



Notes of meeting held on 21st May 2024, 14:00-15:00, Sanctuary Buildings, London and virtually via MS Teams.

Co-Chairs

1. The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP - Minister of State for Schools
2. Simon Blake - Deputy Director, Attendance Division, Department for Education [**SB**]

Attendees

- Pepe Di’lasio - General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders [**PD**]
- Paul Stride - Portfolio Coordinator, Metropolitan Police deputising for Catherine Roper [**PS**]
- Russell Viner - Chief Scientific Advisor, Department for Education [**RV**]
- Isabelle Trowler CBE - Chief Social Worker, Department for Education [**IT**]
- Andy Smith - President, Association of Directors of Children’s Services [**AS**]
- Rob Tarn - Chief Executive Officer, Northern Education Trust [**RT**]
- Leora Cruddas - Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts [**LC**]
- Sarah Clarke - Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums and East of England Regional Steering Group Member [**SC**]
- Tina Emery - Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums and South West Regional Steering Group Member [**TC**]
- Dr Rowena Christmas - Chair, Royal College of General Practitioners Wales [**RC**]
- Professor Peter Fonagy - National Clinical Advisor on Children’s Mental Health, NHS England [**PF**]
- Matthew Cooke - Virtual School Head for Suffolk and Immediate Past Chair, National Association of Virtual School Heads [**MC**]
- Phil Anderson - Strategic Director for External Affairs, National Children’s Bureau – deputising for Anna Feuchtwang [**PA**]
- Alex Jones - Director for Insights and Research, Ofsted – deputising for Sir Martyn Oliver [**AJ**]

Apologies

- Anna Feuchtwang - Chief Executive of the National Children’s Bureau [AF]
- Paul Whiteman - General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers [PWh]
- Sir Peter Wanless CBE - Chief Executive, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [PW]
- Dame Rachel de Souza - Children’s Commissioner [RdS]
- Ade Adetosoye CBE - Children and Families Spokesperson, Solace [AA]
- Chief Constable Catherine Roper - National Police Chiefs’ Council Lead Children and Young Person’s Portfolio, Wiltshire Police [CC]
- Warren Carratt, CEO - Nexus Multi Academy Trust and The Evolve Trust [WC]
- Sir Martyn Oliver - HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted [MO]

Officials in Attendance

- Alice Wilcock [AW] - Office of the Children’s Commissioner
- Officials from Attendance Division, Attendance Analysis Unit, Strategic Communications Team and Child Protection & Safeguarding Division

1. Welcome from Minister Hinds

Minister Hinds welcomed members to the meeting and **Pepe Di’lasio** as the new General Secretary of ASCL.

Minister Hinds congratulated **Isabelle Trowler**, who recently collected her CBE, for her outstanding work in social care.

Minister Hinds highlighted that since the last meeting the Department published interactive tables of attendance data with characteristic breakdowns.

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 actions from the last meeting including:

- **MC** and **IT** for having started Children in Need (CiN) fieldwork to identify good practice in improving the attendance of CiN.
- **RdS** for her work with the Greater Manchester Local Alliance.

- **LC** for completing CST's attendance seminar series.

3. Comms Spotlight: National Evaluation Findings & Back-to-School Plans

Owner: Strategic Communications and Campaigns official [**SCC**] and Attendance Division official [**AD**]

SCC shared the initial findings of the 'Moments matter, attendance counts' campaign evaluation. They thanked members for their input into the campaign development and for amplifying the campaign.

AD discussed back-to-school communications plans to encourage attendance in September and highlighted the engagement with the education sector and across wider programmes.

Action: Members to share and amplify back to school communications.

PD praised the back-to-school communications plan. He highlighted the necessity of targeting children who are not currently attending school.

AW agreed these messages are the right ones and discussed the importance of promoting the use of attendance data beyond the education sector (e.g., health).

AJ echoed the positive sentiment and emphasised the importance of parental attitude towards attendance.

RC discussed collaboration with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health to encourage clinicians to view attendance as a key health outcome measure.

SC highlighted the importance of maintaining sensitive and considerate communications with families who have children with SEND.

TE emphasised the significance of focusing on transitions, highlighting that they should not be viewed as a once-a-year event.

PS discussed their conversation with Junior Citizens Trust and suggested this as an opportunity to showcase key attendance messages.

Action: PS to facilitate the sharing attendance messages through the Junior Citizens Trust platform, and SC to work with officials to ensure effective communication plans are in place for families with children who have SEND.

4. Deep Dive into Severe Absence: Data and Insights

Owner: Officials from Attendance Analysis Unit [AAU] and Attendance Division [AD]

AAU presented an overview of the severe absence cohort, highlighting that there has been a rise since the pandemic, observed in number of regions but more so outside London, and larger in secondary school year groups and for some intersecting characteristics. **AD** shared insights from attendance hubs suggesting that severely absent pupils are for the most part in their homes.

AW discussed the Greater Manchester Local Alliance's focus on severe absence.

Action: AW to provide feedback on insights when gathered.

PD expressed interest in data opportunities and the breadth of alternative provision in areas with severe absence.

MC shared insights from conversations with schools and MATs, emphasising that severe absence is part of a larger picture with influencing factors not always reflected in the data. He highlighted the value of building relationships with parents.

AS highlighted high

anxiety observed in children and parents/carers due to the pandemic.

PF discussed the link between severe absence and mental health. He highlighted the importance of whole family support for increasing children's attendance.

PA noted bullying as another driver and shared that schools with anti-bullying strategies tend to perform better.

5. Closing remarks

Minister Hinds thanked members for the rich discussion and encouraged members to undertake activity to mobilise workforces and sectors beyond the Department, including health, police and wider services, in the lead up to September.

Minister Hinds closed the meeting.