



Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State

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23 November 2021

Dear School Leaders,

Since the pandemic began, I have been consistently impressed by the hard work and dedication that schools and their staff have shown in ensuring that children and young people are able to continue attending school and accessing face-to-face education. I understand how difficult the circumstances over the past 18 months have been for schools to navigate, and I recognise the continuing pressures that you are dealing with.

Since becoming Secretary of State, I have witnessed first-hand the tremendous work that you do, and I am extremely grateful for the way you've tirelessly worked to minimise disruption to the education of our children and young people as far as possible.

I recognise the impact that Covid is continuing to have, and this is why control measures such as home testing, increased ventilation and the vaccine offer, are as important as ever to ensuring disruption to education and particularly school attendance is minimised. School attendance should also not be limited through the use of bubbles or isolation of contacts, and I am confident that effective implementation of the control measures remains the best way to manage the effects of the virus.

I know that the pandemic has exacerbated traditional drivers of non-attendance as well, such as lack of routine and mental health challenges, and as we now move forward I hope that we can continue to work together in a collaborative way to tackle these.

As such, I want to work with you to really focus in on resetting our approach to attendance and make maximising school attendance a top priority. This is not only crucial for ensuring that all children and young people, including the most vulnerable, are taking advantage of the education recovery programme, but also for their own physical and mental wellbeing.

Schools of course play an extremely crucial role on attendance, and I am keen to build on the excellent work that is already ongoing. You are in a

unique position to spot various issues that contribute to absence, and the relationships you hold with pupils and families are vital to reaching resolutions. It remains important that we are taking a robust and joined up approach across the sector and I therefore ask for your support on ensuring the following actions are being taken forward:

- Communicate clear and consistent expectations around attendance to families and working with your LA, make full use of enforcement actions where appropriate. During the height of the pandemic, suspending the use of these measures felt most appropriate, but as we push now to maximise school attendance, it is important that they are once again being applied across the country.
- Identify pupils who are reluctant or anxious about attending or who are at risk of disengagement and develop plans to re-engage them – especially those who are or at risk of being persistently absent.
- Use the additional recovery funding, including for tutoring, as well as existing pastoral and support services, attendance staff and resources and pupil premium funding to put measures in place for those families who will need additional support to secure pupils' regular attendance.
- Work closely with other professionals to support regular attendance. This includes ensuring that links across the system, such as between social care and safeguarding services, remain strong.

I am delighted that Dame Rachel de Souza has also made the attendance of children and young people in schools and colleges one of her priorities. Her office will be looking to work with Local Authorities and MATs in the coming weeks.

We are at a crucial point in the pandemic and must collectively act now to ensure lower levels of attendance do not become the accepted norm. I hope you agree on the urgency around tackling school attendance issues and that you will do all you can to address this. I remain grateful for your continued work and effort.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Zahawi', with a large, stylized initial 'N' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State for Education