

## Attendance Strategy Consultation Feedback Report

### Introduction

The Local Authority issued the 'Making a Mark' attendance strategy in 2002 which aimed to improve school attendance by working in close partnership with schools. Feedback from schools outlined that the strategy was extremely helpful at the time but with the introduction of the concept of 'Early Intervention and Prevention' and the redesign of the MAST structure it was agreed that the time was right to develop a new strategy.

The draft strategy was developed in the spring term of 2012 and has been shared with schools, governors and staff to take views on the content.

All the consultation feedback has been collated and below are the highlights from the feedback on the five themes of the strategy.

### Theme 1 - Schools' Own Management of Attendance

**Whole School Approach** - the 'whole school' approach was strongly agreed upon with rigorous tracking and monitoring systems.

**Family Of Schools Approach** – suggested ensuring consistency.

**Accurate Recording** – of attendance was highlighted as a big issue in schools.

**Admissions Process** - It was acknowledged that the admissions process of allocation is unrealistic and has a negative impact especially when children in the same family are allocated to different schools and often outside the catchment area. Transport was also cited as a problem area.

**Targets** - Should be set but in discussion with the head teacher not imposed, although it was suggested that the LA should set the overall targets for schools and that this could form part of SLA between MAST and the School. It was also stressed that schools are under pressure to meet other targets and attendance is not always a priority for them.

**City Wide Forum** – should be introduced to share good practice and positive recognition including promoting incentives.

**Financial Barriers** – restrict schools from doing more but it was suggested that it would be helpful if schools were able to employ more staff to help with attendance.

**Term Time Holidays** – and extended leave to country of origin impacts on attendance, again suggesting a 'family of schools' approach would be helpful.

**Childs Voice** – was highlighted as important.

**Transition** – the importance of regular school attendance should be emphasised at each stage of transition from Nursery to Primary and then to Secondary.

**Practice Guidance** – should be provided to accompany the strategy.

**Consistency of Service** – in MAST was highlighted as an issue as there is different ways of working across the 3 MAST areas.

**Overall Responsibility** – for attendance should be held by the schools with school undertaking initial home visits, and school meetings held where required to ensure that parents are aware of any targets that are set .

**Communication** – needs to be improved within schools, and between schools and MAST.

## **Theme 2 - Early Intervention & Prevention**

**Advice and Support** – from MAST should be new and additional to what school have already provided.

**Admissions Process** - It was acknowledged again, that the admissions process of allocation is unrealistic and has a negative effect especially when children in the same family are allocated to multiple schools and may need a number of bus rides to get there.

**Financial Barriers** – whilst it was acknowledged that MAST don't have capacity it was suggested that MAST should provide schools with personnel or funding to improve attendance.

**EWOs / Attendance & Inclusion Officers** - Schools expressed their concern about the removal of experienced EWO's and said they do require more "door knocking". In addition other people were concerned about the reduction of A & I Officers and believed that there are not enough in the new redesign therefore there is an inability to challenge schools re coding which is ultimately a safeguarding issue

**Accurate Recording** – of attendance in schools was again highlighted as a big safeguarding issue. The lack of challenge to the schools and the safeguarding issues this potentially causes when children are not in school and are incorrectly coded, therefore not referred to MAST for follow up. If schools are not using the correct codes for CYP then MAST don't get a true picture about who and why they are not in school. It was also emphasised that schools should input their attendance data and send it onto SIMS more quickly. MAST often have to work with data that is up to 6 weeks out of date.

**Caseloads for MAST** – it was acknowledged that MAST is limited to caseload size but that workers were taking on too many cases. It was suggested that 4 to 6 contacts is not realistic when it comes to attendance especially if the cases are to be progressed through the legal process. Also, timescales was questioned where schools delay in sending in referrals and then MASTs have waiting lists.

**Family of School Approach** – is required, as there is a link missing between secondary and primary for families where children in each school have same pattern of attendance. Also, the importance of Early Years was emphasised.

**Whole Family Approach** – was acknowledged as good practise but MAST are not there yet re 'one worker, one family, one plan'.

**Meeting Needs** – it is important to respond to local needs/circumstances including family needs and minority communities. It was also stressed that attendance may not be a high priority for families that are facing multiple issues.

**Parents Evenings** – it was suggested that MAST workers should be invited to attend parents evenings.

**Early Years** – it was emphasised that Early Years professionals need to have an understanding of attendance e.g parents missing Health Visitor appointments.

**SEN** – MAST need to have a much stronger link with the SEN department.

**Transition** - from children to adult services was highlighted as an issue.

### **Theme 3 - Support for Looked After Children –**

**Out of City Placements** – it was suggested that the funding for out of city placements should be central / national so that cities would not be charging each other for care placements.

**Children in Respite Care** – are not recognised as LAC therefore there may be less support for attendance and they don't have a social worker.

**Transport** - for LAC is an issue and it is suggested that there is a dedicated transport system provided.

**Communication** - from social services to schools could be improved.

**Designated Teacher** – it was suggested that detailed information regarding the designated teacher role is communicated.

**LACES** – it was made clear that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the role of LACES.

**Residential / Foster Carers** - it was suggested that detailed information regarding foster carers and residential homes is communicated including the link role of the A & I Officer (LAC Champion) in MAST.

**Resources** – there needs to be more resources and budget for LAC at Primary, Secondary and for Out Of City.

**Personal Education Plan (PEP)** – the role of the PEP needs to be acknowledged and understood.

**LAC Handbook** – it was strongly suggested that everyone should read practitioners handbook for education of LAC.

### **Theme 4 - Local Authority Targeted Support for Schools**

**Mid Term Admissions** - Schools that are under numbers often due to high migration are vulnerable to high numbers of mid term admissions which can have a negative impact.

**Persistent Absence (PA)** - Is more a reflection on issues in the community therefore more resource/attention required in wider community (including schools). For example where changes in a community e.g migration, affects schools (Slovak Rome) there needs to be a more rapid and supportive input from the LA.

**Advice and Guidance** – there needs to be common policies shared between schools and clear guidance on issues such as coding, non attendance, registration and extended holidays

**Home Visits** – there needs to be more support with service delivery/knocking on doors rather than strategy

**Consistency** – there needs to be more consistency regarding staffing and support

**Academies** – it was suggested that Academies should be targeted for additional support.

**Special Schools** – it was suggested that Special Schools should be targeted for additional support.

**Troubled Families (Successful Families)** - it was suggested that targeted support should be linked to the Troubled Families pilot.

**Resources** – It was suggested that schools that already have lots of additional resources would get additional MAST resources, this is unfair to schools with limited funding.

**Exclusions** – Schools should be targeted if they have high rates of exclusions.

## **Theme 5 - Full and Effective use of Legal Powers**

**Penalty Notices** – There was a difference of opinion about the issuing of Penalty Notice Warning Letters (PNWL). Some Secondary schools do this already and other schools would like to, but a number of schools would not want to do this and would prefer the LA to take this responsibility. This came particularly from some Primary Schools (but not all). It was believed that there would be more impact if they are issued by the LA rather than school and it would enable the school to maintain good relationships with parents. It was stressed that if schools do issue PNWL they have to inform the LA and if this then goes onto a PN being issued this **has** to be done by the LA. Schools currently issue PNWL as a punitive measure whereas MAST workers issue PNWL as a part of a support package. It was voiced as a concern that school may not be aware of the underlying reasons for non attendance. The majority of people thought that the LA should continue to take a lead but if schools did issue PNWL the cases should be checked by A&I Officer (SWQ).

**Progression to Court** – some Secondary schools would like to progress their own cases to court others are very much against taking this action and want the LA to continue to fulfil this role. If schools do consider progression of cases to court they would have to pay for access to legal services.

**Prosecuting more Parents** - again there was a difference of opinion here. A minority of people were in favour of increasing the number of cases to court. It was felt that many cases were not suitable for the legal process e.g. where families have multiple issues that would require addressing before court could be considered. It was strongly felt that the legal route should only be used as a last resort when all other support systems have been utilised. It was further acknowledged that cases should only progress to court if confident that it would make a difference to the child's attendance.

**Training for Schools** – If schools decide to take the lead on the legal process they will require training regarding gathering evidence, writing Witness Statements and understanding 'Statutory Defences'.

**Parenting Contracts** – if Parenting Contracts are to be promoted in the strategy it is important that they are effectively implemented.

**Children's Fieldwork Services** – It was felt that Social Workers need to understand that poor attendance can be classed as neglect.

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**7.11.12.**