

Belonging, engaging and participating

Consultation response form

Your name: Pippa Cotterill

Organisation (if applicable): Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

email/telephone number: Philippa.Cotterill@rcslt.org

Your address: Floor 3, Transport House, 1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9SD

Responses should be returned by 20 July 2023 to:

Supporting Achievement and Safeguarding
Equity in Education Division
The Education Directorate
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

or completed electronically and sent to:

email: ccd.sas@gov.wales

Question 1 – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance provide suitable useful, practical information for leaders, teachers and other practitioners in schools, pupil referral units and education otherwise than at school settings to enable schools and governing bodies to improve learner engagement and attendance?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Children’s speech, language and communication development and needs (SLCN) can be a significant factor in affecting children belonging and feeling engaged at school. Additionally, there is a clear correlation between learners who are more likely to have persistent and significant absence, and the prevalence of SLCN. This includes children living in areas of social disadvantage, pupils with ALN/SEN, those in alternative provision and those in contact with social care services. Links between SLCN and poor mental health or well-being issues are also a factor in attendance. This needs to be acknowledged more overtly in the document.

Highlighted below are areas within the guidance where it is imperative any SLCN are considered.

Page 8 refers to ‘promoting good attendance’ being particularly important where learners have a great risk of absence. However, what is more important is creating the right environment for them to attend. This would include making the necessary adaptations and using the necessary strategies to support children with SLCN. This ‘right environment’ including ‘in relation to a child’s speech, language and communication skills’ needs to be included in the section about ‘improving attendance’ (page 8, paragraph 6).

Page 8 also states it being ‘timely for schools to renew and re-launch their campaigns ... for improving attendance in the long term’. Is it not more important for school to understand the reasons behind poor attendance and provide support in this area. This could include needs such as SLCN.

‘Actions which can support positive attendance’ (page 8) should include staff in education settings having complete information about the child when they first start – this is in relation to information sharing between health (such as Speech and Language Therapists in the NHS) and education. There needs to be an appropriate system and method for this which there is not currently.

Page 9 (paragraph 3) needs to include all education setting staff receiving initial and on-going training in speech, language and communication development and needs as being a fundamental way to ‘provide learners with engagement and relevant teaching and learning opportunities’.

Page 13 (paragraph 1) acknowledges that approaches need ‘to be personalised and individualised to address the specific needs of each learner’. Education setting staff being able to adapt their communication to suit the child and adopt strategies that support speech, language and communication will be effective in reducing a number of barriers for learners so should be included here.

Acknowledgement that ‘improved pedagogy through professional development’ (page 13, paragraph 4) would be more explicit if it specifically mentioned teachers and wider school staff having speech, language and communication development and needs training.

Staff establishing and maintaining positive and constructive relationships with learners (page 18, paragraph 4) must include ‘using communication appropriate to the child, especially where they have SLCN’. The school will need to support staff to do this by providing training on SLCN and development of skills in this area.

‘Training and continuous professional development’ (last bullet point on page 21) should read, ‘to have pupils’ voices heard (including for children with SLCN) and in decision-making.’

Resilience is a focus highlighted on page 33. It should be noted that developing learners’ resilience is often done through speech, language and communication and therefore if a learner has SLCN there will likely need to be adaptations in the ways resilience is developed. This should be acknowledged in this section.

Page 41 describes the links between parental engagement in reading and learners’ academic performance. It is important to highlight what else is important, that is, communication at a wider level, such as, talking about books, parents responses to their children’s communication, parents modelling language and following their child’s lead. These are strategies that schools can work with parents on through workshops (including in published programmes such as ‘Let’s Talk with Under 5s’ by ELKLAN).

Question 2 – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance clearly set out the legal responsibility of the school and governors?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

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Question 3 – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance clearly set out the responsibilities of the local authority?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

As stated in question 1, local authorities also need to be aware of SLCN to ensure that they understand the needs of pupils and can support learners with SLCN in this area. Local authority personnel would need to access training on SLCN.

Question 4 – Are the contributing factors and the many possible reasons for absence adequately covered?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

It is acknowledged in the document that ‘learners with additional learning needs or are living in poverty are more likely to be absent from school’.

- i) Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are the most common type of additional learning need.
- ii) There is a strong correlation between poverty and delayed language (those children whose language skills are developing significantly more slowly than those of other children of the same age but who do not have a specific disorder)
- iii) Children who are entitled to free school meals and live in more deprived neighbourhoods are more than twice as likely to have identified SLCN.
- iv) Over 50% of children in socially deprived areas may start school with impoverished speech, language and communication skills.

Given that SLCN are high in all these categories, SLCN should be included in the list of ‘factors which may place learners particularly at risk of missing school’ (page 11).

(References:
 Dockrell et al (2012). Understanding speech, language and communication needs: Profiles of need and provision. Department for Education. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/557156/DFE-RR247-BCRP4.pdf
 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: Implications for the early years and beyond. International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, 37(1): 3-15.)

Question 5 – Are learners with protected characteristics included?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

The guidance does include learners with protected characteristics but the clear correlation between many of the group of pupils who are disproportionately more likely to be excluded, and the groups of children and young people who are more likely to have communication needs, including pupils from certain ethnic minority groups and pupils with ALN and disabilities needs to be explicitly highlighted within the guidance.

Question 6 – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance provide sufficient information for parents and carers to understand their statutory responsibility for ensuring that their compulsory school-age children receive full-time education?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Question 7 – Is the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance explained clearly? If not, which areas could be improved and why? Are there aspects that you particularly like, and if so, why?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Question 8 – Is the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance user-friendly? If not, which areas could be improved and why? Are there aspects that you particularly like and if so, why?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

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Question 9 – On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘not at all’ and 5 being ‘very’) how helpful do you find the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance? Are there improvements you would like to see?

1	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

<p>An improvement would be to add ‘communication’ to the list of skills that ‘regular attendance supports’. Currently this names ‘literacy and numeracy skills’ but communication more widely is vital to ‘the conceptual understanding needed for further study and success in the workplace’. (p.7 paragraph 2)</p> <p>The whole system approach is a vague notion which needs to be more specific. The ‘effective learning environment’ (page 14, penultimate paragraph) needs to include what needs to be done to ensure education setting staff have the skills and knowledge to do this from a speech, language and communication development and needs perspective.</p> <p>Creating positive relationships, culture and ethos (page 15) is about communicating with learners. Education settings need to ensure they are doing this effectively with children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).</p> <p>The importance of pupils being listened to and therefore cared for – how are education setting staff ensuring they can do this if pupils have SLCN?</p>

Question 10 – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance provide adequate information in relation to:

- i. explaining the principles and approaches that should be adopted in improving learner engagement and attendance?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Please see answer to question 1.

- ii. identifying the contributing factors that may impact on attendance?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Please see answer to question 1.

iii. signposting to further guidance and good practice?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

iv. recording and analysis of attendance data?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

v. family engagement and multi-agency support?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Multi-agency systems where information sharing is achieved for the benefit of children and their families without having to send out paper copies, email reports and intervention plans, are vitally needed.

This would enable the 'cohesiveness of the response from the education system and partners' referred to on page 15 (paragraph 1) which is vital to improve attendance.

'Developing partnerships with wider services and interventions to remove any barriers to learning' is a focus on page 16. This must include information such as from Speech and Language Therapists about where a child's SLCN are a barrier to their learning. This needs to be supported by effective communication systems between agencies which are not currently available.

vi. formal absence management?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Question 11 – For statistical purposes, persistent absence has been defined in Wales as being absent for over 20% of half-day school sessions. The Welsh Government proposes that the statistical definition of persistent absence be amended to over 10% of sessions, which is the definition currently in use in England. Do you agree or not with this proposal and why?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Question 12 – We would like to know your views on the effects that the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favorably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Supporting comments

Question 13 – Please also explain how you believe the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favorably than the English language.

Supporting comments

Question 14 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: