

Attendance Working Group Meeting  
Friday 14 June 2024, 9.30 – 11.00am  
Town Hall, Committee Room 1

## MINUTES

**Chair:** Greg Fell– Director of Public Health - SCC

**Notes:** Ruth Powell – Learn Sheffield

**Attendees:**

Name	Setting/School/Academy	Name	Setting/School/Academy
Stephen Betts	Learn Sheffield	Jo Quinlen	Lowfield Primary
Lucy McGann	Minerva	Hannah Bridgewood	Whiteways Primary
Cathy Rowland	Dobcroft Infant School	Tracey Rice	SCC
Martin Finch	Tapton School Academy Trust	Pat Butterell	SCC
Scott Burnside	Tapton School Academy Trust	Giles Robinson	SCC
Emma Anderson	Newfield School	John Mansergh	SCC
Laura Selby	Sheffield Young Carers	Candi Lawson	SCC
James Gibson	Becton School		
Laura Crocker	Springfield Primary		
Liz Pediani	Arbourthorne Community Primary		

**Apologies:** Elena Drayson, Evelyn Abram, Katie Collins, Rachel Scragg, Bob Cuff

Item	Detail	Action
1.	<p><b>Welcome and apologies</b> Greg Fell, Director of Public Health - SCC welcomed colleagues to the meeting, introductions were made and apologies were noted.</p>	
2.	<p><b>Minutes and matters arising</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notes from GF GF shared notes following the previous meeting – these are unedited and added to the bottom of the previous minutes.</li> <li>• Pupil illness - guidance and impact of immunisation This action will be picked up by Bethan Plant. It was noted that this needs to be practical advice for school leaders which is not just reinterpreting the PHE guidance.</li> </ul> <p>There is an action for the NHS to catch up on immunisations for a whole generation who have missed out. Nobody is attending the working group from the</p>	<b>BP</b>

	<p>NHS. They are having their own working group meetings to collect views, SB has attended this meeting. The intention is to bring the two groups together to make it into one conversation. Everyone agrees that it is a city-wide issue rather than an education specific one. The NHS needs to be involved in the City's response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data analysis and scope of future work (agenda below)</li> </ul> <p>Today's meeting is to look more deeply into the data analysis, which has moved on since the last meeting.</p> <p>By the end of the four meetings GF wants to understand the issue and then work out a strategy. This is a task and finish group to make a plan, but this does not include implementing the plan.</p>	
3.	<p><b>Data analysis: cohort with attendance below 50%</b></p> <p>GR spoke to this item, sharing his analysis of the cohort with severe absence. The following key points were discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It appears that Covid disproportionately affected the attendance of older children. There looks to be a slight improvement in this in 2024.</li> <li>• Absences due to illness could reflect changes in recording rather than a change in illness levels.</li> <li>• Suspensions and exclusions account for a very small number of absences, and most of these are fixed term exclusions.</li> <li>• Late absence is a growing problem in primary, but is improving slightly in secondary. Colleagues added that the new guidance (in effect from August 2024) clearly states that children who arrive 30 minutes after registration need to be recorded as a U code rather than late. Schools need to be careful not to discourage lateness to the point that children do not attend school at all. It could be the case that late absences rise next year, especially in secondary.</li> <li>• A late present code is not counted as an absence. This can be an issue in primary as children could miss phonics, literacy and numeracy. It is important to identify patterns for pupils in this respect.</li> <li>• Family holidays are down this year but data is not yet available for the summer term. The group discussed the fact that this is a continuing problem and could link to the cost of living crisis. There are new rules around fines, which include higher fines and a per parent, per child amount to try and deter families. This will have an impact on families who go on extended trips abroad to visit family. The group discussed the unintended consequences of these rules.</li> <li>• 'No reason given' is the biggest absence category. GF noted that this is the case across most data sets. This category includes unauthorised absence. Policy and process around this are changing next year. It is expected that changes will become more visible in years 2 and 3.</li> <li>• The city needs consistent guidance around religious observance codes. One day can be authorised for Eid, but some staff are entitled to two days. This will impact on the unauthorised absence figures.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe absence is much less of an issue in primary but has a bigger impact. Levels are more than double what they were pre-pandemic. It amounts to 1 in 20 kids in secondary schools. This is an alarming number and has a significant impact on staffing.</li> <li>• Children who fall off the radar but are not taken off roll are disproportionately from minority backgrounds. The data for 2021 is anomalous, if this is discounted then the upswing to 2024 would look more significant.</li> <li>• Ethnicity is a significant factor, especially children from mixed backgrounds. The Roma cohort are a key focus group in terms of outcomes and health data. It was noted that it is important not to further stigmatise this group and to work closely with families.</li> <li>• The number of EHCPs has gone up since the pandemic, which has led to an increase. The problems around SEND support in mainstream settings is getting worse.</li> <li>• The cohorts of children with speech, language and communication or social, emotional and mental health as a primary need are growing as they move through the system. This links to the work that Nick Whittaker is leading.</li> <li>• Covid has had a tidal wave effect but we are also living with a 'new normal' and cultural baselines have changed. Behaviours relate to families as well as individuals, and families are all affected differently, especially where there are multiple siblings in a school.</li> <li>• The current Y10 missed Y6 and 7 as a result of Covid. The Y9 trajectory is coming down, which is potentially encouraging. Severe absence was not really discussed before the regulations changed in 2022 and it became a new category.</li> </ul>	
4.	<p><b>Data analysis: setting attendance outcomes</b></p> <p>SB spoke to this item, sharing data analysis conducted by Kate Wilkinson. Slides will be shared with the group.</p> <p>It was noted that work needs to be done to identify what can be learned from other LAs, and what we can learn from settings that outperform their context. The work on the data does not give an answer, but points to the conversations that need to happen.</p> <p>Helen Lane is joining Learn Sheffield, she will speak to identified settings who are outperforming and produce a report by the end of the school year. This will identify what works and what makes a difference. The focus will be general features rather than specific interventions within settings.</p>	
5.	<p><b>Data analysis: LA attendance outcomes</b></p> <p>The data has been modelled to predict attendance at LA level using a list of variables. Some young people will be affected by multiple variables</p>	

	<p>In any model like this, the weakness is that it is unfair to the highest attaining because you can't go over 100%. Most higher attaining LAs appear to do less well than they might but when variance is taken into account, it is capped.</p> <p>CR asked about the significance of settings that are separate infant and junior cohorts. It was agreed that these need to be separated out as it is aggregated at the LA level. SB to speak to KW about this.</p> <p>An actual vs predicted absence chart was shared for both primary and secondary settings. Sheffield's attendance at primary is slightly higher than might be expected given the cohort. Deprivation is a bigger factor in secondary.</p> <p>TR added that when you talk to the DfE, Birmingham and Bradford are identified as having the best practice. According to the charts, their absence is higher than expected so it is not clear why the DfE signpost to them.</p> <p>The core cities to watch are Bristol and Newcastle (in a negative context) and Manchester (in a positive context).</p> <p>Predicted vs actual attendance for the special school data is significantly worse when compared to national. Absence at 4 settings, which provide for very specific needs, have a big impact on the figures. A generic approach is not suitable for these settings.</p> <p>A list of pupil characteristics was used to model the impact on attendance in primary and secondary. It was emphasised that these are used for discussing significant statistical connections, and not making predictions for pupils with these characteristics. The model is being used to identify who is outperforming their context based on the information available</p> <p>JG asked whether the number of school moves has been included as mobility seems to disproportionately affect children in hospital schools. SB to check this with KW to find out whether this is not included or not significant.</p> <p>The group discussed whether ethnicity is a predictor. SB shared that the Learn Sheffield insight report found that ethnicity as a predictor varied by point in time and cohort. It was noted that some of the strongest performance in terms of attendance was from cohorts other than White British. It was found that prior attainment was a more consistent factor.</p> <p>LS added that there is local data available on young carers, which may be worth looking into. LS to share this information for consideration at a future meeting.</p> <p>Attendance in the previous year has a significant impact on a pupil's attendance. It was emphasised that it is important to get it right in reception as it makes a big difference going through school.</p>	<p><b>SB</b></p> <p><b>SB</b></p> <p><b>LS</b></p>
--	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------

	<p>A piece of work will be done before the next meeting to look at the charts and layer it with internal knowledge of schools (localities etc). The distance travelled and progress made will be included.</p> <p>TR mentioned that there are four schools whose data is not transferring properly, which is skewing the data. KW to check with Nicola Williams.</p> <p>The group discussed the importance of wider factors such as community, culture and curriculum etc in relation to attendance. It was noted that high staff absence can also affect pupil attendance.</p> <p>TR shared regional findings that there is a drop off from primary to secondary. It is easier to motivate students to have 100% attendance at primary, but secondary students do not want to be recognised in that way. PB commented on the link to school culture and how achievement is celebrated generally and other members of the group noted that this extends to families and the way things are approached within different cultures.</p> <p>Learn Sheffield has received some funding from Public Health to do a Sensemaker piece of work to understand voice and experience of CYP in speech and language and engagement and attendance. The work will take place for two years from September and will give insight into attendance.</p>	<b>KW</b>
<p>6.</p>	<p><b>Scope of future analysis</b></p> <p>A number of areas were discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What works &amp; impact of larger number of PA pupils.</li> <li>• The importance of not over interpreting data.</li> <li>• How do you turn data into narrative for different audiences?</li> <li>• Coding- consistency may help with tidying up the data.</li> <li>• Interventions- real life experience, school within community specific.</li> </ul> <p>Learn Sheffield are picking up the further analysis of what works and will update on this on Friday 12 July.</p> <p>GF noted that the group needs to define what can be done- no government policy. Needs to be in the context of the school and community- use partnerships and resources that already exist. He also noted the nuance between what works and what interventions work. Not everything works at every point on the journey.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p><b>Next steps and actions</b></p> <p>Partnership group feedback- is it possible to do something together on policy to avoid everyone doing their own?- To be discussed at the next meeting.</p> <p>It was agreed that the meeting on 21 June will be cancelled as there is not enough time to move things on with the data. The next meeting will take place on Friday 12 July at Learn Sheffield.</p>	

	<p>Action for all: GF asked that colleagues use the time gained on Friday 21 June to reflect on the day's discussions and share ideas by email. These will be collated for use going forwards. Colleagues were also asked to reflect on a template policy which could be adapted to use in all settings.</p> <p>The slides and GF's notes will be shared following the meeting.</p>	
8.	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DfE Attendance Data Update Letter (see email 12/05) was discussed</li> </ul>	
9.	<p><b>Future meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friday 12 July , 10.30 – 12.00pm</li> </ul> <p>Meetings to be held at Learn Sheffield.</p>	

**Contact Officer:** Evelyn Priestley 0114 2507417 [Evelyn.priestley@learnsheffield.co.uk](mailto:Evelyn.priestley@learnsheffield.co.uk)