

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Schools Forum
<b>Subject:</b>	Improving school attendance and reducing exclusions - focus on relational practice
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
<b>Report from:</b>	Sarah Daly, Director of Children, Families and Education
<b>Report by:</b>	Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director, Education
<b>Wards affected:</b>	All

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## 1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Schools Forum endorsement for a three year commitment from the DSG carry forward in order to support a renewed collective effort on reducing time lost at school through non-attendance, suspensions (previously known as fixed term exclusions) or reduced timetables. Any such endorsement will require Secretary of State approval.
- 1.2 Specifically, it is seeking support for a city-wide relational practice programme, a whole-school approach that has the potential to transform this agenda, building on previous work to implement restorative practice in schools, excellent evidence-based practice in the city and Wave One of the Relational Practice programme that commenced in Autumn 2021 and which has so far involved up to 17 schools.

## 2 Recommendation

- 2.1 **It is recommended that Schools Forum endorse a three year total commitment of £530,000 from the DSG carry forward as set out in section 4, in order to support the implementation of the strategy to improve school attendance and reduce suspensions, and specifically support a city-wide relational practice programme. Any such endorsement by Schools Forum will be subject to Secretary of State approval.**

## 3 Background

- 3.1 The city-wide strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions was recently approved by the PEP Strategic Board (refer to Appendix 1). The strategy sets out a renewed collective effort on reducing time lost from school as a result of non-attendance, suspension/exclusion or reduced timetables, set against the background of the learning loss that so many of our children and young people have

experienced throughout the pandemic. It also responds to the relatively high levels of exclusion and absence seen historically across Portsmouth schools when compared to similar LA areas. The strategy was also subject to a deep dive review by the DfE earlier this year in response to an invitation from the DfE to have a DfE attendance adviser work with us to review the strategy and our approach. The adviser was extremely positive about our approach and the actions that are being taken or are planned.

- 3.2 The strategy builds on several years of work and a range of initiatives, many of which will continue to be delivered under this strategy. However, this strategy takes a whole system strategic approach to tackling school absence and suspensions, a major strand of which is around relational practice, building on previous work to support restorative practice in schools and making this central to a school's culture and ethos.
- 3.3 Relational practice involves a universal approach to teaching and learning which influences whole school ethos, systems and policy, as well as everyday practice. It is also a targeted approach to support those children who are most in need. A whole-school relational approach enables children and staff to develop strong positive relationships, through an intentional set of systems and strategies, which has measurable impact on child and staff wellbeing, educational inclusion and indeed some international evidence of impact on learning outcomes. In addition, young people attending schools that have adopted Relational Practice have reported positive impacts on their mental health.
- 3.4 The strategy sets out the case for why a renewed effort is required. Relatively low levels of attendance and high levels of suspensions, particularly in secondary schools, have been a feature of the Portsmouth education landscape for a long time - these are not new findings. We remain concerned about the impact of low attendance and continuing high levels of suspensions on the life chances and wellbeing of individual children. We know that being in school consistently is crucial to children making progress and gaining the qualifications they need for success in their lives. We also know that being out of school places children at significant risk in terms of criminal exploitation, involvement in criminal activities and other safeguarding risks. Children also miss out on support for special educational needs and mental health problems.
- 3.5 Data from the last set of reliable data in 2018/19 highlights the distance we have to travel if we are to match national averages and those of our statistical neighbours (refer to page 5 in Appendix 1). Data has also been provided for 2019/20 for suspensions and for 2020/21 for absence (Appendix 2). The latest data indicates an improving picture but due to the impact of the pandemic we need to be cautious about the veracity of this data. Even allowing for the improvements, the challenge for Portsmouth clearly remains. The impact of poor school attendance on progression into post 16 and the proportion of young people who become NEET (not in education, employment or training) is clearly demonstrated in Appendix 3.



- 3.6 The strategy provides details of what has been done over the past few years to improve attendance, including more recent work that has been initiated during the pandemic. Much of this work will continue, as will the significant efforts by every school in the city to increase attendance, the resources for which are already in place.
- 3.7 But clearly we need to do more and the focus on Relational Practice represents a key strand of this strategy which Members of the PEP Strategic Board are convinced has the potential to make the greatest impact based on similar work done in cities such as Hull and Leeds. We now have a stand-out example in the city, **Trafalgar School** (part of Salterns Academy Trust), who have exemplified what can be achieved through relational practice and by taking the whole-school approach, with one clear measurable impact being extremely low suspensions, underlined by the fact that in 2020/21 the school recorded just two suspensions and the same in 2021/22 compared to mainstream secondary school averages of 95 and 120 respectively. This is in addition to other anecdotal and measurable impacts of relational practice in several other Portsmouth schools since 2016.
- 3.8 Schools have been invited to participate in 'Waves' of implementation over the next 3 years, with the ambition of running at least 3 Waves during this period. 17 of our 61 schools have been involved in Wave 1 of the Relational Practice Programme which commenced in Autumn 2021, and many more have indicated a willingness to join in future waves, with Wave 2 scheduled for January 2023. The council has been fortunate enough to be able to secure some one-off funding through the DfE Regional Recovery Fund which, together with some funding from the council, has funded the support given to schools in Wave 1.
- 3.9 A summary of the support schools in Wave 1 have received (and which will be expanded upon in future waves) is set out below:
- Headteachers from the schools participating in Wave 1 visited Trafalgar School during the Autumn and Spring terms to see first-hand how relational practice is being embedded in the school and the impact it is having on behaviour, attendance and suspensions. Two delegates from each school (headteacher and one other) are receiving group coaching during the Summer and Autumn terms 2022. This covers 'developing a restorative mindset and culture', restorative conversations and language, using circles and holding meetings differently and dealing with conflict and practicing sustainability in your schools. All of the sessions are delivered within a restorative framework of high challenge and high support.
  - Pastoral leaders from participating schools have received 3 days training on 'Restorative Practice in Action'. This provides delegates with practical skills and underpinning knowledge.
  - Participating schools are receiving bespoke support from Trafalgar School's senior leadership team and Director of Relational Practice to develop and implement an action plan for their school.

3.10 There are **four key resources** that will be needed to roll out Relational Practice in our schools:

- **A commitment from each Headteacher and their senior leadership team, governing board and Multi Academy Trust** (where relevant) to ensure a whole-school approach is adopted and consistently followed through
- **Capacity within Salterns Academy Trust** to share good and effective practice, facilitate school-to-school learning and support, provide professional development and enable networking. **This capacity will be extended to include other Trusts and schools with primary expertise.**
- **Support and co-ordination from the council** to work in partnership with Salterns Academy Trust and all schools to develop resources, share practice, develop links with other LA areas, monitor the programme and support evaluation and impact. The council will also support a systematic approach to working relationally with schools extending this to all partners including children's social care, early help, health and the police.
- **Specialist support in relational practice** providing a bespoke package of support for schools working closely with Salterns Academy Trust and coaching / support for the seconded Directors of Relational Practice.

3.11 In terms of **governance** the Portsmouth Education Partnership and the SEND Board already have in place structures which can oversee and monitor the implementation of the strategy and the focus on relational practice, in the shape of the Removing Barriers to Inclusion Group (RBIC) and the Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG) which reports into the RBIC. Much of the current and planned work set out in the strategy sits within these groups and it is therefore proposed that the implementation of this strategy and the work on Relational Practice will be monitored through these structures. A **Schools Relational Practice Steering Group** has been set up, chaired by the Director of Children, Families and Education, to monitor the progress of the programme and ensure sufficient resources are in place.

3.12 The ambition is to develop and build a city-wide whole school relational culture and ethos, establishing practices that become "the way we do things in Portsmouth". The plan includes developing leadership within schools and across the PEP, establishing networks and developing CPD packages support and resources as required. Once embedded, with a clear underlying ethos, the ongoing maintenance of relational practice should be sustainable through school-to-school support.

## 4 Costs

4.1 Schools Forum is being asked to consider a commitment for three calendar years, commencing January 2023, from the DSG carry forward as set out in below, to support at least 3 more waves in 2023, 2024 and 2025, as well as some continued support for those schools that have been involved in Wave 1 and for those that will be involved in future waves.

4.2 A breakdown of the annual costs is given below. These provide an outline of the estimated costs each year. Staffing costs incorporate:

- project co-ordination which will be managed by the council;
- senior school leaders (referred to as directors of relational practice) who will be seconded from primary and secondary schools, in order to provide bespoke support for schools and training, CPD and resources, as has been the case for Wave One.

<b>Estimated costs to implement Relational Practice across Portsmouth</b>				
<b>Calendar Year</b>	<b>2023 £</b>	<b>2024 £</b>	<b>2025 £</b>	<b>Total £</b>
Staffing Costs: Project Co-ordinator and Directors of Relational Practice from primary and secondary	148,600	155,600	163,800	468,000
Specialist RP training and coaching (including materials), evaluation and communications	20,200	20,600	21,200	62,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>168,800</b>	<b>176,200</b>	<b>185,000</b>	<b>530,000</b>

## 5 Reasons for recommendations

5.1 Portsmouth needs to make a step-change in how we address educational inclusion in terms of raising attendance, reducing suspensions and wider wellbeing for children and young people. Relational Practice in schools, as seen across the country, and specifically seen locally in Trafalgar School, offers us the opportunity to make that step change and move Portsmouth from the bottom decile nationally for educational inclusion. If the impacts seen in relational schools is mirrored across all Portsmouth schools, the impact would be dramatic and in terms of value for money, this would be one of the most cost-efficient investments seen in education in a very long time

5.2 Testimonials from three of the schools involved in Wave 1 highlight the early benefits and support for the programme (refer to Appendix 5).

5.3 There is clear evidence from other local authority areas and in some schools in Portsmouth that a commitment to relational practice and a whole school and system approach, can lead to transformational results in terms of improvements to school attendance, reduction in suspensions and savings in children's social care. A good example of this is in Leeds, details of which can be found on page 23 of our city wide multi agency strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions (Appendix 1). An extract taken from the paper '*From Restorative Justice to Restorative Culture*' (Appendix 4 - page 30) shows the transformational impact

restorative practice and culture has had on school attendance and exclusions at Monmouth Comprehensive School in South Wales.

- 5.4 The delivery model, primarily through school to school support, is aligned with the approach of partnership working through the Portsmouth Education Partnership. Seconded staff from primary and secondary schools in the city will give a range of skills and allow bespoke delivery according to the needs of each school. External coaching and mentoring from RP experts will bring challenge and support and will help to build capacity within the PEP to sustain the programme longer term.
- 5.5 The evidence and feedback outlined above and in Appendix 5 indicates that this programme will have a significant impact, not just in terms of improving attendance and reducing suspensions, but also in terms of attainment and progression and staff recruitment and retention. Improved relationships in schools, means less conflict and swifter resolution of the conflicts that do occur. This frees up resources within schools to work proactively and preventatively with children, young people and families and having a positive impact on not just their educational outcomes but also their wider long-term outcomes. Keeping children and young people successfully in school reduces financial pressures such as the demand for SEMH support and alternative provision and the impact that this potentially has on the High Needs Block of the DSG
- 5.6 Other Local Authority areas are now also investing in this approach. Two current examples include:
- Gloucestershire CC which has committed £200k p.a. to support a team of 4 council officers and commission training consultants. Currently working with 43 primary, 5 secondary and 4 special schools/ APs
  - Staffordshire CC which has one lead officer, supported by mentors, plus additional resource from a specialist RP consultant. They are currently working with 16 schools, plus 7 in the Autism in Schools Project and 20+ in solution focused circles.

## **6 Dedicated Schools Grant**

- 6.1 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is a ring-fenced grant for Education and can only be used for the purposes of the Schools Budget as defined in the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations
- 6.2 As set out in clause 4 and schedule 1 of the above regulations the DSG should not be used for the "non schools budget", it further clarifies that those areas of expenditure that fall outside of schedule 2 should also be considered as "non schools budget". The proposals set out in this report fall outside of the regulations and the funding provided for the admissions and attendance service funded as part of the central schools services block of the DSG.
- 6.3 This initiative does support all pupils in mainstream, alternative provision and special schools in Portsmouth, and aims to support improve educational attainment and

attendance. It is also seen as an Invest to Save initiative as it could reduce the need for Education, Health and Care Plans and the use of Alternative Provision in the City. Whilst the regulations do not include the use of the DSG carry forward for this purpose, the regulations do allow an application to be made to the Secretary of State to disapply the regulations for this purpose. Should the use be granted, it would still leave £3.8m for other preventative and Invest to Save initiatives.

## 7 Legal implications

- 7.1 The Schools Forum is a statutory body which must be consulted on the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Final decisions however on the funding distributed to schools, proposed spends on central services and the High Needs budget are matters to be determined by Cabinet and Council, having taken into account the responses from the Schools Forum. For the purposes of this particular initiative, an application will be required to the Secretary of State, should the decision be taken to proceed.
- 7.2 The proposals for the initiative will assist Portsmouth schools and the Local Authority in meeting their statutory duties around safeguarding, inclusion, engagement, attainment and achievement.

## 8 Director of Finance's comments

- 8.1 Financial comments are contained within the body of the report.

Signed by (Director)

**Appendices:** see below

### **Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

The information upon which this report has been based has been drawn from a variety of sources: however much of the information used is held in budget files prepared by the children and Education Finance Team. Please contact Angela Mann, Finance Manager, if required.



<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
City wide multi agency strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions in Portsmouth	Appendix 1 of this report
LAIT data for attendance and suspensions	Appendix 2 of this report
Impact of poor school attendance on NEETs in Portsmouth	Appendix 3 of this report
From restorative justice to restorative culture by Belinda Hopkins	Appendix 4 of this report
Testimonials from schools involved in Wave One	Appendix 5 to this report