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Making Attendance Everyone's Business in Redcar & Cleveland

Solutions Workshops

20th March 2024 and 8th May 2024

Sharing good attendance practice interventions to help reduce the risk of, and reverse persistent and severe absence in the Borough



This Project is funded by Anglo American and managed by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

To keep up to date on the Project and to access free and useful resources please visit

www.skyblue.org.uk/attendance

How do we maximise engagement with attendance hubs and find and share the good practice found within the Borough's nurseries, schools, colleges & learning settings?

What are attendance hubs?

[Attendance hubs](#) are led by senior leaders in schools with effective attendance practice. Through their hubs, lead schools share their strategies and resources for improving attendance. The first attendance hub was set up by Rob Tarn, CEO of Northern Education Trust and members of the [Attendance Action Alliance](#), to provide other schools with techniques, resources and advice on how to improve attendance. There are currently 14 attendance hubs in England with an intention to expand to 32 in 6 regions in turn supporting 'nearly 2,000 schools ...to tackle persistent absence'. (DfE 8th Jan 2024).

Examples that are close to Redcar & Cleveland

- [Attendance HUB - Northern Education Trust](#) (100 schools signed up for the pilot which will see the sharing of strategies and resources for improving attendance)
- [River Tees Multi Academy Trust \(rtmat.org.uk\)](#) 'Attendance at River Tees Multi-Academy Trust (RTMAT) academies is, like safeguarding, everyone's business.'



Early learning from attendance hubs about what works: *"Forensic data' is key ... but schools need to go 'extra mile.' You need to build trust with the family and find out what's going on at home, to strengthen that bridge. Improving attendance takes time."*

How can R&C schools get involved?

DfE published an application process¹ in December 2023 inviting mainstream maintained schools and academies to express interest in 'joining' an attendance hub which would see them – *if successfully selected* ('Spring 2024' decisions) - being able to access support for a range of commitments in exchange. 'Schools who join the hub will have access to half termly virtual hub meetings run by the lead school to share practice and discuss any challenges with others. They will be expected to use this learning to revisit and revise their existing systems and protocols for managing attendance to drive improvement. At an initial online meeting, school leaders will be introduced to their hub and have the opportunity to ask questions. DfE will match interested schools to the most appropriate hub. In the form applicants were asked which area of attendance practice they/their school would like to receive support from through a hub giving insight as to the kind of practice likely to be shared:

■ Developing an effective attendance policy	■ Staff training	■ Staff roles & responsibility
■ Establishing a culture of high expectations for attendance		■ Attendance systems & processes
■ Improving attendance for specific groups of children data		■ More effective use of attendance

? Are schools in Redcar & Cleveland engaged or engaging with these hubs? We're not sure. The application process is still being decided so we will seek an update from DfE. At the most recent Attendance Network meeting (February 2024), only one school represented on that call (from c30) said they

¹ [Attendance Hubs Application Form \(office.com\)](#) and [expectations for schools joining attendance hubs](#)

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had engaged with an attendance hub in England, saying that whilst it would be beneficial over time the matching of their school to just one hub had been challenging. Another school reported they had applied to be an attendance hub in 2023 and 2024 but not heard anything back. Christina Jones, the Chief Executive of RT-MAT introduced their attendance hub to the Network with a generous offer for anyone in Redcar & Cleveland wanting to know more to get in touch with her / team via Grant Smith (Head of Inclusion, RCBC).



The Attendance Network has been starting to share examples of good practice used to encourage good attendance and address PA and SA. From their SWOTS (collected by Grant Smith and his team) which strengths and opportunities do we need to build on?



What about the **role of Governors and accountability for attendance** – are they / could they be Champions?



How much of the shared strategies and best practice that hubs and matched schools discuss and learn about together about things **outside of a school's control** i.e. that require wider system partners to be a part of the solution and 'make attendance everyone's business'?



Suggestions from delegates attending the 20th of March 2024 'solutions' workshop session

Suggested Solution(s): Maximising the opportunities of Attendance Hubs as well as good practice within the Borough².

1: Thinking about this solution, and referring to the theory of change *diagram*, if done well, which outcomes would it most contribute towards?

A key theme of the discussion was around the need to provide **'support before sanction'** as an approach to addressing attendance issues. If this, and other good practice is applied across the Borough a range of useful outcomes could occur including:-

- Culture change – language and attitudes, small changes that add up over time to the way things are done
- More support for CYP / families would result in less sanctions and less punishment perhaps galvanising more trust amongst the different parties
- Recognition of effort by CYP with schools offering more flexibility in approach
- Policy change could result in removing barriers that otherwise inhibit 'good' attendance
- Feelings of openness, access and belonging by CYP supported with their attendance
- Changes for parents, governors, Trustees and pupils working together.

2: Are we already doing this solution anywhere 'well' in Redcar & Cleveland?

Where is it working well and why?	Where are there gaps that you think this solution would ideally fill?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Archway – works well by encouraging small changes with each young person• Laurence Jackson School was namechecked as having good practice to meet individual needs• South Bank Primary School were namechecked as having good practice regarding mental health modifications• <u>Macmillan Academy</u> were namechecked for good practice in relation to policy changes they had made	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective, consistent transition• Unless it's for parents evening, parents don't go into secondary schools or get involved – how to change this culture?

² Including consideration of supporting School Governors as champions for attendance (accountability) and all the 'SWOTs' being completed by schools/participants of the Attendance Network.

3: Which people/organisations in the wider system i.e. not just schools or colleges, but across any of the services, in communities, at home – need to be involved in this solution?

- Whole staff culture – attendance has always been 'done' in a certain way, so the language has to be more supportive than in the past
- Outside agencies e.g. Early Help, Education Psychology Service
- Inclusion team members – to advise on other services
- HeadStart – school quality standard (academic resilience framework)
- CEOs of Multi Academy Trusts – to follow up on a recent event about Attendance Hubs at Middlesbrough Football Club – have there been any policy changes@ Individuality at what age and purpose of compliance discussions to continue.
- Youth club / auxiliary staff – shared staff retention
- Schools who can be supported to do more Early Help Assessments.

4: What is your recommended action plan for this solution?

<p><i>How do we get started / build on what we've got?</i></p> <p><i>If we think more of this type of solution is needed how do we make it happen?</i></p>	<p><i>Can we make change using the resources 'we' already have in the system i.e. can we improve things by doing things differently with what we've already got? Do we need additional resource to make a step change in the outcomes to reduce the risk of / persistent / severe absence?</i></p>
<p>Relationships and Culture</p> <p><i>"Encouragement on everyone's lips in school"</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the positives – instead of 'where have you been?' say 'good to see you back?' • Sharing attendance practice with different settings • 'Where are you' to 'How are you' language builds trust and develops relationships. • Transition – key people involved, build from their experience • Staff training – whole staff – everyone using the same language including auxiliary staff who can often not be part of this training/info sharing however are also often first contact. • Some pupils are in Social isolation, 'don't see a person' so its important that their 1st contacts are positive and trusting. • 'Get in there!' – Macmillan Trust slogan Their approach will be shared at next network meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance policy – consistency / comprehensive coverage / applied by all-needs revisiting and training • Planners and phone calls will need to be updated – phone calls made more personable than a text. • Text messages are not relationship based, therefore re-write email / texts to make them strength based so how do we improve things, 'knowing' forces the conversations. • Rewards for most improved linked to health so that even the slightest improvement is recognised and rewarded. • Consistency in applying the attendance codes in all schools • Punctuality systems – <i>"change the bell"</i> - what happens if you ring it 5 mins earlier? • Expectations should be realistic and ambitious but not punitive. • Tutor group recognition- the role of the form tutor – has this been reduced in recent years ? • Compliance – consider compliance based policy – what is the purpose – if it doesn't have one remove it

Suggested focus for action at the 8th of May 2024 solutions workshop session

At a further 'solutions' workshop hosted on the 20th of May by the Project Team, over 30 delegates agreed that there might be benefit in focusing on a small number of actions – some that would incrementally be trialled and embedded in each school setting, whilst others would be purposely aimed at connecting and learning about as much good attendance practice as possible.

Some of the delegates – mostly from professional services that work with children, young people and families felt they did not know enough about Attendance Hubs – what were they, where were they, what was happening and what their offer was. Whilst NET and RT-MAT (the two closest Attendance Hubs) are well known within the school system / community there may be benefit in inviting them to present / explain their approach and learning to this wider audience in the Borough at a future event. We have discovered, however, that just because they are the closest Attendance Hubs it doesn't necessarily mean that schools within the Borough are or could be 'matched' with them to access their best practice and resources. As such, knowing about the overall network of Attendance Hubs invested in by the government may equally be beneficial.

Here, meantime, is one of the strongest ideas emerging from the Project participants that might attract energy from different stakeholders for 'good practice' solutions in 2025.

Inspiring conference to celebrate and share best practice

A mix of activity is required to extract and share the best practice found inside and outside of Redcar & Cleveland that will reduce the risks of, and reverse the levels of persistent and severe absence. In every school, college and learning setting there should be a predisposition to share the positive work of students regularly. Whilst interactions between school staff and professionals could involve scoping conversations to share and celebrate good practice. RCBC attendance surgeries could be facilitated in each school to offer good practice on resources at ground level and include a face to face meeting at the start of next term.

To bring visibility to the many ways in which persistent and severe attendance could be reduced and reversed it is proposed that an inspiring event should be hosted in 2025; the ambition being to showcase what we're already doing well in the Borough but with a clear ambition to identify schools / settings / system partners – 'champions' - willing to try something new.

Step 1: Plan a conference with inspiring keynote (e.g. Paul Dix to talk about 'visible consistencies' and belief that 'when the adults change everything changes') and good practice workshops linked to effective interventions

Step 2: Advertise / plan for 3 follow up research projects³ – 'all have to sign up for one'

Enabler ('wish-list 'would be nice...'): Introduce an Attendance Co-ordinator for the Borough building relationships within the system for the long-term and making this kind of activity the norm in all settings.

³ This idea needs further exploration to understand what such projects / trials might look like, but likely to be a mix of the most effective interventions being discovered through this and wider regional (Teesside Attendance Action Alliance) and national (DfE / Attendance Action Alliance) work and investment.