Attendance Working Group Meeting
Friday 26 April 2024, 1.00 – 2.30pm
Learn Sheffield

MINUTES

Chair: Greg Fell– Director of Public Health - SCC
Notes: Evelyn Priestley – Learn Sheffield

Attendees:

Name	Setting/School/Academy	Name	Setting/School/Academy
Liz Pediani	Arbourthorne Community Primary School	Tracey Rice	SCC
James Gibson	Becton School	Bob Cuff	SCC
Nicole Felicien	DfE	Pat Butterell	SCC
Charlotte Marr	DfE	Giles Robinson	SCC
Stephen Betts	Learn Sheffield	John Mansergh	SCC
Rae Nichols	Longley Park Sixth Form	Andrew Jones	SCC
Jo Quinlen	Lowfield Primary School	Rebecca Sutton	SSET
Emma Anderson	Newfield School	Martin Finch	Tapton School Academy Trust
Rachel Scragg	Outwood Academy City	Scott Burnside	Tapton School Academy Trust
Evelyn Abram	Sharrow Primary School		

Apologies: Chris Howlett, Laura Selby, Dave Trounce, Cathy Rowland, Martin Finch, John Bedford, Molly Eedle, Rachel Metcalfe, Laura Rzepinski

Item	Detail	Action
1.	**Welcome and apologies** Greg Fell, Director of Public Health - SCC welcomed colleagues to the meeting, introductions were made and apologies were noted. GF has been invited to chair these four attendance meetings following a request from Meredith Teasdale, Strategic Director of Children's Services – SCC. This is an unfamiliar area of work for GF and hopes to bring together stakeholders to look at the attendance issue. This is a task and finish group to look at what we understand, what we can glean from sources of data in order to develop a plan for the city.	
2.	**Background to this working group** • **Sheffield Strategic Partnership**	

SB outlined that this working group is an off-shoot group following the Sheffield Strategic Partnership group meetings held between July 2023 and January 2024.

The papers from the Shefield Strategic Partnership decided that attendance was an area to be investigated. https://www.learnsheffield.co.uk/Projects/Sheffield-Strategic-Partnership

- **Other groups and activities**

There are other groups who are meeting to work on attendance and related issues. There is an opportunity to rationalise these groups and bring them together.

| 3. | **Learn Sheffield Insight Report: Attendance**

- **Key learning and next steps**

The Insight Report: Attendance was circulated with the agenda and SB summarised the key points from the report.

In Sheffield absence is unauthorised more than other core cities and we need to be mindful of this fact.
- Authorised absence rank 2nd LA (of 152) and 1st core city (of 8).
- Un-authorised absence rank 147th LA (of 152) and 7th core city (of 8).
- Lower illness rates – which may also reflect coding.

Impact of attendance on attainment was summarised, your chances of being age appropriate in attainment is reduced as attendance drops. A similar pattern is seen at KS4. Once attendance drops below 90%, the chance of achieving a 4+ in English and maths drops significantly.

The proportion of young people whose attendance is below 50% in Sheffield is significantly higher than both national and core cities in all sectors.

Attendance is a significant issue and needs a partnership response including Post 16 provision. Schools DfE, SCC and Public Health colleagues are all involved in this work.

SB proposed the next steps for this task and finish group(in line with the performance analysis trails) prioritise further analysis and discussion of:
- The characteristics of young people with attendance below 50% and below 90% to explore the root causes of Sheffield's attendance challenges.
- The bottom quartile attendance in Sheffield special schools to consider the impact of the nature of provision and cohort, and attendance practice.
- The extreme rankings of authorised and unauthorised absence, and whether this consistent approach to coding reflects good practice.
- What we can learn from other LAs that have implemented city-wide cross remit attendance drives, including the impact of attendance fines.
- What the strongest setting outcomes (relative to context) locally tell us about what works. |

- What impact raised attendance would have on attainment.
- The strategic impact of larger numbers of persistently absent pupils on the ability of settings to deliver granular approaches to impact on attendance

SB commented that attendance is about a school having clarity of approach to all families, children and staff followed by a granular approach to families who need additional support.

The summary was a fair assessment of the current position. It was asked what will success of this working group look like? What does best practice look like for settings. Difficult issues may be picked up and taken away to resolve.

There is "what works", "what are we doing" and "what can schools and communities do". The key is common understanding of what we can infer from the data and what does the lived experience of school leaders and other stakeholders tell us.

Colleagues discussed the suggestion that we should identify the strongest outcomes compared to context – noting that this is about more than just the locality.

It was also noted that, for example, transport links may be good but family context may be the barrier. Ofsted guidance has changed with a statement that says a school may be doing everything they can but there is still no change in the data.

There is a challenge for the DfE which impacts on government policy, housing and transport and the requirement to place children in schools, sometimes not local to their home.

Colleagues observed that, what makes the biggest difference is relationships and availability of staff to commit to attendance. Transport issues impact secondary schools more than primary schools. What's missing is all the support that struggling families used to be able to access which have now disappeared and so this falls to schools to support the family by themselves.

During the pandemic parents worked from home and there are now electronic devices to keep their children occupied / interested. It is easier for children to stay at home where parents work from home. One size does not fit all. It is about creating a momentum that can be kept going. Parental mental health during covid took a dip and parents resilience has been reduced.

Perceptions have shifted since the pandemic and perceptions can be shifted back. It is about the approach to attendance alongside all the other approaches in school.

Context is key, parents in primary schools are reliant on their family network and not having a network they can draw on is now more of an issue. Persistent absence

is a journey it is not a quick win. For a school who have moved a child from 50% to 75% attendance the child is still classed as persistently absent.

SCC shared that the number of 100% attendance across the city has dropped. This is no longer something that children wish to be praised for in assemblies or via wider acknowledgement.

There was a discussion around prosecuting, the threat of prosecution is more effective than actual prosecution. Mental health absence does not have a code so it is difficult to unpick this reason for absence.

GF noted the need to be careful about medicalisation in relation to resilience and asked the group about Public Health related resources. Colleagues responded that the role of the school nurse is now only immunisation and weighing children, there is no school nurse as there was previously.

The guidance on when children can return to school after an illness may need to be reviewed. GF will look into how long children should be kept off school with infection diseases.		**GF**
Younger year groups seem to get more waves of illness. There is no evidence of lack of immunisation playing into this. GF will check up on this.		**GF**

Staff absence has also increased, staff data is not as accessible as pupil data. Illness amongst working age people has gone up, particularly mental health absence. Staff absence and the management of absence is also having an impact on school budgets.

Mobility is a factor, which can be reported on by locality. This does often mean good attending pupils are swapped for poor attending pupils.

In Post 16 one of the issues are students who are working and this means they either do not attend or attend and are tired.

The length of time a child is off school due to holidays does show that the longer they have off the harder it is for then to return.

GF summarised:
- Attendance is directly related to attainment
- Multifactorial and no single act or stakeholder has all the answers
- We know what the segments of the work are

4.	**Changes to attendance guidance**	
	TR summarised the changes to attendance guidance which come into effect from 19 August 2024 (this is the date Scotland schools go back to school).	
	- Revised version of the 'Working Together to Improve Attendance' guidance.	

	- Mandate of Attendance Data Sharing. - Modernisation of school admissions and attendance registers. - New National Framework for Penalty Notices. This guidance also covers modernisation of administration and introduction of new codes. The change to not putting children on roll until the parents have accepted the place. There is a new framework for penalty notices and parents need to be informed of these changes. This will include working with schools and making sure absence is being authorised with information provided. There are networking sessions being led by the DfE and the details have been shared with all schools. The attendance team is available and schools are encouraged to use them.	
5.	**Next steps and actions** School leaders determine the approach in schools which then moves through localities. There is a programme of work around the civil responsibility to shape the pubic narrative. This needs to include the team around school. The wraparound services need to be right. Government cuts and the reduction of services and waiting lists are affecting the ability for schools to support families. There is a threshold for families to access the Family Intervention Service and they need to meet at least three criteria. This is a civic problem not a school problem. What can we do to strengthen resilience? At all ages and also resilence of parents. Sharing good practice, what war heads doing and how are they getting attendance improvements. The 2-year-old health check to include conversations such as what school are you thinking about and how will you get the child to school. Becton School receive notes for absence when a doctor has not actually seen the child. The is an absence around anxiety of attending school. Potential next steps include: - Research inputs to support discussion about **policy approach to attendance** – new government guidance input, Centre for Mental Health report & analysis/feedback on authorisation currently? - Better understanding the characteristics of young people below 90% and below 50% to inform a discussion about **intersectionality and attendance**.	

	• Analysis of Sheffield **setting attendance outcomes** relative to context to enable us to explore what works in Sheffield across our communities? • Research **LA attendance outcomes** to enable us to explore what works nationally? • **Impact of larger numbers of PA pupils** on the ability of settings to deliver granular approaches to impact on attendance? Note: special sector attendance activity to be taken forward with the Special & IR partnership initially. SB to work with GF and GR (and other Learn Sheffield colleagues) to scope analysis to bring back to subsequent meetings. The last point made was for the group to come back and be able to talk about what's the impact of having a larger number of PA pupils.	**SB/GF /GR** **ALL**
6.	**AOB** None raised.	
7.	**Future meetings** • Friday 14 June, 9.30 – 11.00am at Town Hall (~~was Friday 24 May, 9.00 – 10.30am~~) • Friday 21 June, 9.30 – 11.00am • Friday 12 July, 10.30 – 12.00pm Meetings to be held at Learn Sheffield.	

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Additional Note – Greg Fell:

Who was and wasn't there
Some stakeholders weren't at the meeting we had. Who was missing from our meeting. We talked a lot about health. The DPH isn't "health" in the sense of NHS at least. Are there other processes that need to be aligned.
How are we aligning different messages

What I took the data to tell us
National issue. Not just Sheffield
Increased significantly post covid
We do middling, slightly better given our profile. Don't be fooled by relative – the absolute position remains "see me after class" – has consequences, and a big improvement target
Averages also skew
Coding. How much do we get into nuances on coding. Are there specific intervention points here re consistency of coding. Authorised / unauthorised
Attendance we know (from our own data and elsewhere) correlates to attendance – ie education works
Add to this home based working

Trends were established pre covid

Don't over sweat data analysis. Don't do it to death. Use data and experience to inform actions

Population flux and movement. ?more of a thing in some parts of sheffield than others

Post 16 …. More might be working. Esp given poverty

Spike in emotionally based absence – lined to individual and family resilience, covid.

Principles

Multiple understandings and perspectives. It is a complex problem. There may not be a single version

Whole system needs to come round the issue. Can't be solved by single agency or actor.

Principle of school leaders determine approach in school setting and community. We know they know best what will fly and land well. The issues of hard line or cuddly. Horses / courses. No one size fits all

How we carve out segments of the problem. Probably not sector by sector, but do it whole school community /whole neighbourhood

Team around the school taken as a principle but resource to execute that to the level we might want is problematic. Resources reduced by 2/3. Can't pretend that isn't in. Schools need resources to allocate to solve problems

Focus on relationships. Relationships matter ++.

Approaches focused around holistic understanding of pupils and families. Capacity for identify specific needs.

Root in culture of community and belonging

Messages I took to emerge from the conversation

Under resourced settings and support services a very real thing. We need to state this very clearly to govt.

Incremental improvement vs big policy shifts. I am not sure there are big policy shifts within our gift. If there are would welcome them being flushed out

Don't forget post 16

Interventions – what I took to be interventions

Emotionally based non attendance. Easy to medicalise. What are the core messages, how well do we get these out. Who writes this script. Script for who. What interventions. Who is on point.

We said "civic response". What does this mean? Role of school actors, parents, NHS system, LA education, other. Ditto who writes this script. Different roles of different actors around the problem set – have we clearly stated these. Be mindful this will land better in some communities than others.

Do we know what works? What is the evidence. What are we doing against what we know. Auditable standards??

Transport (esp secondary) answers? Do we know want they are?

Ditto - curriculum based stuff

Ditto - behaviour policy,

Role for non school wrap around services to make good on the team around school (met with a bit of derision). Do we know what they are? Is someone specifying them. FIS – I heard a bit of "where are they" chatter. As one of the core funders of FIS I wouldn't mind knowing the answer.

Parent views have shifted – who is working on this. What do we / don't we understand. What insights

Programme of shifting perceptions of a set of stakeholders. Programmatic approach to this

Health specific things.

UKHSA exclusion from school guidance. Leads to some issues. Skilled interpretation, risk thresholds. Really how much of a thing IS this. A piece of work on this

School nursing. Programme based vs skilled professional for a setting / whole of setting vs a clinician to do clinical stuff in a setting. Resourcing of SN is a thing

Something to put into health visiting practice, asking about schools

The LMC / too ill to attend but not seen issue – who is on point.

Med management

Set up system for protocolising & sharing good practice and ideas that seem to have impact

This is pretty good from EEF [EEF blog: Supporting School Attendance: A new tool for… | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)](#)

[Supporting School Attendance - Reflection and Planning Tool | Education Endowment Foundation (d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net)](#)

1. Build a holistic understanding of pupils and families, and diagnose specific needs
2. Build a culture of community and belonging for pupils
3. Communicate effectively with families
4. Improve universal provision for all pupils
5. Deliver targeted interventions to supplement universal provision
6. Monitor the impact of approaches