

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: 4th February 2021
Report for: Information
Report of: Karen Samples: Director of Education

Report Title

An update on the position of schools and how children are progressing in education through the Pandemic.

Summary

This report provides an update on the impact of COVID on schools in Trafford and the response to this during the Autumn term. This also includes an overview of remote learning which schools are required to provide and the strategies schools are adopting to address lost learning.

Recommendation(s)

That the contents of the report are noted:

- Covid cases in schools
- School attendance
- Remote Learning
- Catch-up funding
- Pupils with Special Educational Needs
- Ofsted monitoring visits
- The 2021 assessment arrangements

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 In Trafford, during the Autumn term all schools have remained open to all pupils despite the context of high rates of COVID-19 infections across the Borough and Greater Manchester, and attendance was high.

1.2 Both the autumn and spring terms have been incredibly challenging for all school leaders who have had to deal with many positive cases of Covid, and the requirement to identify close contacts who have needed to self-isolate and the more recent lockdown implications. Invariably, this has resulted in operating with reduced number of staff whilst still needing to implement remote learning and

address the impact of lockdown on pupils' learning. School leaders are also managing the additional financial costs incurred by ensuring their provision is Covid safe and secure.

- 1.3 Following a plethora of Government guidance in the autumn term, including the late notifications of the additional INSET day to reduce the time required by school staff to contact trace over the Christmas holidays and the staggered return for secondary pupils, pupils arrived back to school on 4th January only for the commencement of another lockdown to be announced.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on the impact of COVID on schools since September and how pupils are progressing.

2.0 Numbers of positive cases of COVID19

- 2.1 At the time of writing this report, the numbers of Covid cases since September are as follows:

	TOTAL	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	SPECIAL
Number of pupil cases	673*	192	454	11
Number of staff cases	345*			
Number of pupils isolating	15,876*	7077	8321	264
Number of staff isolating	787*			

**Some of these cases will sit within the early years sector.*

- 2.2 Since January, the numbers of cases has reduced due to the reduction of children and young people attending schools.
- 2.3 It has been pleasing to see that the number of pupils being required to self-isolate in response to a positive case of a child or adult in school has reduced as a consequence of schools taking a positive approach to adjust their organisation, identify close contacts more accurately and manage the times that bubbles mix.
- 2.4 The Public Health Team have continued to support schools through a fortnightly meeting with school leaders to share good practice, lessons learned and support in scenario planning.

3.0 School Attendance

- 3.1 Overall, Headteachers continued to report through the autumn term that schools are generally calm with children responding really positively to the changes and engaging well with their learning. Attendance overall remained strong with the vast majority of schools reporting attendance levels at least in line with national expectations averaging at 92%.
- 3.2 Since the start of this current lockdown, attendance is monitored through the DfE portal and through our own liaison with schools. Some schools have had to manage the challenge of providing enough places to meet the demands for

school places following the latest lockdown. The DfE stated that schools will remain open to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers only. The definition of vulnerable children and young people includes children who have a social worker, an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or who may be vulnerable for another reason at local discretion, including those who cannot engage with remote learning due to the lack of a digital device.

Attendance data reported so far states the following:

ATTENDANCE	Numbers / %
Total number of requests for places	7699
Total pupils	7367 (96%)
Children with a social worker	46%*
Children with an EHCP	41%*

*Based on school returns to the DfE attendance portal

4.0 Elective Home Education (EHE)

4.1 As previously reported, the numbers of families electing to home educate their children has continued to increase and is higher than at the end of the Autumn term last year - the total of new notifications for this academic year is 60, taking the overall number to 178.

There have also been some new trends and variations compared to previous years. Reasons for Electing to Home Educate are as follows with a number of cases related to Covid-19 and lockdown in some way:-

- Some parents have enjoyed extra time spent with their children over lockdown and are now choosing EHE to continue to build on positives
- Parents of children who had previously suffered from isolation or bullying in schools have also noticed their children appeared happier during lockdown
- Some parents are choosing EHE due to their anxieties about Covid-19 and their fear that children attending school may bring the infection into the family.

4.2 We have asked our Headteachers to work with parents to ensure that they fully understand that by electing to home educate, their child will be removed from a school roll and will therefore not access the school's remote learning offer. All new cases are then being contacted by the EHE officer, who also discusses with parents the reasons why they want to home educate and ensure that parents who are not sending their child to school because they are anxious about this, understand their options and the implications of home education. The team also provide information to parents on home education and establish whether the education provided by the parent is suitable for the child.

5.0 Remote Learning

5.1 Where a class, group or a small number of pupils need to self-isolate, or local restrictions require pupils to remain at home, it is a statutory requirement that schools offer immediate remote education. Since the announcement of this lockdown, there will be a significant number of children and young people accessing home learning. Schools are required to:

- Align the remote learning offer to the classroom curriculum as much as possible
- Set work that is of the following equivalent lengths:
Key Stage 1- 3 hours / Key Stage 2 – 4 hours/ Key Stages 3 & 4 – 5 hours
- Understand that remote education is not the same as digital education.
- Have systems for checking, at least weekly, whether pupils are engaging with their work, and inform parents immediately where engagement is a concern
- Establish systems for feedback and assessment as they are still as important as in the classroom.

5.2 Thanks to the dedication of Trafford’s teachers and school leaders, remote education is being delivered in all our schools when it is needed. This provision is being continually improved in line with expectations and emerging best practice.

5.3 Central to our School Improvement Quality Assurance process is the expectation that schools complete a self-view which is shared with their governors, which outlines the strategic priorities for the school, including their remote learning offer. This enables us to be assured that we have a secure knowledge of our schools. In addition, where bubbles have had to be isolated, schools were required to share their remote learning offer to the local authority to provide the necessary assurances that learning continued. Schools are also required to provide details of their remote learning offer on their school website.

5.4 A common challenge identified by school leaders is the issue of access to appropriate technology, whether this is a device or broadband connection. In some cases families are sharing one device between them, which might be a phone, and so children are not able to access the device for any length of time each day. The council are continuing to support schools with the provision of additional devices through approaching local businesses and engaging in support from Greater Manchester. The DfE have also allocated an additional number of devices to schools and offered free mobile data increases or 4G wireless routers. However, it must be stated that remote learning does not need to always be on-line and schools have also provided a range of alternative materials to support learning, including workbooks and experiential activities.

5.5. As we would expect, the approaches seen in schools has been bespoke to their situation. Trafford’s School Improvement Officers have provided a range of resources and support for schools as they plan their curriculum offer, as shown in the Toolkit.

Appendix 1: Remote Education Toolkit

Some of the features that have been reported in the self-views, are captured in the bullet points below:

- √ Student and / or parent surveys have been carried out to assess needs and ensure the school is able to meet these
- √ Use of a blend of online platforms (many using Google Classroom / MS teams) and ‘hard copy’ resources
- √ Staff and pupils being trained in using the online platforms

- √ Support for parents with home learning
- √ Access to live lessons following a weekly timetable
- √ Use of virtual lesson provided by the DfE's Oak Academy
- √ Access to pre-recorded lessons

6.0 Catch-up Funding & Addressing Lost Learning

To support schools in tackling the inevitable impact of Covid and lost learning, the government announced £650 million which was shared across state primary and secondary schools over the 2020/21 academic year. Whilst Headteachers will decide how the money is spent, the government expects this to be spent on small group tuition for whoever needs it. A focus for teaching has been on the basic skills of speech and language, reading, writing and mathematics in the primary school sector. In the secondary sector, the curriculum has been adjusted so that literacy and mathematics is a focus throughout all subjects to build key skills. Targeted catch-up sessions have been provided and tutors employed to teach the intervention programmes required.

- 6.1 Whilst schools had some good attendance prior to the summer break, Headteachers report that the baseline data for all year groups show that the lower and middle ability children, and particularly pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, have fallen behind. Reading is an area of concern as the children find it more difficult to comprehend what they are reading. Whilst phonics is strong within the majority of schools, and schools report that their curriculum is centred around vocabulary and experiences, they are all reporting significant gaps. For schools in more deprived areas they are reporting access to books outside of school is limited and there is a lack of engagement in listening to children read at home. Again, Trafford School Improvement Officers provided a suite of materials to support schools in their curriculum recovery planning. This can be found in the following document.

Appendix 2: Curriculum Recovery Toolkit

The assessments for Foundation Stage Early Years, Year 1 Phonics and Key Stages 1 and 2 tests have been cancelled for this academic year and the plans for Key Stages 4 and 5 exams are being consulted on currently. Further details are provided in the Appendix below.

However, pupils in year 2 sat the phonics check in the autumn term 2020, and the results are as follows:

PHONICS YEAR 2	TRAFFORD %	NATIONAL %
All pupils	84.5	78.5
FSM eligible	65	64
Non-FSM	87	82
Boys	83	76
Girls	87	82
SEND all	53	42

The data reports extremely pleasing results for our pupils, outperforming their national comparative groups in all areas. This is despite 2 terms of disruption.

7.0 Pupils with SEND

7.1 Throughout Covid, we have maintained effective support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs. Panels have continued to meet to ensure any requests for a Needs Assessment or Education, Health and Care Plans can be considered within timescale and currently 81% of plans have been issued within the expected 20 weeks. This has ensured that this cohort of vulnerable pupils received the right level of support despite the challenges of the pandemic.

7.2 The Inclusion Service have continued to deliver services throughout to schools and directly to children and young people, to ensure that their attendance was not effected by Covid. All pupils requiring assistance from the Sensory Impairment Service to access school received direct support, whilst other partners including the Educational Psychology Service and SEN Advisory team, continued to provide support for schools throughout the lockdown.

7.3 Co-production has formed a central strand of our response to Covid, ensuring that the Local Authority is sighted early on emerging issues and the rapidly changing picture. By responding quickly we have been able to mitigate risks related to Covid and helped to support parent/carer anxieties. Activities have included the following:

a) Regular and effective joint communication strategy

- √ Joint statements from the Trafford Parent Carer Forum (TPCF) and LA over lockdown measures, reasonable adjustments and risk assessments
- √ Daily check-ins with TPCF Directors throughout lockdown to ensure that issues/challenges were identified early and solutions actioned. Examples include exemption cards for travelling and accessing outdoor spaces and special schools loaning bikes/equipment and providing access to playground space
- √ Live Parent Carer question and answer sessions on requested topics eg, reasonable adjustments and support during lockdown, delivery of health provision including assessments on Trafford's Autism Pathway and Speech and Language Delivery and Social Care short breaks

b) Direct support for parents during lockdown

- √ Educational Psychology Service telephone consultations for parents
- √ Educational Psychology, Speech Therapy and Occupational Therapy/Physiotherapy sessions on the Facebook platform to support parents at home including managing anxiety and returning to school, supporting a return to early years settings and hypermobility

c) Support for schools and settings

- √ Online forums for schools – managing risk assessments, processes around reasonable adjustments, completing online Annual Reviews and Preparing for Adulthood transition reviews

√ Recovery support for school leaders

7.4 As a result of the last lockdown being announced, SENCO cluster meetings across all geographical areas have taken place to disseminate key messages from the Department for Education and to gather assurances that all children with additional needs are receiving an appropriate educational offer. Where staffing allows, all children with an EHCP are offered a place in schools and attendance has remained strong throughout the pandemic. Children with SEN support are offered a differentiated curriculum in line with their needs and all SENCOs have been asked to inform the LA if a situation arises where a child with an EHCP cannot be offered a place in school if the parent wants it. There have been some agreements with parents for part time places when schools have been significantly impacted by low staffing levels. These situations are reviewed on a regular basis so that adjustments can be made when staffing changes. The Inclusion Service has worked across all settings to identify children who are shielding so that appropriate provision can be made during this time.

The types of lessons that have been delivered to children with additional needs, including to those not in school, includes:

- Live lessons with either the teacher or the teaching assistant
- Speech therapy interventions delivered by the teaching assistant in consultation with therapists
- Access to differentiated learning resources
- Learning boxes delivered home
- Daily welfare check-ins and checks that parental situation/decision to keep children away from school is still the preference.

In-school support continues from the Sensory Impairment Service.

8.0 Ofsted

8.1 Routine inspections remained suspended for the autumn term, with a plan to resume in January. In the autumn term, Ofsted carried out 'visits' to schools and colleges, not inspections and these visits looked at how schools and colleges were getting pupils back up to speed after so long at home. The visits were not graded and the outcomes of the discussions with leaders were published in a short letter so that parents could understand what steps are being taken to help children back into full-time education.

4 of our Trafford schools were visited and received positive feedback which recognised the following:

- Teachers have adapted their curriculum plans to include any learning that was not taught in the spring and summer terms
- Teachers are giving priority to mathematics, reading and personal, social and health education. This is to help pupils settle back into school and to make up for lost learning time
- Leaders have purchased new resources to reignite pupils' love of reading for pleasure
- Teachers are checking on pupils' new starting points in mathematics. They are using this information to help pupils to catch up with learning that they have missed or that has been forgotten since March 2020

- Staff have checked pupils' knowledge of phonics and you have arranged extra support for those pupils who need to catch up
- In other subject areas, teachers are developing systems to identify learning that pupils missed during the 2020 spring and summer terms. They are planning to re-order or change the content in some subjects, if this is needed

9.0 Conclusion

9.1 It has been an extremely busy and challenging time for all our school leaders and school staff who have worked incredibly hard to ensure that our schools have remained open, COVID secure and safe with high numbers of children and young people attending each day. Throughout the Autumn term, there have continued to be positive cases of COVID-19 each week. These positive cases resulted in significant numbers of children and adults having to self-isolate but through the support of Public Health, schools were able to monitor and respond to this through effective track and trace processes. Where pupils have been unable to attend, we are confident that there is a remote offer in place which children can access at home, although this is certainly not a substitute for the learning and concerns remain that some of Trafford's children will be significantly disadvantaged. Although there have been major adjustments made to accountability measures once again this year, in that data will not be reported once again, schools remain committed to ensuring our children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes they can.

APPENDIX 3 – Summary of revised assessment and reporting arrangements for 2021

Early Years Foundation

Ministers have decided it will not be mandatory to complete the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) assessment in 2021 but instead will be asking schools to make 'best endeavours' to undertake it. This is because it can be used to provide important information to parents and to year 1 teachers, should the situation at the time allow. This will be a judgement for schools and teachers depending on their individual circumstances and will in many cases depend on the coming weeks and months.

Key Stage 1 & 2 Assessments

The Secretary of State issued a statement on 18th January that Key stage 1 and key stage 2 assessments due to be held in summer 2021, including tests, teacher assessments and the phonics screening check, have been cancelled.

Changes to KS4 and KS5 Examination/Assessment, 2021

Following the latest lockdown announcement, it was stated that exams would not go ahead as normal and that the DfE would work together with Ofqual to put in place alternative arrangements.

Two connected and complimentary consultations were launched jointly by the DfE and Ofqual on the 15th January to end on the 29th January 2021 which will focus on:

- GCSE, AS and A levels
- Vocational, Technical and other qualifications