements and reforms

Owner: Attendance Division official [AD]

AD highlighted the updated Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance, regulations to mandate attendance data-sharing by all state-funded schools, regulations to modernise school attendance and admission registers, the new National Framework for Penalty Notices and National Attendance Ambassador.

AD shared the next steps and support for the sector to implement the changes from September.

SC expressed positive sentiment towards the support-first approach in the guidance for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), noting the importance of clarity on what help was offered.

WC highlighted that the updated attendance codes will significantly enhance school, trust and national understanding of attendance.

RT emphasised the importance of consistent penalty notice thresholds from a multi-academy trust perspective.

AS echoed the sector's welcoming attitude towards the reforms and interest in assessing impact given there is no new funding to support implementation

***Action:** AS to share information on upcoming implementation webinars through the ADCS newsletter.*

***Action:** DfE officials to collaborate with LGA to share webinars among their network.*

4. Forward look: supporting schools further

Owners: Baroness Barran and Rob Tarn

Secretary of State thanked Baroness Barran and Rob Tarn on work they have been doing to support leaders with actionable insight and practical advice.

Baroness Barran highlighted that attendance is improving. Behind aggregate national level data there are green shoots, and we need to accelerate and build on that.

Baroness Barran noted departmental work to segment absence data by severity and year group to give a more granular view, which she hoped would empower schools to break their absence problem down, adopt practices of strongest schools, and meet expectations in our new guidance.

RT thanked the team for ongoing work with attendance hub leads to develop practical advice for schools, which includes whole-school approaches focusing on

culture and communication strategies and a collection of attendance hubs case studies.

RT emphasised the importance of a school-led approach.

Secretary of State expressed her gratitude for the effort being invested in developing further materials to support schools, noting the importance of identifying early signs of absence and fostering a strong sense of belonging.

MC emphasised that a granular understanding of attendance data is crucial for schools, as well as social workers.

***Action:** MC to share good practice in using attendance data with virtual school heads (VSHs) through a NAVSH webinar and case studies.*

AS expressed positive sentiment on supporting schools to segment their data further and advocated for a holistic view of the child.

***Action:** RT to develop case studies focusing on the capabilities of LAs to support schools.*

TE encouraged join-up between segmented attendance data and other departmental dashboards and information. She emphasised the importance of providing pupils with the right support at the right time, which involves schools identifying the right resources and getting support.

***Action:** Officials to work with TE to explore linkages to ordinarily available provision in local areas.*

***Action:** Officials to investigate potential links with the national and local SEND and AP dashboard in development.*

5. Closing remarks

Secretary of State expressed her gratitude to all members and concluded with the strong position we are in to make a significant difference. The next meeting is scheduled for 21st May.