

WSOA Identifying Barriers in School Attendance Task & Finish Group

12th May 2022

(Sarah Informal Notes)

It was quite an informal meeting, with no actions etc at this stage, hence the informal report.

Attendees:

Susan Rickard - Inclusion Officer BCP

Rachel Anderson - BCP Inclusion Team Manager

Chantel Cox - Parent

Lucy Short - Parent

Sarah Murray - PCT

Apologies: Rebecca Hussein

Started off the meeting checking who should be there - and I innocently said 'Marion', and was told that both Marion and Mel Hart had been unable to attend the joint meeting, so had met privately with Rachel the day before. I literally didn't know what to say! I have not had any dealings with Rachel Anderson before, and don't know how much she knows about PCT, but she seems unaware that we are the strategic partner, or really who we are?

Other than that -

The report will be submitted in July.

The meeting was looking at creating a report highlighting what the barriers are for children unable to attend school, which was the main focus. Both Chantel and Lucy were very vocal about lots of the areas (I will share the report once its been finalised - it's the usual - anxiety, schools need proper training, lack of safe space in schools, lack of funds, mental health issues, physical health issues etc).

Then we looked at family barriers - lack of support for parents, families, siblings, lack of communication between schools and home, parent carers with disabilities, parent carers where English is not their first language etc.

The second part of the meeting was looking at ways in which these barriers can be overcome, which was obviously more difficult! Training for staff, family support, funding for extra staff, the removal of the 'parent blaming' culture, safe spaces in schools, mental health support, a recognition of diagnoses, but also the fact that a diagnosis doesn't need to be there for a child to have problems).

All three of us parents are currently going through this issue - we have a child/ren with attendance barriers, and it felt very much like we were listened to. Both Rachel and Susan were listening more than talking, stating clearly that they feel there is a problem, that changes need to happen and that children and young people are suffering.

Then something else odd happened - Chantel was talking about lack of parent support groups and advice, and Rachel said something to the effect that Marions forum was there to support and advise. I highlighted that neither their forum nor PCT was able to offer advice, but that PCT (as strategic partner!) were there to signpost and help. I'm actually struggling to work out what (if anything) we can do to highlight our forum to people from BCP who seem

to be involving PCF more and more in separate meetings, and actually prioritising them over PCT.

I will, of course, write a formal report and share the document when it is finalised.

Sarah Murray