Partnering with GPs

School Attendance Impact Story

Enable, Share, & Collaborate



CONTEXT

Secondary school headteachers reported receiving GP sick notes advising extended absences—often several weeks—for reasons such as bullying, emotional wellbeing, and anxiety. In many cases, the note was the school's first indication of difficulties, particularly around mental health. Headteachers said that earlier awareness would have enabled timely referrals to support services to keep pupils in school. In some instances, schools were already addressing needs and had services involved, yet GPs issued notes without knowledge of existing support.

OBJECTIVES

- **Enable** GPs to access clear guidance & referral options
- **Share** consistent information across services
- **Collaborate** through networks to strengthen links

INTERVENTION

Relationships were already established between the Consortium of Medical Committees (which represents and advocates for GPs), and the LA.

A meeting between the medical committee lead, Education Partnership Officer, and school attendance consultant explored creating a pathway of options for GPs—rather than simply issuing a letter—and reassuring headteachers that this was not an agreed process.

It was agreed that a joint letter would be issued to headteachers and GPs, outlining guidance on improving attendance and providing a clear referral pathway for children's emotional wellbeing, alongside exploring individual needs.

After a two-year process, the agreed letter is now available on the GP online platform and the schools portal, and has been circulated to all schools and GP practices.

OUTCOMES

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

The joint letter serves as a point of reference for GPs, linking them to relevant services. Headteachers feel more able to challenge sick notes or explain attendance guidance when staying home isn't in the child's best interest.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Parents sometimes requested sick notes to justify absence, though prolonged illness should be evidenced by specialists. Headteachers initially felt the letter targeted them, so reassurance was provided at meetings. While telling GPs how to do their job was deemed inappropriate, the letter guides careful case-by-case consideration and promotes better communication with schools before issuing sick notes.

OPPORTUNITIES & FUTURE PLANNING

The letter will need periodic updates as services and guidance evolve. Strong partnership links between education and GPs are established through existing networks, with issues addressed via this pathway. A clear mechanism now exists for resolving future concerns and sharing information between GPs and schools.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

The established relationship with the LMC enables transparent, respectful dialogue between professionals. It is important to clarify whether absence evidence is requested by parents or schools, or if GPs recommend time off as support. GPs should have a clear pathway and service list—such as school health and local MHSTs—to contact first, ensuring communication with schools and encouraging parents to engage directly.

> ***If my school and the doctor talk to each other, I get the right help and can be in class with my friends. It means I don't miss out on anything and I learn lots of new things.***



Claire Fox
Education Partnership Officer
claire.fox@lancashire.gov.uk

Lancashire Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership