

A Theory of Change to help make attendance everyone's business in Redcar & Cleveland



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What exactly is a theory of change?

“Throughout our work and personal lives, we have aims and ideas about how to achieve them, but we rarely take the time to think these through, scrutinise and articulate them. This is what a theory of change process does. It encourages us to reflect on our aims and plans, to discuss them with others and to make them explicit.

The output from a theory of change process describes how we believe our activities will lead to the outcomes and impacts we want to achieve. At NPC, we tend to think of theory of change as the foundation of charity strategy, evaluation and communication.” (NPC, October 2019)



Theory of Change

10 Steps

Ten steps to theory of change

Step 1: Situation analysis

Step 2: Target groups

Step 3: Impact

Step 4: Outcomes

Step 5: Activities

Step 6: Change mechanisms

Step 7: Sequencing

Step 8: Your theory of change diagram

Step 9: Stakeholders and 'enabling factors'

Step 10: Assumptions

Workshop 1: 16th October

- The Group sought to undertake steps 1 and 2.
- The emphasis of the discussion, individual and group exercises was to understand 'the situation' around the topic of attendance (at school, college, alternative education setting, home), as well as the problem that is trying to be addressed.
- We also sought to identify some potential wording for a goal for this work which, whilst having a communicable strapline of '**making attendance everyone's business**', may in fact have a slightly different emphasis in terms of desired outcome by the end of 2026 (our agreed time horizon), and in terms of the enduring impact any activity before then may seek to enable.
- Finally, we started to consider 'target groups' with a particular focus on young people and families struggling to attend well. We considered a range of case studies as well as personal and professional insights and experience. We particularly sought to think about young people that are severely absent, persistently absent or at risk of these characteristics in Redcar and Cleveland.

Thanks to all
attendees

Ten steps to theory of change

Step 1: Situation analysis

Step 2: Target groups



What is the problem?

The common starting point appeared to be that the rates of attendance are not as high as is desired. And there's no sense that the problem will get any smaller in scale without further intervention. This dynamic has negative consequences for children, young people, families and the Borough that we want to do something about.

Whose problem is this? Response: It's everyone's problem.

Themes included:

- Risks to CYP's safety, welfare and wellbeing by not being in a place of education, especially our most vulnerable children
- Inequities and barriers to attendance mean those already at a disadvantage face even further adversity if they can't attend well – and these gaps widen even further between disadvantaged CYP and peers.
- Lack of value placed on education by some CYP, and parents/families means poor attendance behaviours could persist and grow further in communities or specific groups making the problem bigger and bigger.
- Risk to achievement of academic outcomes (though this prompted a lively debate about whether 'achieving in life' is different and what 'success' means)
- There is a lack of understanding about the causes of persistent and severe absence, and what sits behind the reasons for CYP not being able to attend well. Assumptions and presumptions prevail, and there is insufficient time and space to address each CYP / family's individual needs.
- The feeling that children are missing out on valuable learning, growth and development opportunities by not being in school or college.
- Current system / approaches are not meeting needs or stemming the decline in attendance nationally nor locally.
- *This is a national issue not just affecting Redcar and Cleveland.*

"Attendance is a problem if home is a problem too."

"Young people say they don't like school but they do like learning."

"School should be a place where a child wants to be."

"The issue then is engagement, not attendance?"

"As a society we're trying to make people fit into boxes."

Problem Statement

- ①
- We are worried that our current system is not able to meet the needs of
- individual children (especially SEND).
 - big gaps of children
 - Staff
 - requirements of Ofsted, DfE etc.
 - 21 century life + employment.

The problem is 'the system'

Problem Statement

Problem

For those C&YP who are not attending school, there is a lack of understanding about why they are not attending school. ②

The problem is our lack of understanding

Problem Statement

PROBLEM Increasing ATTENDANCE &
INCREASE ENGAGEMENT
(AS LIMITING CHANCES/CHOICES TO A
BETTER FUTURE) ③

The problem is that
poor attendance has
negative consequences
for CYP life chances

Drilling down...

Using the NPC's Ten Step Guidance, we broke into three groups and worked through these 7 questions to drill down and think more deeply about the situation.

We had opportunity to come back together and identify common and different viewpoints.

Step 1: Situation Analysis - Problem Statement Questions

1: Who is affected?

Who is particularly vulnerable?
What type of person?

2: What are the consequences of the problem?

3: What are the causes of the problem?

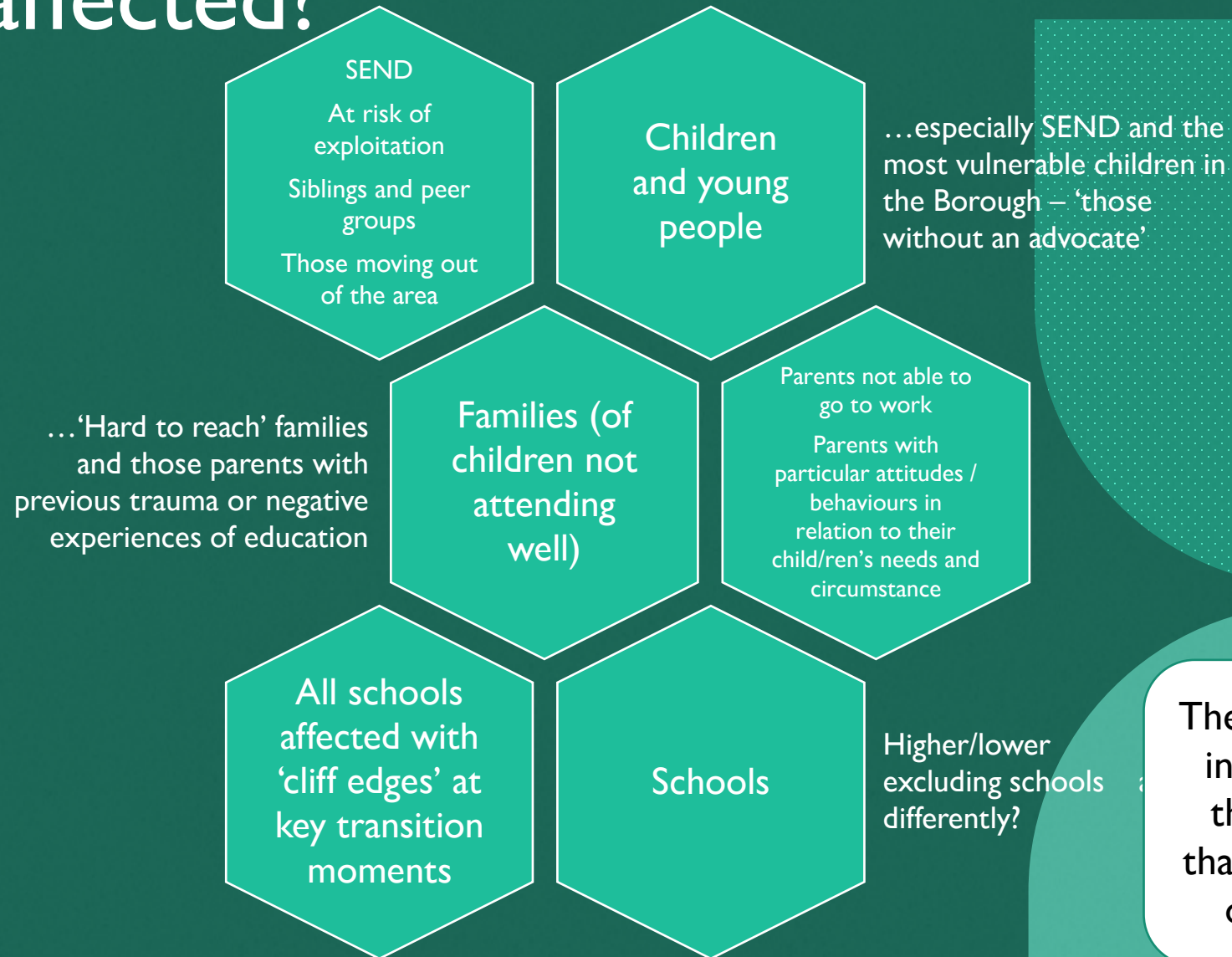
4: What are the barriers to change?

5: What are the opportunities to overcome these barriers?

6: Who else is working to tackle the issue? Who are the other relevant stakeholders?

7: What is not happening? What are the gaps?

Who is affected?



What are the consequences of the problem?



Some stats...

- This information from the Centre for Social Justice (January 2022) is just one source that help us understand the deeper costs of absence.
- The information below, whilst slightly dated, is from the Early Intervention Foundation(January 2022).

TABLE 3. ASSUMED UNIT COST OF A PERSISTENTLY ABSENT PUPIL (2016-17 PRICES)

	Cost	Source
Justice	£265	NEM Unit Cost Database
Police	£265	NEM Unit Cost Database
NHS	£65	NEM Unit Cost Database
Local government	£410	NEM Unit Cost Database
Education	£882	Brookes et al. (2007)
Total	£1,886	

[The cost of late intervention: EIF analysis 2016 | Early Intervention Foundation](#)

The costs of absence

Severe absence carries with it considerable short and long-term costs. Notable is the link to crime rates. Studies conducted by the Ministry of Justice and DfE have connected school absence with the likelihood of an individual becoming involved in the criminal justice system. A 2016 analysis found that **90% of young offenders sentenced to custody have a previous record of being persistently absent from school**,¹² and of the adult prison population, **59% reported that they regularly truanted from school**.¹³

The picture is not much better regarding educational attainment. A DfE commissioned study found that as the level of overall absence across the relevant key stage increased, the likelihood of achieving key attainment outcomes at the end of KS2 and KS4 decreased. Accordingly, **every extra day missed from school lowers a pupils' chances of achieving 5 or more good GCSEs**, including in English and Maths, or gaining the EBacc.¹⁴

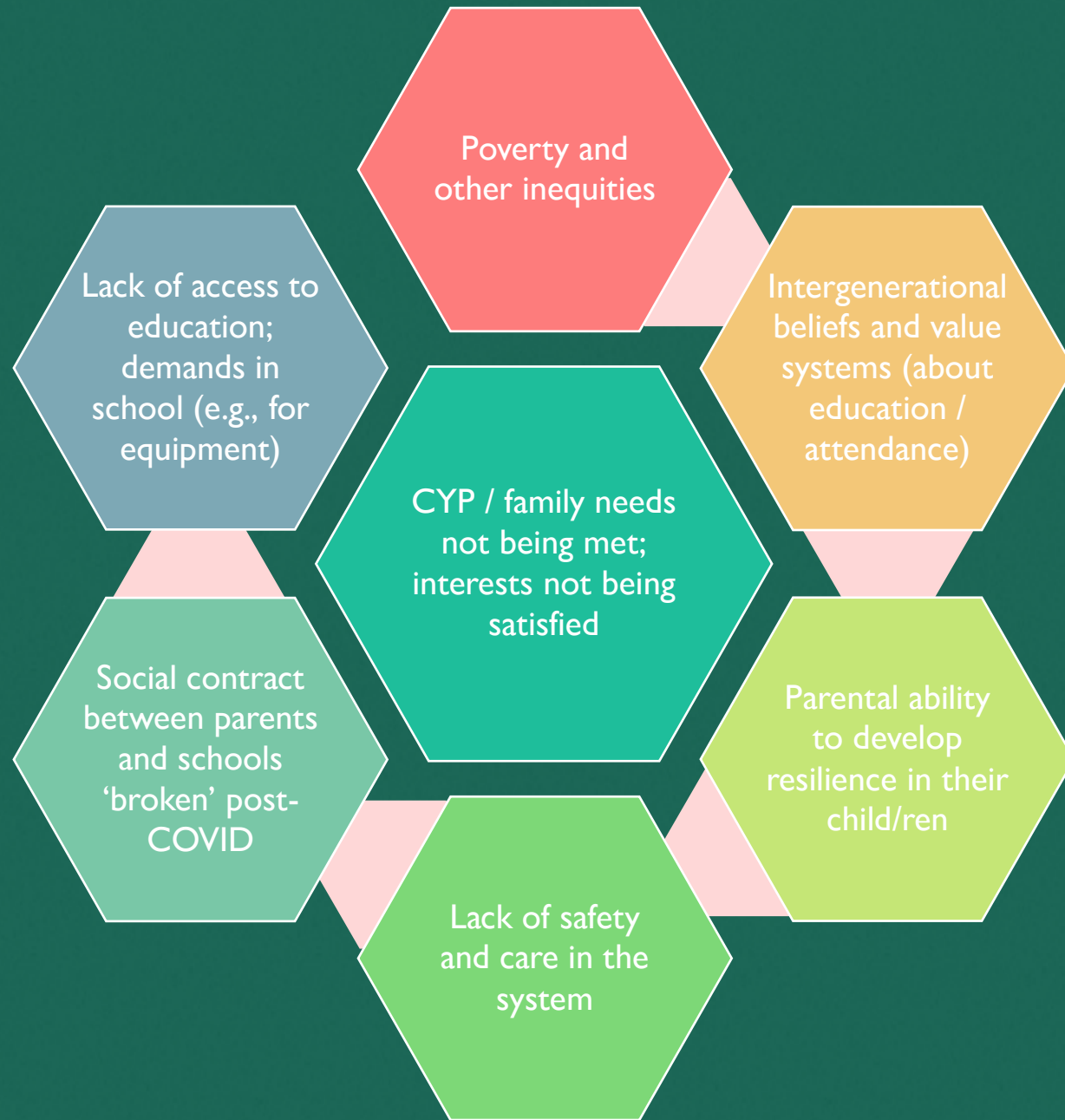
Severe absence continues to be linked with bleak prospects after formal education. A DfE analysis found that **when looking at the NEET cohort for the year, those who had been absent for over 10% of KS4 were vastly over-represented** when compared to the year's entire cohort. Only those without any A*-C GCSEs were more over-represented in the year NEET group.¹⁵

Children missing from school are also far more vulnerable to exclusion. The Timpson review established that **every extra percentage point of school sessions missed due to unauthorised absence was associated with a one percentage point increase in the likelihood of permanent exclusion**.¹⁶ Fixed-term and permanent exclusions compound the risks already associated with high absence outlined above, including vulnerability to criminal activity, low attainment, and NEET likelihood.

As well as the cost to the absentee, this all has a social cost. **According to New Philanthropy Capital, the average cost to society of a persistently absent pupil is £33,000**¹⁷ (data adjusted to 2020 prices). For a severely absent pupil, this figure is expected to be significantly higher. It should also be considered that **each excluded pupil costs the state approximately £370,000** in additional education, benefits, healthcare and criminal justice costs across a lifetime, with an annual £2.1billion cost to the Treasury.¹⁸ This makes the strong relationship between absence and exclusion all the more salient.

[CSJ-Lost_but_not_forgotten-2.pdf](#)
(centreforsocialjustice.org.uk)

What are the causes of the problem?



'Wider determinants'
including poor health
of CYP not able to
attend well

What are the barriers to change?

- A lack of.....
 - Pastoral resources in schools
 - Understanding of 'child voice' (both non-attending and attending)
- The negative influence of social media
 - 'You don't need to go to school to become rich' messaging
 - The way it fuels the 'I expect information now' behaviour (affecting attitudes to learning)
- Schools 'not able to keep up with the world' – therefore not as attractive to children and young people as they might

'It's still similar to the system set up for Victorian times. We should ask what we need to teach and how we need to teach it.'

- Parental trust in the system is low
- Inability to meet individual needs of children e.g. SEND.
- There isn't enough time and space created to understand these needs nor build trusting relationships

"Still feels like we're running a medical model rather than a social model."

Who should change?

What should
change?



What are the opportunities to overcome these barriers?

- Strengths-based working – demonstrating the value in every child.
- More community-based working to improve dialogue and maximise relationships that young people might have outside of school.
- Poverty proofing all schools, colleges, education settings.
- Increased engagement opportunities e.g. through food.
- Making attendance everyone's business in the way that 'safeguarding is everyone's business':-
 - 'Everyone's a reservist – like the Swiss Army model' – pastoral care threaded in all Job Descriptions, not just 2-3 people managing caseloads or having this in their Job Title in a school/college.
 - To have a comprehensively trauma informed workforce Parental trust in the system is low .
- Transfer what's working well in primary to secondary system.
- Get better together at identifying risk and investing in preventative solutions around persistent and severe absence.

“Every child needs an advocate.”

**Who should
change?**

**What should
change?**

Who else is working to tackle the issue?



Attendance Hubs

Who is missing?

Peer support?

Champions?

What's not happening?

What are the gaps?

Plans that are put in place to support a child with their needs put in place by the local authority alongside the school are not always shared with all relevant teachers

“Then that child puts one foot out of line with a teacher that is unaware of their plan [for support] and the child is out again.”

“Needs an effective use of time to agree actions linked to an individual child or case when reviewed – needs more of an outcome focused assessment.”

Language and communication

“Do we have a common language for the issue – that works for professionals, that works for each child?”

“Communication within the school is a real problem.”

Plans for child
implemented well

Language and
communication

What's not happening?

What are the gaps?

There are relationship gaps in different parts of the system where they need to be stronger to motivate child / family to attend well

“Parents are not invited to meetings about their child. It should be ‘Team Around the Family [TAF] with parents involved.’”

Understanding the needs of the child/ren and family circumstance

“This is linked to the time needed and better understanding of whose role it is to open up an Early Help assessment.”

There is a lack of consistency in the multi-agency working – TAC, TAF, TAS?

Relationship centred
practice
Parental
involvement
Multi-agency
working consistency

Problem Statement – Revisited (workshop 1, October 2023)

Too many children are absent from school limiting their education, welfare and life chances

Unauthorised and authorised persistent and severe absence is limiting the health, wellbeing, safety, and life chances of thousands of children and young people that could otherwise be attending a school, college or alternative education setting in Redcar & Cleveland. Data and intelligence suggests that the scale of persistent and severe absence is stubbornly high since the pandemic despite efforts to achieve pre-pandemic levels of attendance. In the short-term, the problem appears to be one of understanding how to reach, understand, motivate and support children and young people at risk of, or already persistently or severely absent to attend well; and in a way where they and their family will feel equipped to maintain good attendance thereafter.

The needs of those unable to attend well are often misunderstood or not known

Parents and family members of children that are not attending 'well' suggest that the needs of their child or their wider family context presents challenges that require extra effort – and that despite trying their best – feel misunderstood or labelled with being lazy or feckless. Their lived experience is not yet at the heart of a system that could provide a 'relationships first' approach in preference to, or at very least alongside, the punitive levers available (fines and legal proceedings) to incentivise good attendance.

The system to support good attendance is inconsistent and resources are limited to meet all needs

The system to support good attendance relies on the strengths of many individuals, families, communities and professionals. But it is inconsistent. There is a lack of understanding as to the reasons why some children, young people and their families are unable to attend well. Moreover, the time and space to create understanding, and trusting relationships is limited by capacity constraints. Expectations for services and support in the Borough outstrip the resources required to meet the many needs of those unable to attend well, often for multiple reasons not just one factor.

Tackling the causes of absence not just the symptoms is a shared ambition – but it's really difficult.

Tackling the causes, not just the symptoms, of poor attendance is the Borough's ambition. And being able to work as a system that provides care, support and consistency will seek to support a 'shift' such that attending school, college or education more generally is something prized and valued.

This draft statement was shared with the Group in November 2023 to improve – see next 4 slides to see how our thinking evolved

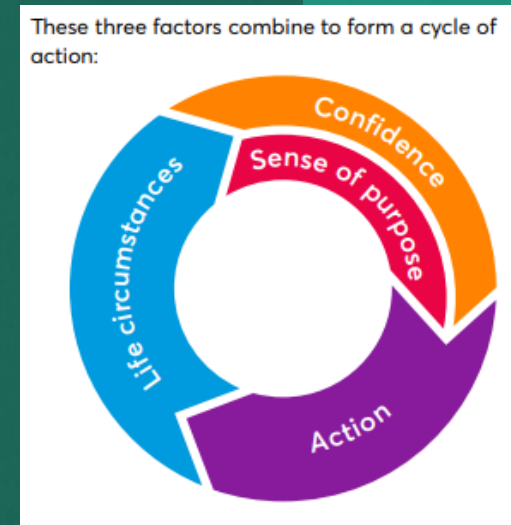
'There is an inconsistent attendance system where many needs are not being met.'

We evolved the problem statement at the 2nd workshop – we talked more about ‘the system’

- The system we desire and imagine for children and young people and families in R&C struggling to attend well at school or college is not yet the one that anyone wants including those delivering child-centred solutions, support and whole family working .
- There is a misalignment between needs, attitudes, expectations, support, capacity and capability to create the conditions where persistent and severe absence is eliminated within the Borough for the long-term.
- The ability to work together to address the causes of absence seem too big and ‘wicked’, whilst burdens increase (for schools and local authorities) and financial and non-financial resources to affect change are stretched and challenged.
- Meeting the individual needs of each of the 4,000 CYP persistently or severely absent each year in the Borough feels distant and whilst great effort is made to support those already in this situation, getting ahead of this – further upstream to prevent it happening to those CYP and families most at risk of following this trajectory is even more difficult.

We evolved the problem statement at the 2nd workshop – we talked more about ‘motivation’

- To encourage any individual to change the way they do things it is felt that three things need to be in place: a sense of purpose; the confidence to act and life circumstances that include more enabling conditions than barriers to act.
- Michie’s ‘COM-B’ model meantime suggests that capability, opportunity and motivation are 3 interacting conditions for behaviour change
- Related to this theory, is the view that enduring change is unlikely to occur – *for an individual, a family, a school, a service, a community or wider system* – unless there is the opportunity for and the act of **self-determination** – where a person feels motivated for themselves to do something – which requires competence, autonomy and belonging.
- Being told to do something essentially, having to comply and conform, is less motivating than someone choosing to ascribe value to doing something for themselves without the need to be told. Intrinsic motivation is key.



Self-determination

What makes people feel motivated?

Competence: ‘If I feel competent and know I’m succeeding and achieving’;
Autonomy: ‘If I feel I have voice, sense of control’ I feel more motivated; and
Belonging: ‘If I fit here, have got relationships, am known, liked, and important’

We evolved the problem statement at the 2nd workshop – we talked more about barriers

The removal of barriers is critical for this work.

Barriers can look different for every child that misses more than 10% (persistent), 20% (chronic) or 50% (severe) of their education sessions.

Sometimes these barriers relate to very practical things linked to the timing and availability of health services and appointments for children missing education for this primary reason; whilst other barriers relate to subjective factors such as children or parents not feeling that going to school or college is important; or that their needs aren't met; that they aren't listened to or understood; or that they don't feel safe near or in their educational setting (consider the statistics and therefore effects relating to bullying, fear of or exposure to serious and violent crime).

Barriers need to be removed alongside the child and family members in a consented and negotiated way not done to or for them otherwise the chances of them being able to do things for themselves with confidence in future will be more limited. The principles of 'Good help' may be helpful for framing this approach.

“When we do things **to** people it's an act of violence. We want people to things for themselves.”

Problem Statement – Shorthand updated at the 2nd workshop

Attendance isn't everyone's business....yet.

Too many children are absent from school in Redcar & Cleveland limiting their education, welfare and life chances. The needs of those unable to attend well are often misunderstood or not known. Young people that are persistently or severely absent feel unheard and face barriers.

We need to help remove these barriers.

The role of parents, carers and family members is significant too. Their skills, attitudes and circumstances influence attendance behaviours with fewer opportunities for parallel learning though family hubs and services have evolved. Relationships have broken down between some parents and schools.

We need to create environments where children want to go, where they feel safe, loved, content and motivated. **There need to be more reasons to attend than not.**

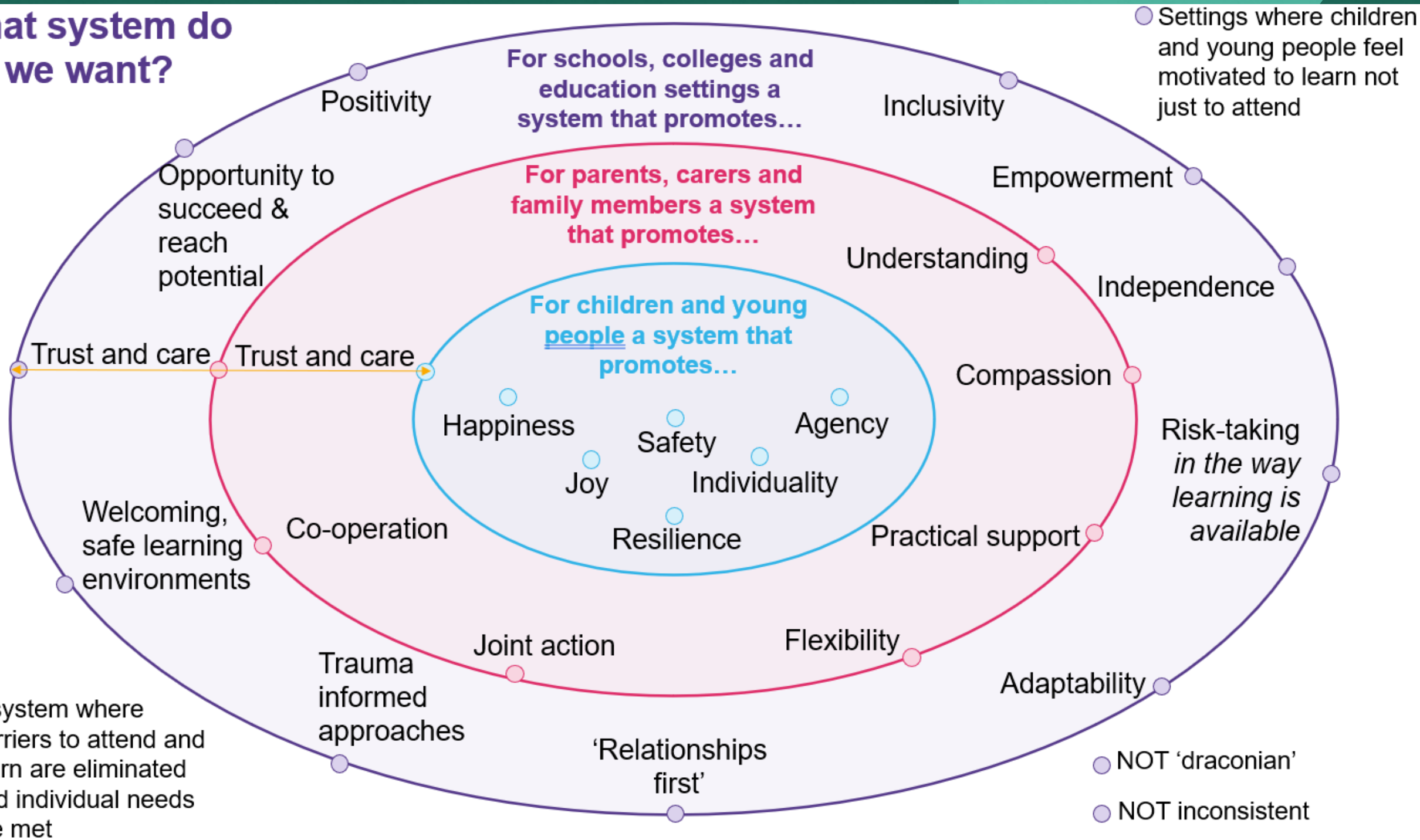
Tackling the causes of absence not just the symptoms is a shared ambition, but it's **difficult to do enough preventative and early intervention work.** This makes it hard to identify and support those at risk of persistent or severe absence.

The system we desire and imagine for children and young families in R&C struggling to attend well is imperfect. It is inconsistent and limited to meet all individual needs. It could be more modern and flexible. **The system needs to look different.**

Proposed for the
Group to improve in
November and
consensus agreed 5th
December 2023

**'There is an
inconsistent
attendance
system where
many needs are
not being met.'**

What system do we want?





Step 2:

Target Groups: case studies

- Group exercise: review of 18 case studies about children who were previously severely or persistently absent in Redcar and Cleveland, but who turned things around to more stable attendance behaviours.
- Looking at each case study, the group was asked to identify some of the characteristics of these children / young people and family members whose experiences were also reflected in the case studies.

Target groups: case study characteristics

- Had experienced previous trauma
- Didn't want to be at school
- Had been bullied at school
- Felt very high levels of anxiety
- Lacked language to describe their feelings
- Couldn't fit in to any phase of education, couldn't find the right learning environment
- Struggled with school work that was 'too hard'
- Questioning sexuality and gender
- Non-conformists in their attitude / behaviour
- Felt uninformed about the future
- Angry
- Lacking trust

“Everyone hates me.”

- Informal young carer
- Living with parents struggling with substance misuse (drugs, alcohol)
- Another young carer whose Mum had a permanent health condition
- Had been in the youth justice system
- Were transitioning from primary to secondary school
- Child in Need
- Previous social care history
- Child struggling with drugs
- Child on an EHCP pathway
- Transport issues to get to school
- Lacking an advocate

Step 2: Target Groups

- The Group was invited to list the characteristics of young people, from their personal or professional experience, had previously been severely or persistently absent or were at a higher risk of becoming more absent from their education.

Target groups: severe or persistent absence

- Children of parents in prison
- Autistic children
- Children with SEND or on a support plan
- Single parent families
- Children with ill mental health
- Children with limiting or chronic health conditions e.g. asthma, epilepsy, diabetes
- Children whose parent/s have ill mental health
- Children in Need / those on a plan
- Child Protection / those on a plan
- Children in our care
- Young people suffering from bereavement
- Young people eligible for Free School Meals
- Young people living in poverty
- Children involved in substance misuse

- Intra-familial circumstances (exploitation)
- Extra-familial circumstances (harm)
- Children who have experienced trauma, violence, domestic abuse
- Children who have had adverse child experiences (ACE)
- Children whose parents are / have separated or divorced
- Children living with grandparents, carer, kinship; or experience sibling crisis
- Anxious-phobic children
- Those with ADHD (but don't take their medication)
- Those with high medical needs but can only get appointments in the school day
- Children with undiagnosed needs
- Children that have multiple moves
- Children that don't take up early years places

Step 2: Target Groups

The Group agreed at the 2nd workshop (7th November) that, on moral grounds, all groups described here would have to be considered for any joint action in future. 'Attendance is for every child every day'.

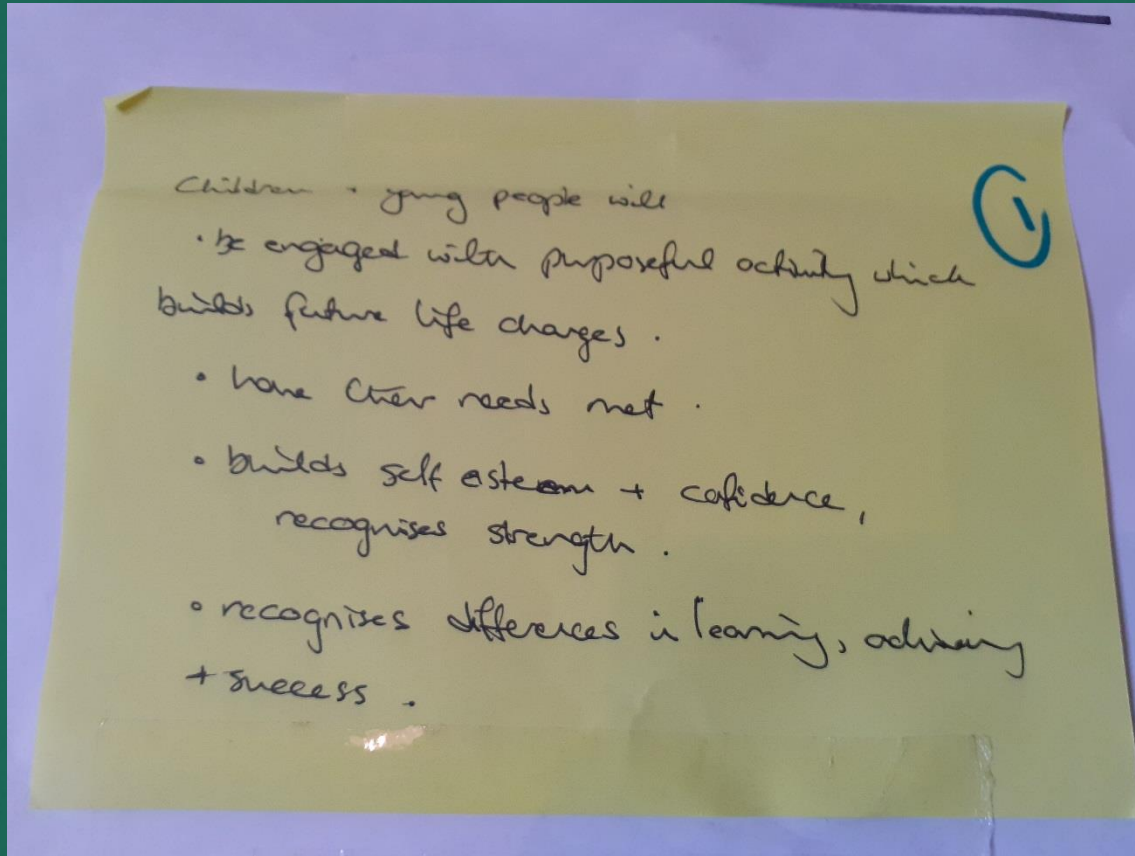
1. Children that are severely absent or at risk of becoming severely absent in the next 3 years (c400 CYP per annum estimate only).
2. Children that are persistently absent (c3,600 CYP per annum estimate only but this market could grow without further intervention).
3. Children that are 'chronically absent' – defined by one school head in the Group as missing 20% of sessions.
4. Children that are at risk of becoming persistently absent between 2024 and 2026.

They also agreed that there would be a preference towards more learning how to do **preventative, early risk identification and intervention work** as a result of this joint effort in the coming years.

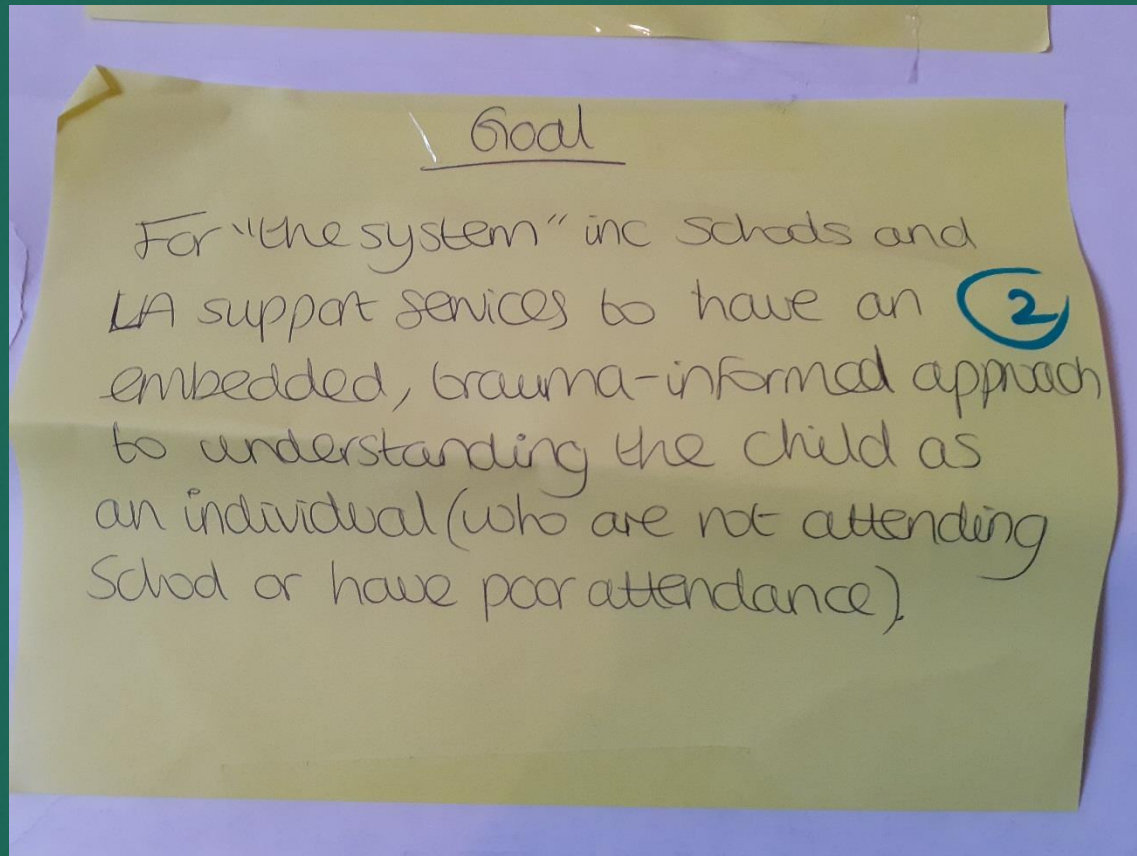
Please refer to the slides from Amanda about attendance rates in the Borough

Data and Intelligence & Lived Experience workstream groups are in place to support understanding of each 'segment'

What could the goal be for all this work between January 2024 and end December 2026?



What could the goal be for all this work between January 2024 and end December 2026?



What could the goal be for all this work between January 2024 and end December 2026?

GOAL:

③

TO HAVE CONFIDENT/CONTENT/
MOTIVATED YOUNG PEOPLE, WHO
ARE SUPPORTED BY PROUD, SUPPORTIVE
& RESILIENT PARENT, FAMILY
& COMMUNITY.

We sought to harmonise our ideas into a single goal at the second workshop, but it was still difficult! There were plenty of ingredients:

- ✓ A better system with positive characteristics e.g.
 - where all staff and their practice is trauma-informed
 - where relationships were caring, levelled, trusted and unbroken,
 - where parents and families feel supported
 - where all CYP can engage and participate (not just attend)
 - where children could feel joy and learn to (love to) learn
 - where individual needs are met to help each child reach their own potential and where children feel inspired and supported
- ✓ A connected system where the right people are in the right places doing the right things and offers / support / help is coherent around each child, young person and family; with an associated goal to understand what the gaps are so we would know how to fill them with greater confidence
- ✓ Adaptable environments where CYP are motivated to learn not just to attend
- ✓ A Borough that offers successful opportunities where CYP can reach their full potential (*taking the word 'attendance' out of the goal completely suggested one group*)

But were we being realistic with the timeframe? And were these goals actually other things...descriptions of an ideal system or state? Were some of these change mechanisms?

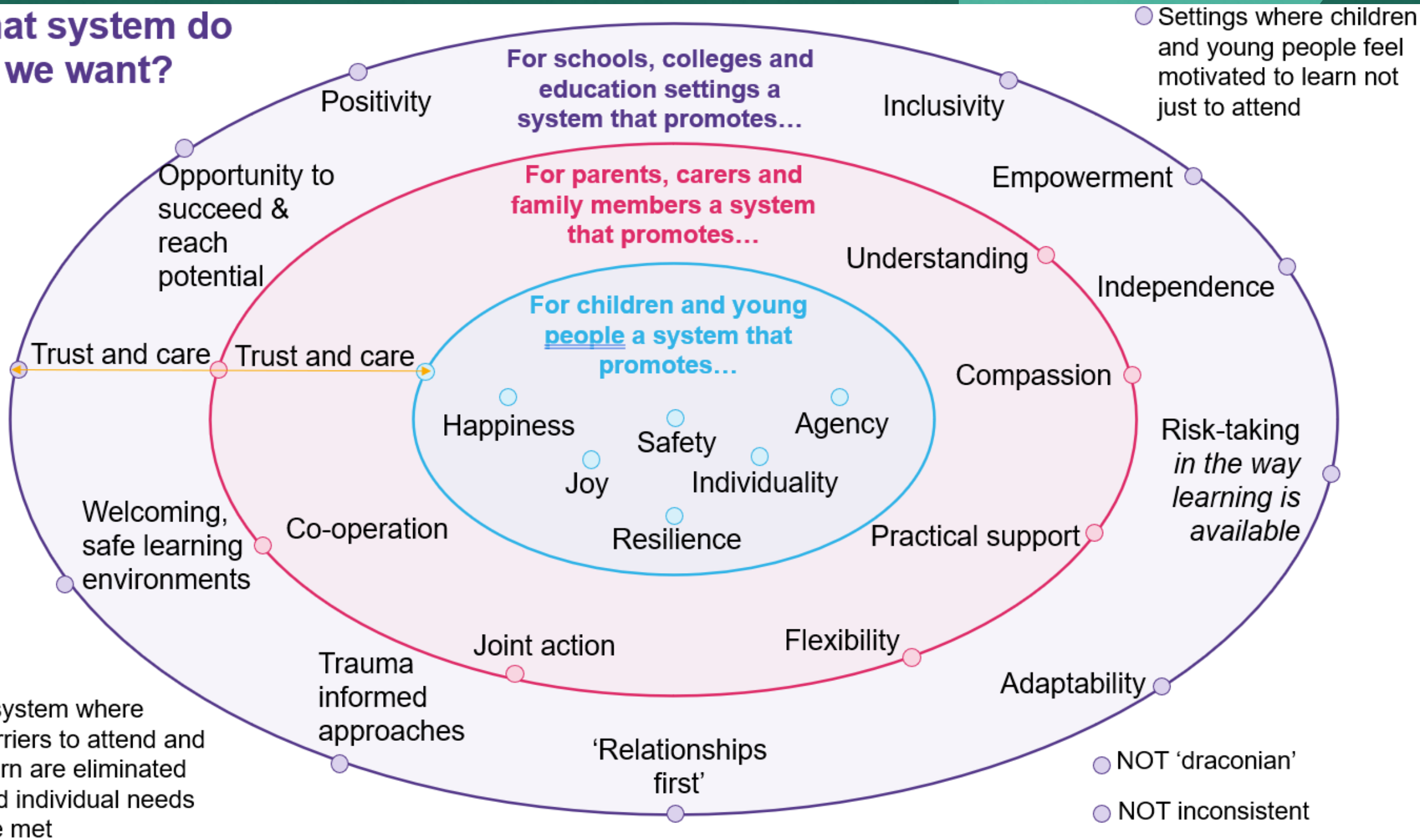
Whilst all suggestions feel relevant some feel like they would take much longer than 3 years to achieve. So how to organise all of this?

At the 2nd workshop we described an ideal system.
This was presented and affirmed at the 3rd workshop in December 2023 – see next slide



At the 3rd workshop we were able to agree a short-, medium- and long-term goal.
See slides following the next one.

What system do we want?



Short-term goal (to end 2026)

We will seek to learn together how to prevent the risks, and reverse the levels, of persistent and severe absence by children and young people in Redcar and Cleveland by the end of 2026 compared to the prevailing situation in 2023.

Consensus achieved
by the ToC Group
5th December 2023

This goal needs to
be shared wider and
drive collaborative
action between
2024 and 2026.

Short-term goal (to end 2026)

Associated goals

- **Seek to connect the system in a way that works better around each child's individual needs in order that they are more motivated, supported and equipped to attend and learn well.**
- **Develop relationship-centred and trauma-informed practices across the Borough that work around each child, whole family and in each education setting such that meaningful adjustments are made that lead to not only better attendance, but opportunities to succeed and learn.**
- **Test and learn how to eliminate barriers to attendance in at least one geographical place (*self-defining communities*) within the Borough to demonstrate what is possible to achieve from encouraging a more connected system where attendance is everyone's business in that place.**

Consensus achieved
by the ToC Group
5th December 2023

These associated
goals need to be
shared wider and
drive collaborative
action between
2024 and 2026.

Impacts if we pursue this goal together?

- The negative consequences of persistent and severe absence are avoided for a greater number of children and young people.
- Instead, their trajectories are replaced by a higher likelihood of longer term, positive life chances. Those who are motivated and supported to attend well, will engage and learn to their full potential for a greater proportion of their years in formal education.
- Child-centred solutions and whole family working models of practice will have evolved providing practical exemplars of how more preventative and early intervention activity is possible in future.
- If successful, the systems-based learning and activities from the suggested place-based approach between 2024 and 2026 could provide know-how and good practice to share, replicate and upscale across the Borough appropriately.

Consensus achieved
by the ToC Group
5th December 2023

Step 3: Impact (continued)

- We explored impact at workshop 2 through the lens of:
- **Children and young people** i.e., what enduring change would ideally happen for a child who was at risk of, or already classified as persistently or severely absent, but then turns that situation around? What could they do for themselves in future in the absence of continued intervention to the level that might be needed initially to support them into being able to attend well?
- **Their families, parents, carers** i.e., what enduring change would ideally happen for them once they had been involved in, and supported to help their child attend well? What could they do for themselves after initial interventions are provided by 'the system'?
- These ideas came from the group.

Longer-term impacts – the changes that endure for **children and young people** having been involved in and supported to attend well at school, college or learning setting

Increased resilience

- More likely to try new things in future
- Stronger networks and social skills
- More likely to know where to go, and ask, for help
- More able to feel and achieve independence

Mindset

- Proud of self
- Able to recognise personal achievement
- Value education and learning
- Able to trust others
- More tolerant
- Positive outlook

Happier and healthier

- Choosing to attend 'well' (school, health, medical appointments)
- Better mental and physical health including self-care routines
- Self-confidence and self-worth
- Thriving or flourishing

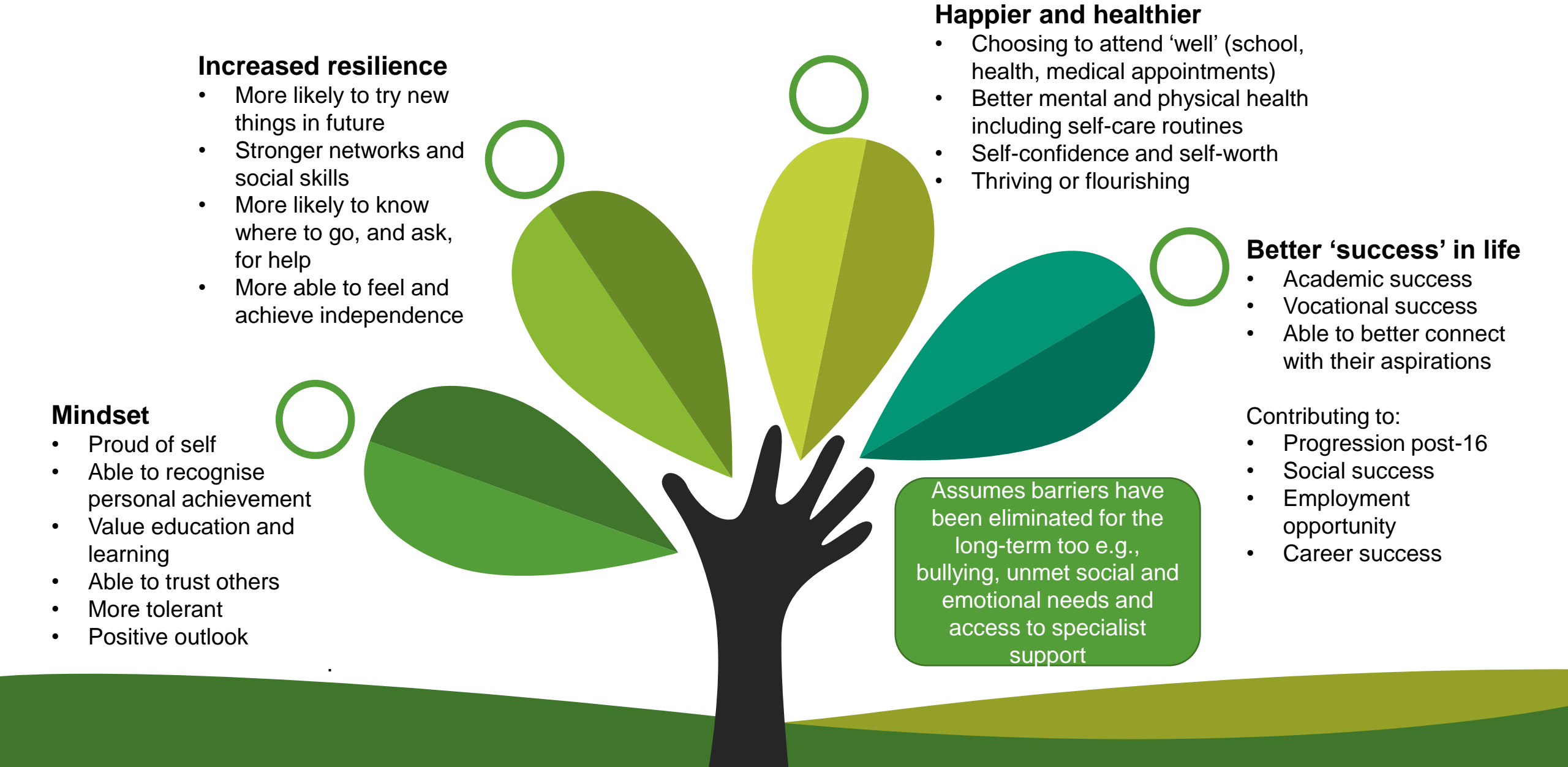
Better 'success' in life

- Academic success
- Vocational success
- Able to better connect with their aspirations

Contributing to:

- Progression post-16
- Social success
- Employment opportunity
- Career success

Assumes barriers have been eliminated for the long-term too e.g., bullying, unmet social and emotional needs and access to specialist support



Longer-term impacts – the changes that endure for **parents, carers and family members** having been involved in supporting their child attend well at school, college or learning setting

Skills to support child and self in future

- Social skills
- Relationship skills
- Communication skills
- Agency
- Know where to go, and ask, for help and support

Happier and healthier

- Value themselves more
- Better mental health
- Improved wellbeing
- Able to spend more quality time with child

Increased resilience to manage challenges in life

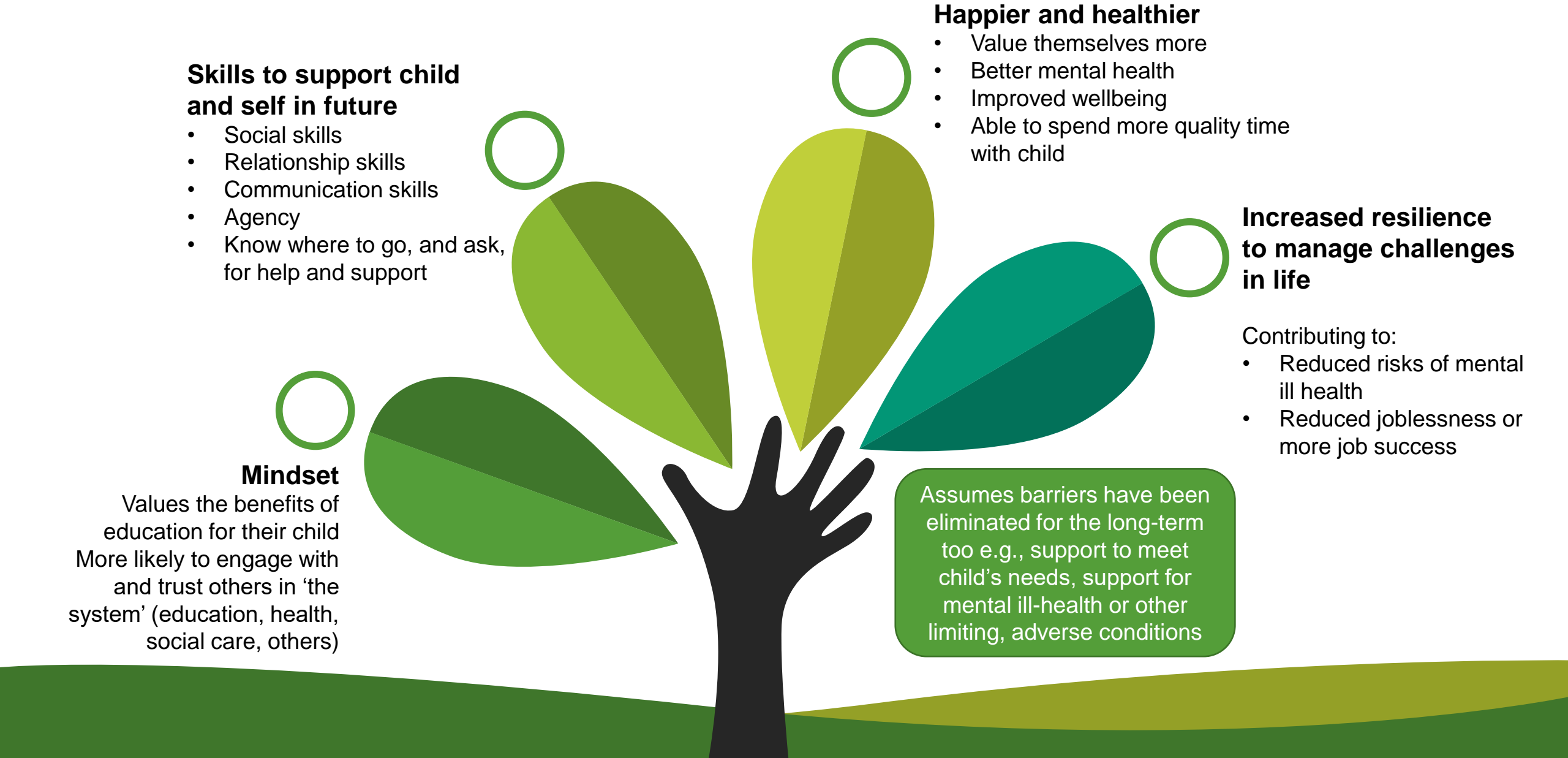
Contributing to:

- Reduced risks of mental ill health
- Reduced joblessness or more job success

Mindset

Values the benefits of education for their child
More likely to engage with and trust others in 'the system' (education, health, social care, others)

Assumes barriers have been eliminated for the long-term too e.g., support to meet child's needs, support for mental ill-health or other limiting, adverse conditions



Step 4: Outcomes

Step 7: Sequencing

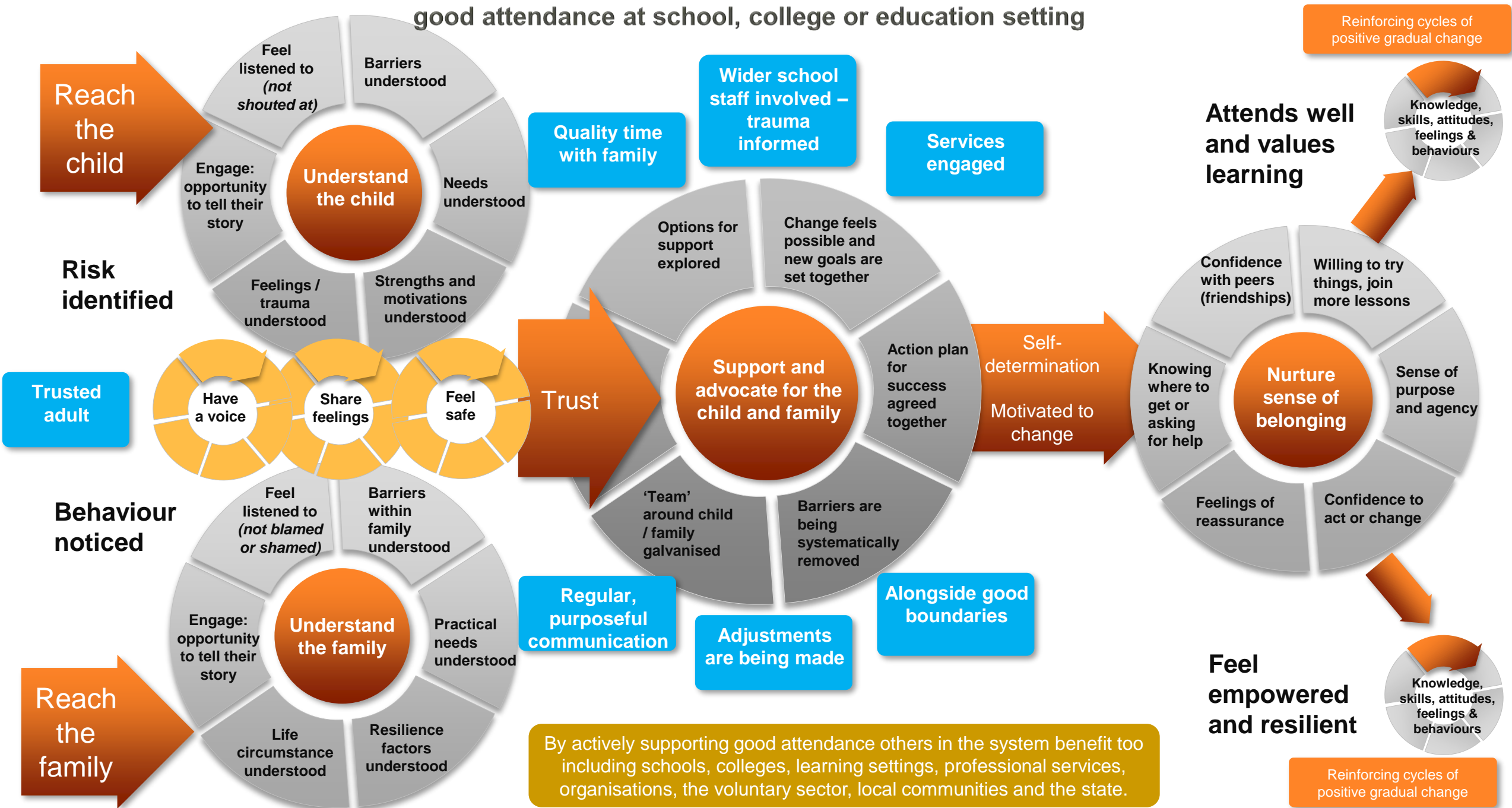
Step 8: Diagram

- We tackled these 3 steps together.
- Firstly, we explored outcomes at workshop 2 through the lens of:
 - **Children and young people.**
 - **Their families, parents, carers.**
- Having discussed the problem(s) and potential goals for any work together between 2023 and 2026 at length, 3 groups spent time developing 'outcome journeys' for each audience above noting that in some instances the outcomes for a child and their family member were often the same.
- To support this work, each group also had a number of real-life case studies (c20 were shared amongst the participants) about children, young people and families either at risk of or who had been persistently or severely absent and had managed to turn that situation around. This meant each group could connect with real stories of young people in the Borough and become outcomes detectives, spotting the different changes that appeared to be important in moving from one situation to another, gradually over time.
- Having listed all the outcomes from the case studies, the groups started to map out the journeys of change, summarised by the facilitator on the next slide as a working draft that was improved and then approved at the final workshop in December 2023.
- A draft sequenced visual diagram was created as a consequence – see next slide.
- As well as agreeing that the 'Project' would focus on outcomes for children, young people and families, the ToC Group recognised that other stakeholders would benefit as well from playing an active role in supporting good attendance.

Acting as 'outcomes
'detectives' we were
looking for changes
in the case studies
such as:

Knowledge
Cognition /
Understanding
Skills
Affective
(emotions/feelings)
Attitudes
Behaviours

Draft 1: Outcomes for children, young people and their family on a journey away from persistent or severe absence to good attendance at school, college or education setting



Step 4: Outcomes

Step 7: Sequencing

Step 8: Diagram

- We tackled these 3 steps together.
- As well as agreeing that the 'Project' or system-change approach would focus on outcomes for children, young people and families, the ToC Group recognised that other stakeholders would benefit as well from playing an active role in supporting good attendance.
- At the December 2023 workshop we therefore explored what outcomes / benefits might arise for these stakeholders by being an active part of supporting the desired outcomes already identified for children, young people and families:
- Schools, colleges and learning settings
- Professional services and organisations
- Communities including the voluntary sector
- We found that reciprocal benefits are achieved in a system that is working well and that makes attendance everyone's business.
- We plotted these outcomes in two ways i) embedded into the CYP and family outcomes visual to provide a comprehensive ToC graphic and ii) as a 'system' diagram to complement the earlier work of the ToC group so we could ultimately see what an ideal system looks like for all stakeholders (see slide after next).

Please see next slide for the 'final' and detailed Theory of Change visual diagram which includes a colour coded key at the bottom of the illustration.

Outcomes for children, young people and their family on a journey away from risk of, or actual persistent or severe absence to good attendance at school, college or education setting with benefits for 'all' stakeholders involved in the relationship and experience.

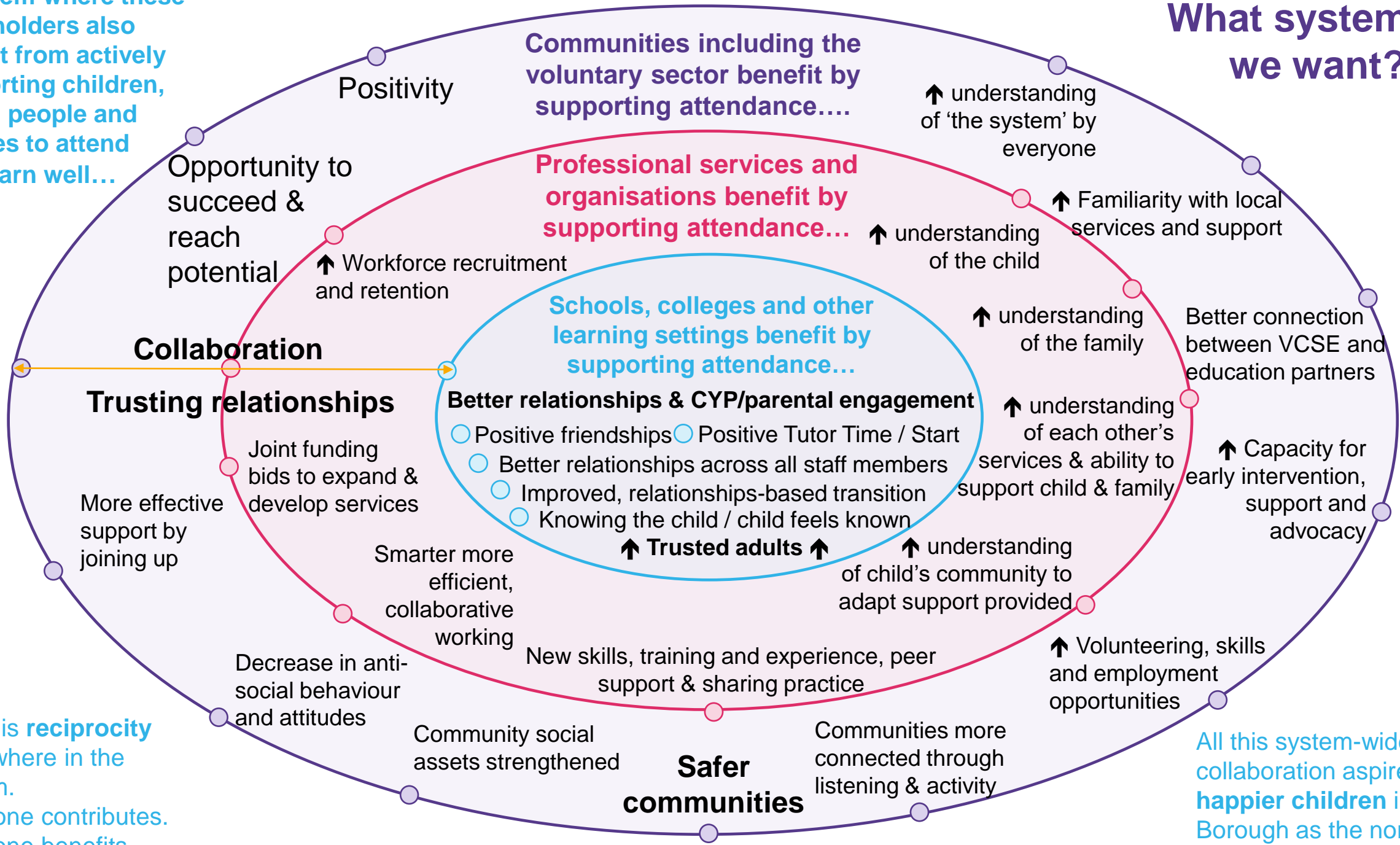


A system where these stakeholders also benefit from actively supporting children, young people and families to attend and learn well...

What system do we want?

There is **reciprocity** everywhere in the system. Everyone contributes. Everyone benefits.

All this system-wide collaboration aspires to **happier children** in the Borough as the norm



Step 6: Change Mechanisms

How will our activities cause the outcomes we want to see?

- The mechanisms stage is where we describe how we want people to engage with our activities, or experience them, to make outcomes more likely.
- This can be as simple as stating that people need to listen to our advice to make a change, but it can be more subtle - that they need to feel our advice is relevant to them and believe it is something they can take action on.
- Defining mechanisms can be one of the hardest parts of the process, but it is also the most useful. In this step we are getting to the heart of how our work is intended to achieve change.
- Prompts to get people to think about mechanisms include:
 1. What do you want people in our target group to be thinking, feeling or doing whilst they are experiencing our service or campaign?
 2. Think about things like feeling safe, trusting staff, having fun, feeling listened to, feeling supported, starting to think about things differently, feeling motivated. All of these are mechanisms.
 3. How will we be able to tell whether things are working as planned, whilst it is happening?
 4. It can help to look at different outcomes in turn. Take a single outcome and consider what will need to happen, or how we want people to feel during our activities to trigger this outcome for people.
 5. In a campaigning context, think of mechanisms as the 'messages' that we want our stakeholders to get or take from our work.

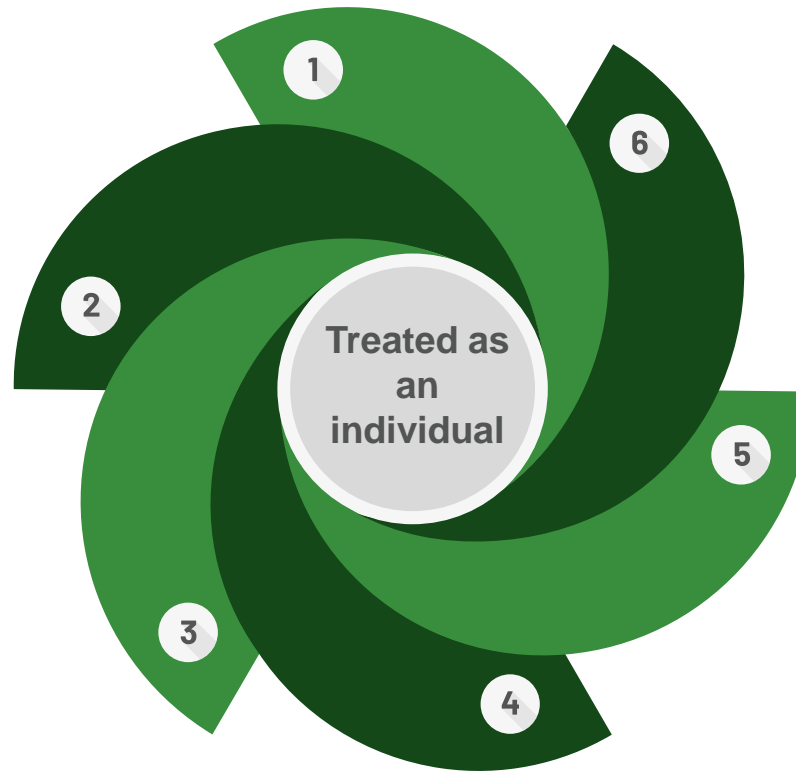
The group agreed with most of the change mechanisms in the guidance from NPC but also identified some others – illustrated on the next slide.

We asked ourselves 'if any of these mechanisms weren't there, would the outcomes be less likely to happen?'

Change mechanisms

How we want people to engage with activities, or experience them to make outcomes more likely.

- 1 Feeling safe**
 - In and near school
 - At home
 - In relationships
 - With professionals
- 2 Meaningful relationships**
 - That feel reciprocal
 - That empower
 - Feel better treated
 - Advice is trusted
 - Respected
- 3 Feel listened to**
 - Needs are understood
 - Barriers are understood
 - Voice is heard
 - Not having to repeat story
 - Adjustments are relevant *not just reasonable*



Environments where any support, activity or learning takes place is safe, calm and welcoming.
Staff and professionals are trauma informed.

- 4 Feeling supported**
 - Support is relevant
 - Support is practical
 - Support is timely
 - Support is flexible
 - Support is progressive
- 5 Encourages responsibility**
 - Through personal choice
 - Through clear boundaries
 - Through communication
 - Feel that education, career and lives matter
- 6 Positive mindset**
 - Engage positively
 - Equipped with tools and strategies
 - Learning can be fun
 - Have a laugh
 - Barriers are lifting

Step 9:

Stakeholders and enabling factors

- We started to explore other stakeholders involved – or that need to be involved – to make attendance everyone's business in the first workshop.
- See slide 18 – 'Who else is working to tackle the issue?'
- We may choose to spend more time thinking about how to develop strong alliances and co-operation for the suggested place-based approach between 2024 and 2026 – making the most of the work done to date through the 3 workstreams initiated in 2023:
 - Data and intelligence (about the 'place')
 - Lived experience (of children, young people and families in the place)
 - System and services (that are in or could play a part in the place)

A critical partner in any work agreed between 2023 and 2026 will be Public Health as 'health' is the largest single reason for persistent absence, and it is important to work hard to understand and then eliminate barriers linked to this intelligence.

It will also be important to 'mirror' the work of the national Attendance Action Alliance at a local level in a visible, coherent way.

Step 5: Activities

- We chose to complete Step 5 'last' in the process as it required more lead time to research the evidence before the last workshop.
- Several solutions were considered at the 3rd and final ToC workshop in December 2023. The NPC Ten Steps Guidance suggested these considerations.

What are you going to do?

You can now move on to thinking about your activities. This step is about stating what you are doing or plan to do to encourage the outcomes from Step 4 to happen. You should find this the easiest part of the theory of change.

Don't describe things in too much detail, that comes in the following steps.

Think about:

1. What are the key features of your activities?
2. What will these features look like? How often and for how long will you deliver to groups or individuals?
3. Who will deliver these activities?
4. How will you get people to find out about you and engage with your activities? For example, through referrals, outreach, or marketing.

The facilitator (Alan from Skyblue) has created a 'list' of possible activities and solutions from the desk research and evidence review stages of the Project and incorporated any suggestions made by partners during the year at the 13 different workshops that have been delivered.

It will be important to spend more time looking at these interventions and their efficacy in 2024 to help decide on where energy is best spent to make the biggest difference linked to the problem statement and agreed goal.

Solutions – a new approach?

- The principle of selecting interventions or activities that would associate with the desired outcomes for children, young people and families was firmly established by the group – but will need consistent and disciplined practice in future gatherings.
- Too often activities or services evolve over time that were once ‘right’ but then establish themselves as a status quo that is much harder to challenge when things change. By being focused on the outcomes it provides a mind-set to question and challenge the way things are done to best effect.
- The theory of change outcomes diagram for children, young people and families along with the two ‘system visuals’ in this pack can be leaned upon by partners to see if and how solutions, activities or proposed interventions are more likely to support the changes desired in the Borough.
- For each solution considered it is also helpful to use the ‘change mechanisms’ visual like a kind of checklist to see if it has those important ingredients making the desired changes much more likely for children, young people and their families.

“We’ve all got to be prepared to work differently in ways that are uncomfortable.”

The ToC Group proposed these solutions, but there are many more to consider and understand yet...

1: A **place-based pilot** to test, learn and trial a co-ordinated range of solutions in and with those communities around reducing the risk of and actual persistent and severe attendance.

2: **Mentoring** was seen as an important – but lacking intervention solution – in the Borough. An audit of existing and desired mentoring activity would be a good starting point alongside a review of **coaching** solutions.

3: Effective “**Team around...**” **models** in the Borough to see what’s the current practice and what could be even better for ‘Team around the child / family / school’ approaches embedded with **relationship centred** and **trauma informed practices**. Learn from the **Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce pilots** too. Strong leadership and accountability is necessary for these to work better in future.

4: Maximising the opportunities of **Attendance Hubs to improve effective practice in schools / colleges / learning settings**.

5: Developing and implementing effective **communication and engagement** strategy and tactics.

6: New ways of working around children and young people accessing different services to meet their needs so they aren’t stepped down or their case is closed when their attendance is still an issue. This addresses issues and barriers linked to service thresholds and **caseload management** between services and professionals.

7: Joyful activity including **cultural participation** to encourage a greater sense of belonging by more children that are at risk of, or are persistently or severely absent.

The ToC Group proposed these solutions, but there are many more to consider and understand yet...

1: There was strong support for a **place-based pilot** *or a pilot in two different areas in the Borough if it can be afforded* - to test, learn and trial a co-ordinated range of solutions in and with those communities around reducing the risk of and actual persistent and severe attendance. This would cohere the system in a geographically focused way to see what is possible for future upscaling. 2024 would be a chance to work on the foundations for any such pilot.

2: **Mentoring** was seen as an important – but lacking intervention solution – in the Borough. There are different types of mentoring that are of interest from the Barnardo's Attendance Mentor pilot in Middlesbrough to social and emotionally based mentoring models evaluated by the Centre for Youth Impact to mentors from businesses and organisations (corporate volunteering / STEM mentoring examples were mentioned). Anglo American and the Woodsmith Foundation are also investing in some mentors for disadvantaged students in two secondary schools in the Borough as part of a pilot to 2025.

An audit of existing and desired mentoring activity would be a good starting point alongside a rapid review of the evidence of mentoring efficacy (e.g., by DfE, EEF) and cost per pupil intervention estimation were something more proactive around mentoring to be mounted over time in the Borough.

Associated with this, but recognising the difference to mentoring, was a proposal to explore **coaching** solutions too in the Borough.

3: “Team around...” models

This discussion revealed a lot of interest, experience and desire to make changes that would really work for children, young people, families and schools, colleges & learning settings.

Describing the different models as they are or could be would attract significant interest not only amongst professional services but all stakeholders. Old models that worked well alongside the best parts of the existing models and perhaps surprising hybrid models will likely emerge for:

- Team around the child
- Team around the family
- Team around the school [college/learning setting]

The contexts for providing ‘**relationship first**’ and **trauma informed** support in each of the models above (as standard) may also differ. Some might be in school/college, close by to that education setting (like we see in some of the current Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce pilots), whilst others might be based on an outreach model going where the CYP and parents of PA/SA children feel most trust and familiarity whether in family hubs, health or community settings.

The importance of **leadership, accountability within each education setting** - and the role of the **lead practitioner** in the context of case management - was also emphasised for any of these model to work.

The ToC Group proposed these solutions, but there are many more to consider and understand yet

4: Attendance Hubs

Sharing good attendance practice amongst schools

There was interest in ensuring that all education and learning settings benefit from the ambitions, resources and solutions being enabled via Attendance Hubs. There are two Attendance Hubs in proximity of Redcar & Cleveland, but it is unclear if RCBC schools are connected in a meaningful way with them yet – or whether there are new opportunities from the DfE's latest call for schools to register to join an [Attendance Hub](#) – applications have to be in by 15th January 2024 with decisions available in Spring 2024.

[Expectations for schools joining attendance hubs \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Also listed in the application for this opportunity are useful links and resources including published guidance and effective practice resources to support schools in managing attendance.

1. Our latest attendance guidance which sets out expectations for schools, trusts and local authorities.
2. A number of webinars focussed on effective attendance practice for schools, trusts and local authorities.
3. An attendance data dashboard showing data at a national, regional and local authority level which is updated on a fortnightly basis.
4. Guidance from the National Health Service about where illness might affect a pupil's attendance at school.
5. A guide from the behavioural insights team focussed on supporting schools who send messages to parents.
6. Supplementary guidance for schools and local authorities related to mental health and attendance.
7. A rapid evidence review of attendance interventions from the Education Endowment Foundation website.
8. A number of written case studies where schools share their techniques for managing attendance, using text messages to remind parents of their child's attendance, and working with the community to tackle the root causes of absence.

The ToC Group proposed these solutions, but there are many more to consider and understand yet

5: Communication and engagement strategy and tactics

Throughout the 'Making Attendance Everyone's Business' Project in 2023, where 104 people have engaged 222 times either at a workshop, in a virtual meeting, small group or 1-2-1 interview the themes of communication and engagement have been consistently present. Ideas differ around:

- What should this look like?
- What messaging is involved by whom to whom?
- What language is used in each context / domain / audience to be effective?
- How best to communicate with parents as part of relationship building?
- How to reach severely absent children 'where they are'?
- How to communicate in a relatable way with children that are persistently absent, on the cusp of becoming persistently absent or have 'high risk' characteristics – most agree that youth voice and lived experience is more important here than messaging by professional adults so how is that enabled in new or inspiring ways in the Borough? [there are examples]

And Educational Psychologists supportive of this whole process have been able to provide fascinating insights about the different ways of exploring motivation and self-determination which could help some of the communication and engagement activity that will need to happen. It means looking at 'push' and 'pull' framing. DfE and the Behavioural Insights Team meantime and the EEF and YEF are active in the field of parental communication and engagement which we can usefully learn from and apply alongside toolkits identified in Scotland.

But who can pull all of this together and / or co-ordinate the different strands of communication that would be possible across the system partners?

6: Removing barriers in the system

Though not a solution per se, the theme above would give rise to a range of activities and interventions that are either new or serve as a catalyst to provide services and support more effectively for the children, young people and families that are the focus for this work.

New opportunities – caseload management

The Care Review provides an opportunity to think about how different professionals in the system provide support differently in future linked to Family Help Teams, the role of Early Help Multi Agency Teams working with CPY and families (who could hold Children in Need cases and appropriate supervision).

More generally, opportunities for recognising the way things are done currently around closing down cases and step-down could be improved through joint working across different teams 'around the child and family'. It involves lots of professionals, the vulnerable adult team, child services, social workers and those listed above. But the sense in the room was 'Let's try it!'

The benefits for this more relationship-centred practice would emerge from the new ways of working and potentially support more children, young people and families at risk of or experiencing persistent or severe absence from school in ways that perhaps existing service threshold configurations limit.

7: Joyful activity – cultural participation

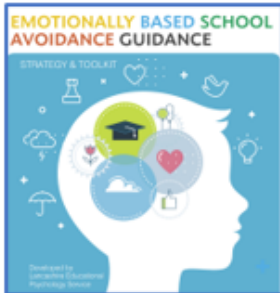





To encourage engagement and give more reasons to come to school than not attend, one member of the group had reviewed EEF evidence around extra-curricular activity and cultural participation. How prevalent is this across the education settings in the Borough, could it be boosted by working as a system making use of all possible community as well as school assets?

Solutions? Activities? Interventions?

....to support the outcomes for children, young people and families struggling to attend well

Focus: those at risk of, or already, persistently or severely absent from school, college or alternative learning setting in Redcar & Cleveland

"...like safeguarding attendance should be everyone's business." (RT-MAT Attendance Hub)

<p>EBSA¹</p>  <p>EBSA Strategies and Tool Kit for Secondary Schools</p>	<p>Attendance Hubs²</p>   <p>How attendance hubs are tackling soaring absences – September 2023 - Leaders are going beyond the school gates in their push to get children back in the classroom. Solutions...</p> <p>"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."</p>			
<p>Attendance Mentors</p> <p>1-2-1 mentoring pilot (delivered by Barnardo's) in Middlesbrough aimed at tackling the factors behind non-attendance (since extended to other areas targeting support for 1,665 persistently absent and severely absent children in total)</p>				
<p>Creative solutions linked to children and young people telling their stories their way</p> <table><tr><td><p>Creative Partnership Programme such as the type completed by Blue Cabin with 4-5 care experienced children / young people. A small cohort of Blue Cabin</p><p>Films and comics created alongside young people have been suggested as solutions</p></td><td><p>3</p></td><td><p>Working with specific populations e.g. carers in creative ways</p><p>We Care You Care - Help and support for all carers living across the South Tees area We Care You Care</p></td></tr></table>		<p>Creative Partnership Programme such as the type completed by Blue Cabin with 4-5 care experienced children / young people. A small cohort of Blue Cabin</p> <p>Films and comics created alongside young people have been suggested as solutions</p>	<p>3</p> 	<p>Working with specific populations e.g. carers in creative ways</p> <p>We Care You Care - Help and support for all carers living across the South Tees area We Care You Care</p>
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¹ Sources: Lancashire Educational Psychology Service, [Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools](#) and Brighter Futures for Children are useful sources


² [Attendance HUB - Northern Education Trust](#) (100 schools signed up for the pilot which will see the sharing of strategies and resources for improving attendance) and [River Tees Multi-Academy Trust \(rtmat.org.uk\)](#) 'Attendance at River Tees Multi-Academy Trust (RTMAT) academies is, like safeguarding, everyone's business.'

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKee0FteBdQ>



Pilot projects to build evidence of what works to reduce absence, exclusions and improve attendance

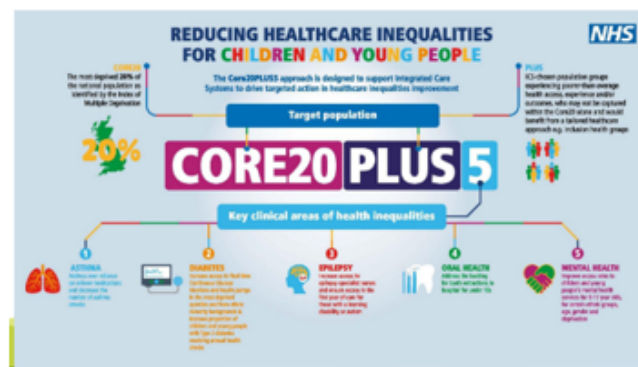


 <p>A review of evidence that organised findings around 8 topics. Evidence was weak overall, so investment is being made to learn more >>>>></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mentoring 2. Parental engagement 3. Responsive and targeted approaches 4. Teaching of social and emotional skills 5. Behaviour interventions 6. Meal provision 7. Incentives and disincentives 8. Extracurricular activities 	<p>(March 2022 specification)</p> <p>We are looking for programmes that focus on enabling 5-18 year olds to attend, positively engage with and remain in school, thereby improving attainment and reducing the likelihood of them becoming involved in violence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anti-bullying programmes 2. Classroom Behaviour Management programmes 3. Internal Alternative Provision interventions 4. Needs-led attendance interventions 5. Parent/carers communication interventions 6. Social and emotional learning interventions 7. Targeted family engagement interventions.
<p>Live Pilots</p> <p><u>A safe, positive place to learn: improving attendance and reducing exclusions - Youth Endowment Fund</u></p> <p><u>Grassroots: a programme to improve pupil behaviour (2023/24 – ... EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk))</u></p> <p><u>BITUP: Updating Parents on Number of School Days Missed... EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)</u> – this is a parent messaging trial - Updating Parents on Number of School Days Missed - working with The Behavioural Insights Team (2022/23)</p>	

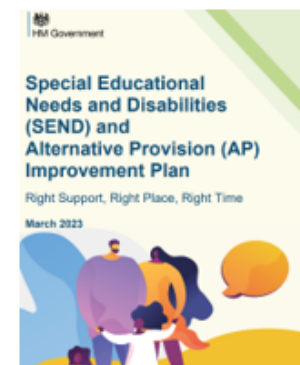
Solutions linked to health and wellbeing

To understand how to support young people and reduce health inequalities – targeting some of the causes of absence at root cause...

Core20PLUS5 Framework for Children and Young People: A North East and North Cumbria Regional Perspective
A Practical Guide for Using the Framework in a Variety of Settings



The Network has 10 priorities⁴ and system partners that work with children and young people across topics that correlate with school absence – are we linking up to maximum effect?



- Attendance** The recently published 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance sets out clear roles and responsibilities for schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities to work together to provide access to early help services and ensure joined up support for children and their families facing special educational needs, health or disability related barriers to attendance. In working with their parents to improve attendance, schools should be mindful of these barriers and put additional support in place such as pastoral or curriculum support.

ELSEC Pathfinders with NHS England

- Access to therapists in areas of need**
42. There is strong evidence that without receiving the right support early to address speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), children are at increased risk of poor educational attainment, poor social emotional and mental health and poor employment outcomes. In partnership with NHS England, we will include Early Language and Support For Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders within our £70 million Change Programme by supporting 9 ICBs and one of the local areas within each of our 9 Regional Expert Partnerships to trial new ways of working to better identify and support children with SLCN in early years and primary schools.
43. The aim of the ELSEC pathfinders is to:
- provide earlier identification and support to children and young people with SEND to reduce the number of children and young people requiring an EHCP to have their needs met.
 - build evidence of new ways of working to better and earlier identify and support children with SLCN that could be rolled out more widely.
 - test the impact on pupil outcomes such as attendance, attainment, behaviour, mental health and wellbeing over the 2 years of the pilot.

Whole family working to improve and / or maintain children's attendance at school

- Case Study – Short Breaks Innovation Fund in Sunderland**
- Sunderland City Council is one of the local authorities taking part in the Short Breaks Innovation Fund programme. One of its offers is Breathing Space, a whole-family model of short breaks both after school and during school holidays. It is designed to offer joined-up support and create positive opportunities for families with children who have social, emotional or mental health needs or autism and who are at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion from school. The aim is to improve behaviour over the longer term to improve and/or maintain children's attendance at school.
- Breathing Space has different hubs, including:
- a family hub centre which delivers specialist emotional support sessions for children.
 - a group for non-verbal children with autism, providing sensory and crafts sessions.
 - an alternative provision school providing after-school extra-curricular activities, such as cooking and trips to the theatre.
- Overall, the Breathing Space short breaks provision has helped with:
- an improvement in pupils' attendance.
 - an improvement in pupils' behaviour in school, linked to improved attitudes to learning.
 - a decrease in suspensions.

Evidence Gap: We need to find out the impact of health on attendance behaviours more generally in order to more confidently put in place interventions that will work for each child and family's circumstance

⁴ 1. Voice of CYP and families 2. Mental Health 3. Poverty 4. Additional Needs & Vulnerability 5. Inequalities and access 6. Strong start in life 7. Health promotion 8. Family support 9. Childhood illness 10. Data, digital & communication



The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education

LETTER TO LAs: CALL TO SUPPORT STRONG ATTENDANCE FROM THE FIRST DAY OF TERM (July 2023) lists a number of actions and solutions.

[new school attendance guidance](#)

[LGA conference speech](#)

[Toolkit for schools: communicating with families to support attendance](#)

To support a strong return to school in September these ideas were suggested to local authorities:

- '...rigorous analysis of absence data to identify the pupils, cohorts and schools that need the most support, ensuring join-up and data-sharing is established with relevant agencies such as children's social care and SEND, and communicating the area-wide school attendance strategy across the council.'
- 'Over the summer I urge you to mobilise your wider services and staff who have contact with parents and children to help to communicate the importance of a strong return to school. I believe we have a real opportunity to reset the system, if we can ensure that trusted voices are giving the same messages.'

Examples of good practice:

- social workers and early help workers ensuring that that every conversation with a pupil and family involves school attendance and addressing any barriers
- school nurses identifying and working with pupils who are anxious about returning to school
- family hubs giving out information to parents on [illness and absence](#) and sharing our [attendance guidance for parents](#)

Support for pupils where a mental health issue is affecting attendance
Effective practice examples

February 2023

Working Together to Improve School Attendance, DfE Seminar, June 2023 offered these suggestions >>>

- Schools to proactively manage attendance**, spot patterns and act as quickly as possible
- More accurate data** for individual pupils, schools, cohorts and areas of the country sooner to facilitate that
- Evidence based interventions** that schools can make use of when they spot a particular problem
- Local authorities to proactively remove out of school barriers to attendance** and working with schools to provide access to support/ targeted intervention

DfE have been focused on clear, strong expectations in their guidance for schools, MATs and local authorities; richer and more timely (daily) attendance data collection from schools, leadership via the AAA and pledges to remove barriers by those system partners, building the evidence base (with EEF) including funding to trial Attendance Mentors, and sharing practice (including expansion of Attendance Hubs). They recommend adopting a 'support first' approach and making attendance everyone's business by:

- Preventing patterns of absence from developing by promoting good attendance
- Intervening early by using data to spot patterns of absence before they become persistent and working with families to remove the barriers to attendance
- Targeting support for persistent and severe absentees with all local partners working together to reengage pupils.

The work of the **Attendance Action Alliance** brought to bear across Redcar & Cleveland including AAA's back-to-school campaign. Topics have included communication with parents, SEND, the need for wider engagement in school beyond just the basic curriculum, the importance of mental health support teams, a strong pastoral support offer in schools, the use of reasonable adjustments and harvesting successful policing interventions in this domain.



Attendance Action Alliance

DfE is reliant on other areas 'to turn the dial' on the underlying causes of absence such as education recovery (attainment), and the Care and SEND Reviews (complex need) – reflecting that the attendance programme is a cross-cutting one.

- Children's Social Care (CSC) and SEND Implementation Plans⁵ – including a new model for Family Help (including Family Hubs), a national framework for CSC, updated statutory guidance and national standards.
- Education recovery activity helping pupils feel comfortable and confident to return to school and making up for lost learning
- Regional support – attendance support provided through Education Priority Areas and the Trust and School Improvement Offer plus support and challenge of LAs and trusts from Regions Group staff

Targeted support

- £200 million investment: offering intensive support to the most vulnerable through the Supporting Families and reforming Family Help (Family Hubs in 87 LAs, CSC Pathfinder in 12 local areas reforming Family Help)
- £16.6 million pa Virtual Schools Head programme expansion
- Supporting those at risk in serious violence hotspots with the SAFE and AP Taskforces
- Building attendance metrics into the SEND and AP inclusion dashboard; also a new CiN attendance indicator in the CSC national framework

Wider measures

- Programmes like breakfast clubs and the holiday activities and food programme stand to particularly benefit disadvantaged children and help to support their attendance
- £21 million in training more educational psychologists
- High need budget to £10.1bn in 2023/24 up 50% on 2019/20
- Additional free schools

Senior mental health lead training

- This is being offered to all state schools and colleges. Further roll out of Mental Health Support Teams and the publication of new guidance on how to support attendance where mental health is a barrier

The above are just extracts from known DfE investments that respond to the multi-faceted drivers of absence – owing to health needs / service pressures, mental health / behaviour and economic, family functioning challenges.

[Targeted support for vulnerable young people in serious violence hotspots – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/targeted-support-for-vulnerable-young-people-in-serious-violence-hotspots)

Extending the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce Pilot (APST)⁶ until March 2025 to learn lessons for the future

SAFE ('Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed') taskforces⁷

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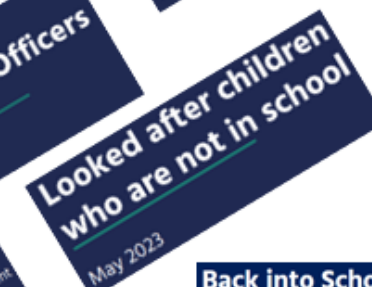


⁵ Transformational reform begins for children and young people with SEND – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) - £70 million change programme announced 2nd March 2023

⁶ Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces (APST) | Department for Education | Youth Endowment Fund and Targeted support for vulnerable young people in serious violence hotspots – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). Announced by Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford 3rd September 2021

⁷ £30 million will be invested into a programme of SAFE taskforces which will be rolled out in 10 of 21 serious violence hotspots areas from early 2022. This 3-year initiative will be led by local schools to protect young people at risk of truant and from being permanently excluded. The SAFE programme will deliver targeted interventions to reduce truancy, improve behaviours, and reduce the risk of individuals failing to enter education, employment or training (NEET).

⁸ Behaviour hubs – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) - The Behaviour Hubs programme supports school leaders by helping them to create calm, safe and supportive environments – with pupils in schools and ready to learn



Back into School

Resources for children and young people

Resources for children and young people

Resources for schools

Resources for schools

Resources for families

Resources for families

[Back into School | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/back-into-school/)

'Invisible' children in care are missing school every day, unique new data shows – May 2023



Outcomes framework

Annex to A positive approach to a parenting: Part 2 of the Independent Family

December 2022

What could be done better or differently in school / college to support good attendance?

Listen to young people Listen, care and offer compassion in all dealings with a child	Get back to a human conversation with a parent when they phone in to report an attendance issue rather than an answer machine. This misses the opportunity to listen and understand the wider context for an absence.
Consider having a more robust plan to support child/ren transitioning from primary to secondary school	Encourage all schools to take up the offer to do poverty proofing to improve whole school approaches in this regard
Making it easier for parents to more easily navigate who's who in school (there can be multiple contacts) to improve the feeling of talking to someone who listens, cares, understands and can support or take action	Remove anything (policy-wise / culturally / behaviourally) that creates stigma for a child and gives them this reason to choose not to attend
Improve communication between school team members who can sometimes be in contact with the same parent without knowing what the other staff member has been in touch with them about at the same time	Consider reviewing the proportionality of consequences issued in schools; lived experience insight suggests these are felt to be disproportionate by some parents that have commented on this issue
Make school / college a place where a child wants to be which means creating a place where they feel respected, valued, treated as individuals and feel they belong and not feeling like 'they want rid of us', 'I don't fit' or 'I'm treated like a robot.'	If a child has been absent offer the 'fresh start' when they come back as the feeling is that it doesn't feel like it for the child - they feel like they are still being judged or punished for their previous lack of attendance/absence
Having an individual plan that is shared, understood and supported around the CYP struggling with attendance	There is very little restorative practice in school, first contact can be negative (e.g., about wearing trainers) – this could be better
Would be good if all schools took up the offer of 'Poverty Proofing' to be more sensitive to CYP needs that could then contribute to their attendance/ behaviours	Create conditions and behaviours to support a child if they are having a bad day e.g., check-ins, more interactive ways of the child rating their lessons and expressing their emotions about things rather than them building up.
Ensure that schools / colleges / educational settings are all SAFE spaces	Arranging peer support where a CYP is allocated a peer if anxiety is identified
What else can Year 6 teachers do to prepare CYP for transition to secondary school?	Pastoral support in secondary schools are 'firefighting' most of the time, unlike the nurturing way in primary school.
Early and earlier intervention to prevent attendance issues escalating	<i>These ideas were captured in May 2023 at Tuned In as part of the 'lived experience' strand of this Project where c20 delegates from across the system</i>

What could be done better or differently in communities to support good attendance?

Provide more opportunities for young people to understand the benefit of completing school by intersecting with companies who may be future employers so they can see what opportunities they could potentially embrace later in life	Need to communicate the frustrations of children falling between services and or waiting for services to support them and find ways of breaking 'vicious cycles' with community support - not just the services.
Resource more community capacity building roles because who best to engage parents in an area than someone from that area and who also has the skills to help navigate 'the system'	Having an individual plan that is shared, understood and supported around the CYP struggling with attendance
Put people with lived experience in the driving seat so they can lead the conversations, be listened to, champion issues that matter to them - adults / parents and children and young people. This is needed for so many aspects of making change in Redcar & Cleveland. Can we learn from experiences described by Red Balloons and Starfish and bring some of that into our communities?	Exploring and perhaps investing more in the role that community centres do, or could, play in providing non-judgemental, safe spaces - something that has been described as generally lacking in some of the school environments that children would appreciate

What could be done better or differently at home to support good attendance?

Communication between parents and school / college (two-way improvements needed)	Inspire parents
Ask parents what support they need and understand the wider challenges and inequalities they are dealing with (e.g., poverty, food insecurity, inability to access specific Apps for school related communication)	Giving parents support to encourage better routines and boundaries e.g., motivational interviewing techniques; and sleep hygiene (no mobile phones from bedtime)
Supporting parents to change the way they put their own (negative) attitudes about school across to their child/ren	Having an individual plan that is shared, understood and supported around the CYP struggling with attendance

Other ideas suggested by contributors to the Project over the course of 2023

- ✓ Re-orienting the existing Attendance Network to be more strategic and sharing good practice
- ✓ Collecting SWOT analysis of attendance practice from all Attendance Network participants by RCBC's Inclusion team leading to even better conversations and support around the child, family and school. Conversations could track changes and 'maturity' in attendance practice over time.
- ✓ Applying recommendations from the [National Education Select Committee Inquiry](#)⁹ into disadvantage and persistent absence at a local, contextualised level
- ✓ Explore how we communicate what we already have to offer around careers education, information, advice and guidance to latch on to a young person's interests and motivations
- ✓ Explore ways of involving children (with higher risk factors of non-attendance) to access alternative, more motivational ways of learning e.g. the local cinema project build provided a focal point of interest to young people.

⁹ [Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

EARLY INTERVENTION

- ✓ Push the early intervention work first rather than the prosecution aspect which should be a tool of last resort when exhausted everything else.
- ✓ Work with the school to identify if every possibility has been exhausted before legal action kicks in

RELATIONAL APPROACHES

- ✓ Create a system that gives time to enable a deeper understanding of needs and relationships. Understanding a family and child's needs and formulating a clear response to meet those needs and value that relationship
- ✓ Tap into skills from other sectors e.g. school nurse, mental health support as part of the relational approach
- ✓ Explore and seek to resource more strengths-based mentors for young people in their lives – 'an absolutely valuable asset' to work around the young person, their needs, their difficulties and their talents

INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT 'DONE THE RIGHT WAY'

- ✓ In schools find the money to employ the right people to do the right jobs which means conversations with parents, going out to homes, meeting in a neutral venue if necessary. This is time and money intensive; we know they make a difference, but budget constraints mean schools have less money again to do this as well as they might like.
- ✓ Developing the skills for school staff....it's a skilful job to talk to a parent.....having the skillset and training

TRUSTED PERSON IN EACH YOUNG PERSON'S LIFE

- ✓ If we want to make attendance everyone's business there is always a trusted person in the stories....maybe not in the school, but elsewhere in their lives. We have to create and celebrate these positive role models and tap into their ability to motivate each young person not able to or choosing to attend well.

COMMUNICATION – a theme to explore further

- ✓ "Better communication within the authority and partnering teams - should be more consistent approach across the authority and clear messages."

Learning from lived experience – solutions need to be mindful of these ingredients.



Wider solutions across the UK from the desk research as part of this project

Theme	Suggested interventions
Early intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family engagement approaches to address underlying issues Mentoring programmes to provide individualised support targeted particularly for at-risk students Counselling services to address emotional and psychological challenges
Positive school climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive environment creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere to reduce social anxiety Anti-Bullying Initiatives: Implement strategies to prevent and address bullying Student Engagement: Provide interesting and relevant curriculum to engage students Flexible learning options for students with health-related absenteeism Student-led initiatives to improve school climate
Personalised support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualised Education Plans (IEPs): Develop tailored education plans for students with specific needs Flexible Learning: Provide options like online learning for students who struggle with traditional settings Peer Support: Create peer mentorship programmes to enhance social connections Outreach programmes for students facing socio-economic challenges
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interagency Collaboration: Work with social services, mental health agencies, and community organisations Collaboration with local health services for students with chronic illnesses Collaboration with community organisations for holistic support Teacher-Parent Collaboration: Regular communication between teachers and parents to address concerns Multi-Disciplinary Teams: Form teams to address complex cases comprehensively
Skill building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Skills Training: Teach students effective communication & interpersonal skills Emotional Regulation: Provide strategies to manage emotions and stress Truancy prevention workshops
Systems change working examples	Leeds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of local attendance strategy involving multi-agency collaboration Training for school staff and families on attendance issues Community engagement and awareness campaigns
	Manchester <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-tiered system of support for attendance, focusing on prevention, early intervention, and intensive support Integrated information sharing among agencies Data-driven decision-making for targeted interventions
	Bristol <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of attendance improvement boards with representatives from multiple sectors Development of tailored support plans for at-risk students Holistic family support through partnership working
	London <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of multi-agency attendance teams to address complex cases School-based health clinics for easy access to medical care Mentoring and peer support programs to engage students
	Sheffield <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of 'Challenge Days' where agencies collaborate to address attendance barriers Student-led campaigns to promote positive school climate and attendance Inclusive curriculum planning to engage all students
	Newcastle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated approach to address absenteeism involving multi-agency teams Provision of alternative education for students with prolonged absences Personalised learning plans for students with health conditions
	Birmingham <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of a city-wide approach to tackle attendance issues Intensive support for students with chronic absenteeism through mentorship Linking youth services with schools to enhance engagement

Place-based pilot(s) Create the conditions for systems-working but within one geographical place within the Borough to learn how to reduce the risk and prevalence of persistent and severe absence between 2024 and 2026 with view to sharing best practice during that period and transferring that know-how and solutions to the wider Borough beyond 2026. This would mean getting all system partners working 'as one' in the selected place pilot area and maximising each other's resources, assets and strengths to provide child-centred solutions and whole family working in ways that impact attendance behaviours. This idea was received favourably when mooted at the 2nd ToC workshop in November 2023. Should we build on this idea together for 2024 and make it happen?	
Engagement Invest in the arts, PE, cultural capital and on bringing the joy back to schools as places of education in the broadest sense. If this can't be done as part of the daily curriculum, how can we add it to highly valued and high quality before and after school clubs – things that children really want to do and that enable children and young people to make functional friendships and to 'find their tribe', as well as learning to succeed and fail in low-risk environments. Enablers and barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government funded wrap around care programme – aimed at childcare not clubs but could create capacity Schools are already overworked/underfunded – may need 3rd sector? 	Evidence sources were kindly supplied by the contributor including the EEF Toolkit (n.b. focused on how to improve attainment outcomes rather than attendance outcomes)
Data and intelligence Peer review October 2023 – we don't use data and intelligence well enough to make well informed strategic decisions. Solution We need to use data better to know/be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trends and patterns over time Live data e.g. Who is PA/SA What the patterns are to these absences – per pupil, per cohort, per school How to regularly benchmark ourselves against others Which of our initiatives are/are not working – for an individual child, group, cohort, school, area Produce data informed strategy rather than scatter gun initiatives. Enablers and barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wonde – the free DfE capture tool for attendance can enable this and is very easy for schools to engage with. Are we using it effectively? Establish this before we opt for other high cost solutions Building trust with schools around 'all in this together' so they are happy to share data 	

Further suggestions from the ToC Group

The issue: young people feel they are "told" how to improve attendance, and they have no control over the tools/resources used¹⁰.

Suggestions

- Attendance improvement posters used in schools designed by students for students
- Link the VCS sector with education further for support/mentoring/families;
- Involve employers in mentoring support
- Alumni from school working (once a week) with young people struggling around attendance (sometimes including behaviour and rising suspensions).

Peer Influence programmes e.g. EEF's Grassroots Programme

"I am interested in learning more about Grassroots (EEF and YEF). Our nearest area is Leeds. I am not sure if our schools could get involved, they say able to travel to one of the areas. Regardless, I think it would be worth us speaking to the Team about the work they are doing. I am very interested in Peer Influence programmes. It's still very much in the early stages, first evaluation report will not be published until 2025."

Other suggestions were generated at the ToC workshop on the 5th of December 2023

¹⁰ Sources considered: Guardian Education Hub; Department of Education/Ofsted; Children Commissioner and Attendance Mentor

Step 10: Assumptions

We will identify where our theory of change is weak, untested or uncertain.

To identify assumptions, we need to put ourselves in the position of our fiercest critic.

How would they pick holes in our approach? What would they question, doubt, or challenge?

10a: Delivery assumptions

- 1. What aspects of our approach are we worried about?
- 2. Can we really reach the people we need to reach? Who are we worried about engaging?
- 3. Can we really deliver what we say we can? What are the chief concerns?
- 4. Does our workforce have the right skills and abilities? Do they have the resources and support they need?
- 5. Do we have the resources we need? How can we get them if not?

10b: Impact assumptions

- 1. What fundamental aspects of our theory of change are questionable?
- 2. Is our model really going to make a difference? Does it seem plausible that we will contribute to the outcomes we want through the activities, outputs and engagement we have described? What are our biggest 'leaps of faith'?
- 3. What types of people is our theory of change most likely to work for? Who will it not work for?
- 4. What does the external evidence say about the links and connections in our theory of change? To what extent does the evidence support what you are saying? Where are the gaps in the evidence?

This step should be completed in 2024 as the ToC is socialised more widely across the Borough and improved accordingly.

Stress-testing our theory of change.

Do we really believe in it?

Do we really think it can make a difference?

Useful resources

The National Inquiry (Education Committee)

- [Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils - Committees - UK Parliament](#)
- The final report, 27th September 2023, worth a read to get a feel for recommendations being made to the Government. It's the one called 'Seventh Report - Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils' found here:
- [Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

Childrens Commissioner – amazing resources to help understand the topic of attendance, child and family perspectives, a 6-point plan as well as practical suggestions for a way forward

[Attendance is everyone's business | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)

This report published in February 2023 is a must-read if you get chance: [cc-response-to-persistent-absence-inquiry.pdf \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#) and check out the infographic on page 6 – really helps to simplify things.

Useful resources – DfE Updates

- **Action for schools: Promote strong attendance throughout the autumn term**
- As we approach winter it is a good time to reshare resources for parents on key attendance practices such as [Is my child too ill for school?](#) and the Chief Medical Officer's [letter](#) to schools, which aid in making judgements about mild illness.
- There is also guidance on [how to seek support with attendance challenges](#), and [good practice examples](#).
- Schools can use our recently published [toolkit](#) for communicating with families to support attendance. This can help set high standards for attendance, ensuring children miss as little school as possible and is a helpful resource to respond to early patterns of absence in children.
- Targeting support to children who have been absent is a key part of an effective strategy. [Research by FFT](#) shows pupils absent during the first week of term were up to 58% more likely to become persistently absent.

[Attendance HUB - Northern Education Trust](#)

RT-MAT is also a recently announced Attendance Hub – watch out for news and resources

[Thousands more pupils to receive support to improve attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Next steps

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council, who have been leading this work in 2023, with funding support from Anglo American and the Woodsmith Foundation will be continuing to develop the foundational work that has been achieved in 2023.

There will be a range of opportunities for anyone who wishes to stay engaged or get involved for the first time throughout 2024 and 2025. Please watch out for and choose to stay in contact with us so we can build on the excellent work that has already been started together.

A plan is being developed based on the Theory of Change work and all the activities that preceded this. We appreciate all the contributions of 104 people at 13 workshops during 2023 across the system that are making this work possible, and getting us closer and closer to the ideal of 'Making Attendance Everyone's Business.'