

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 19th July 2022

REPORT TITLE:	COVID 19 EDUCATION CATCH UP PLAN / LEARNING FROM COVID AND TARGETING RESOURCES WITH REGARDS TO SOCIAL INEQUALITIES
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on education and young people across Wirral. This report gives a summary of the key milestones in relation to the pandemic for young people and the steps different areas of local authority have taken to support schools, families, and young people to enable them to recover from the missed education that has occurred due to the lockdown periods over the last two years.

Schools and settings nationally closed in March 2020 due the first lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period in person education was only offered to vulnerable and key worker children. For young people unable to attend a school or setting, home education resources were put in place. Gradually through the summer and autumn of 2020 more children were able to attend a school or setting in person before a second lockdown in the winter of 2021 led to schools and settings only being available to vulnerable and key worker children. Schools gradually re-opened to all pupils from the spring of 2021.

During 2020 and 2021, no formal assessments have taken place. In relation to primary schools, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), KS1 and KS2 assessments have not occurred. In relation to secondary and post 16 education, KS4 and KS5 assessments have been calculated using Teacher Assessed Grades (TAG's). All normal assessment activity has taken place during the summer term of 2022 but given the absence of external assessment for the last two years, this has been a challenging time for both school staff and young people.

The impact of COVID-19 on both wellbeing and academic progression of young people cannot be underestimated, during the last three academic years young people have experienced a disrupted time that for many has led to significant periods of home education and absence due to restrictions in place for a positive COVID-19 test. A child in year one has never experienced an academic year without a COVID-19 restriction of some description being in place. A year 13 taking external exams this summer has no experience of ever completing an external assessment.

As a local authority we have offered significant support both during the COVID-19 pandemic to support schools and settings to operate in the most effective way, providing clarity in relation to ever changing guidance. In addition, the local authority and partner

agencies have supported schools in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic with additional services focused on the challenges faced due to lockdown periods of isolation for young people; anxiety in relation to returning to school for both young people and staff; and educational recovery due to the significant lost learning due to the lockdown periods experienced over the last two years.

The true impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education outcomes and the well-being for young people will take years to become clear, the following reports articulates actions taken during the pandemic and support that continues to be in place for the education system on Wirral and with the ultimate benefit for the young people that live here.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough and the actions taken link to the Wirral plan 2021-2026 – Brighter Futures

This is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

1. note the report and recognise the contribution to support the lives of young people and Wirral's schools as the education system recovers from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 During the pandemic a range of different service areas and partners supported schools and settings to offer education for vulnerable and key worker children. In addition, the education system developed at speed a home-schooling offer to support young people and parents that could not attend school, this was aided by the distribution of laptops and wireless internet devices provided by the DFE.
- 1.2 The use of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to support additional capacity to support services across Children's families and education to make to the increased demand through the pandemic could meets the needs of children in specific areas. In addition, COMF funding was used to support mental health support in schools.
- 1.3 The development of a continuing Professional development (CPD) package for school leaders and governors for the current and next academic year, "Leading from Strength" will support the development of approaches to support the educational recover of young people.
- 1.4 The additional support offered by LA officers and partners in relation to Early Years; Attendance services; 14-19 services; education services; Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) and Public Health made a significant impact in making sure schools and settings had the right support at the right time in transitioning from COVID-19 pandemic, with a clear focus on educational recovery.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 No other options have been considered, the work carried out LA officers and partners took place at pace and the development of changing national guidance in relation to the pandemic. Through regular meetings between LA officers and schools and settings, discussions to develop the right approach for Wirral's young people allowed the right approach at the time to be taken in relation to the guidance

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Early Year's support

- 3.1 Over the course of the pandemic, Early Childhood Service utilised their 'My Child Can' Facebook page to engage with parents and share information and advice for activities at home.
- 3.2 From March 2020 to March 2021, our My Child Can page on Facebook had content which was seen more than 1.3 million times and was engaged with by more than 18,300 people. The content included videos of learning activities and storytelling as well as local updates and SEND support for parents.

- 3.3 Of the 5,900 followers, the audience is predominantly younger parents (the largest demographic being females age 25-44), many parents have commented on how useful the videos have been throughout lockdown to keep their children engaged and for supporting cognitive development.
- 3.4 During the Winter period of 2021 a proposal to use £100,000 of the Wirral Household Support Fund to provide hampers to families and settings across Wirral. In addition to the hampers being collected from settings across the local authority, 950 hampers were delivered to families in person.
- 3.5 A significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the reduction in the number of young people accessing their statutory entitlement to early years provision. The following table outlines the changing trends over the last 3 years:

	Spring 2022	Spring 2021	Spring 2020
	Take up %	Take up %	Take up %
2-Year-old funding	82.82%	73.40%	80.96%
3- and 4-year-old funding	86.62%	89.20%	95.60%

- 3.6 Analysis of the data illustrates the decrease in uptake pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, the reduction in two-year-old uptake of 7.5%, this is approximately 90 children not accessing education provision at the earliest opportunity. The work of the Early Years childhood services team has had a positive impact on the uptake returning to pre-pandemic levels this year.
- 3.7 In relation to uptake of 3- and 4-year-old funding this has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels, with a reduction in uptake of 9%, this is the equivalent of 450 pupils. Collaborative work between different service areas is being undertaken to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Education services support

- 3.9 At the start of the pandemic a school's cell was developed to include colleagues from across the local authority; Public health; HR; Health and safety; IT; Legal and Early Years. This mechanism allowed for timely analysis of the COVID-19 picture on Wirral, to allow for measured and timely guidance to support schools in settings in keeping provision open; sharing relevant guidance with staff and making sure the relevant support required by schools and settings could be provided by the local authority and partners.
- 3.10 The Director of Children's Services and other members of SLT held regular headteacher briefings to allow for relevant guidance from the DFE to be disseminated to allow for the appropriate actions. This was supported in addition by Assistant Director from Public Health who became the link professional for children's services. Feedback from senior leaders illustrated this supported was invaluable and the Assistant Director from Public Health continues to work in a collaborative approach to support schools and settings.
- 3.11 The development of a school help line to support schools and settings with any queries in relation to COVID-19 and the operational decisions being made by school leaders

and governors. This was initially resourced via children's service personnel and supported by colleagues from public health. This was eventually taken over by the Public Health and continued to support schools until March 2022.

- 3.12 The development of a clear working model between Public Health, Children's services, and school colleagues to allow for the timely distribution of PPE equipment distribution and at a later stage during the pandemic the logistics in relation to schools-based testing and vaccinations. This support will continue with support from the newly developed Health Protection Team within public health and a clear plan for training infection control leads within schools and settings. In addition, the distribution of DFE electronic devices to support the home education of young people who did not attend school during the first and second lockdown.
- 3.13 The development of digital learning platform, this was developed by local authority IT services and facilitated the pooling of available resources such as Oak Academy and advice on remote learning and digital platforms. This support was invaluable in supporting schools to allow for timely advice to parents who at very short notice had to support learning within the home environment.
- 3.14 To support the school system in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic the local authority has partnered with Education Success Partners to develop a 'Leading with Strength' programme to support both schools' leaders and governors. This will have a focus leadership; wellbeing; curriculum; inclusion; SEND and education recovery given the impact of the pandemic on the school's system. The programme commenced in December 2021 and will continue into the next academic year.
- 3.15 In line with the school's improvement strategy approved by committee in September 2021, we have worked with schools' leaders to identify the key areas impacted young people's learning through the pandemic. With support from schools, we are in the process of developing subject experts from across Wirral that will be able to support colleagues in other schools in specific areas needed for development. The key focus for the next academic year is Early Years practice, reading and numeracy. The working being carried out is taking place in collaboration with the literacy and numeracy hubs that have collaborated with schools on Wirral previously.

Attendance services support

- 3.16 The Wirral School Attendance Service was developed 6 months before the pandemic began and the first lockdown commenced in March 2022. The new Local Authority attendance Officers were still establishing working relationships in relation to this service. Through the support the service provided to schools, relationships develop at pace in positive way to support schools in following attendance guidance accurately.
- 3.17 Locality Attendance Officers continued to be available via phone and email to all schools throughout the early stages of the pandemic. Through collaborative working relationships with the DfE attendance team, relevant updates were shared with schools and settings through regular dialogue.
- 3.18 DfE Attendance Codes changed at various times throughout the pandemic due the changed guidance in relation to changing levels of COVID-19. The local authority attendance service provided regular updates to advise school on the relevant changes.

- 3.19 Throughout the pandemic the attendance service team were involved in supporting calls relating to free school meal vouchers and food support for families, advising parents how they could access appropriate provision. In addition, support for schools was provided where the difficult task of considering parent's anxiety about Covid, or a child's anxiety, and the impact COVID-19 could have on vulnerable parents or grandparents when changes to school attendance guidance expected young people to return to schools or settings.
- 3.20 Additional support was also made available in relation to accessing online learning and school places at the time when schools were open for key worker and vulnerable children.
- 3.21 The development of the Vulnerable Children's Panel which was setup during the pandemic to ensure that young people who were not being seen by school staff or engaging with online learning where identified and relevant support from partners agencies put in place if appropriate.

Public health and the 0-19 school nursing service

- 3.22 The support of additional resource through the COMF to make sure additional provision was provided for the most vulnerable young people during the pandemic and as we recover from the impact of COVID-19;
- 3.22.1 Additional capacity of the health and education coordinator with a clinical background. This was to support schools to ensure the needs of young people were identified and swiftly responded to. An increase in referrals to the 0-19 service has been recorded through the pandemic. Schools will receive a timetable of support with direct on-site provision to review and plan for the needs of children and young people requiring additional support.
- 3.22.2 Additional capacity in relation to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) Pathway. This support assessed and processed referrals ensuring that there was additional resource to manage increased demand.
- 3.22.3 An additional Speech and Language Needs to focus on speech and language development of children affected by lack of access to usual socialisation opportunities due to the restrictions put in place to control the pandemic, leading to disrupted school attendance. The additional capacity is providing a Wirral wide approach, working with a range of partners, for example children's centres, Koala NW and local nurseries. They are providing a key contact for settings where there is a concern with a child or young person over their speech and language development. Identifying these vulnerabilities early will prevent further pressures in the system later.
- 3.22.4 Additional capacity to support Early Years integrated health practitioner provision for development reviews, offering catch up sessions and input for families who have identified a health/development concern throughout or after lockdowns. Providing a Wirral wide approach, the practitioner will provide an immediate response for packages of care. The additional resource will work with children's centres, community

groups and childminders to identify and respond to needs. This role will also offer an opportunity to develop a bespoke approach to needs in different parts of the borough.

- 3.22.5 In addition to these specific areas that have been funded to support the 0-19 services, additional resources was identified to support mental health in schools, given the challenges faced in relation social isolation and the anxiety of young people in relation to COVID-19.
- 3.23 To support special schools during the COVID-19 pandemic special school nursing continued to offer care and support to children attending SLD (Severe Learning Difficulties) schools within Wirral. During this period all 4 schools remained open for children to attend and continued to offer consistency and continuity for children at a very challenging and frightening time for some of the most vulnerable children. Nursing staff supported children to understand the importance of changes that they and others in their community needed to make. 2 schools where also open during both the February, April and May half terms through the pandemic which enabled families to access school as a safe short break provision with the confidence of a registered nurse on site.
- 3.24 Throughout the pandemic support through digital platforms has strengthened. The partnership approach delivered with Early Years teams, Midwifery, Koala Northwest and a combination of therapy and 0-19 supported families and young people. The `what's on` programme usually delivered within early years quickly developed a virtual programme. The self-care resources and videos that staff developed were regularly shared for local parents and families. Chat Health has also been a new service offered that allows 11–19-year-olds to contact the school nursing service for support and advice on a range of topics.
- 3.25 The Bounce Back programme has been developed to support young people struggling with their own mental health through the pandemic. It is a digital and face-to-face early-intervention resilience building CBT programme for age 7 – 19 years old. It provides group discussion, practical tools and coping skills which enable children and young people to manage their day-to-day emotional wellbeing and reduces the risk of more intense mental health issues. Each Bouncing Back programme consists of 2 x 1-hour sessions (a week apart). The sessions are delivered by trained practitioners. The programme can be delivered either Face-to-face for a group of up to 30 children or young people or digitally via Microsoft Teams for a group of up to 10 children or young people. The programme is being delivered to groups of children and young people of a similar age range. All participants are provided with a Bouncing Back Booklet, containing advice and information to reenforce programme learning and provides signposting information.
- 3.26 The Blues programme is run by trained Action for Children Blues specialist (Blues Busters). Eligible schools, colleges or sixth forms sign up and students aged 13 -19 fill out the Blues survey. The survey identifies students who will benefit from the programme. The programme involves a 1-hour group session at school each week for 6 weeks, plus home tasks. Students learn how to challenge negative thoughts and talk about different coping strategies. After the programme, the programme leader evaluates and shares the results.

Post-16 Education including Adult Learning

- 3.27 The post-16 education sector responded swiftly to challenge of Covid and its associated periods of lockdown. All providers prioritised the most vulnerable learners, including those with special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND). Study programme curriculum was very quickly adapted for online delivery – including English and maths. Providers also ensured all young people had digital equipment and connectivity to enable their learners to continue to access their education.
- 3.28 During 2020 the Council’s Lifelong Learning Service applied for various grants to provide digital kit for learners in deprived communities. Successful bids with the Good Things Foundation saw the service distribute over a 100 devices and connectivity boxes to adult learners in the most deprived communities. A further digital access grant was also made available by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority which has support delivery of laptop scheme for adult learners across the borough.
- 3.29 The proportions of young people aged 16 to 18 reported not in employment, education and / or training (NEET) during the period of the pandemic has been maintained at a low rate. The data table below illustrates the % change in NEET for the month of February between 2020 and 2022:

Year	2020	2021	2022	% change 2020 - 22
NEET Rate	3.5%	3.6%	3.5%	-0.0%
Not Known (NK) Rate	1.4%	1.1%	0.7%	-0.7%
Overall NEET & NK	4.9%	4.7%	4.2%	-0.7%

(Source, NCCIS, February data reports 2020 to 2022 (years 12 and 13))

- 3.30 The above NEET data suggests in February 2022 the NEET rate of 3.5% equated to 258 young people. The percentage of young people not known in the same period (0.7%) equated to 52 young people. The local authority commissioned NEET and Participation Support Service adapted its service offer during the pandemic with much more frequent telephone / social media contact with NEET young people, risk assessed community face to face visits and coordinated meetings at the Birkenhead offices.
- 3.31 Apprenticeship participation remains low; however, the numbers of young people (aged 16 to 18) accessing employment with / without training is increasing. In February 2022 218 young people were recorded as accessing full time employment with or without training as compared to 176 February 2021. The February 2020 pre-pandemic rate was 169. This isn’t a position local authority Officers support; Officers preference would be that young people access apprenticeship because of the significant training aspect which supports longer term career progression. The table below illustrates year on year Apprenticeship participation for young people aged 16 to 18:

Year	Feb 2020	Feb 2021	Feb 2022	% change 2020 - 22
Apprenticeship Numbers (years 12 and 13)	357	239	254	-28.9%

3.32 Adult Community Learning enrolment have continued to be very buoyant during the 2020/21 academic year considering the challenges of reduced capacity in classrooms and maintaining a Covid secure environment for learners and staff. The Council Lifelong Learning Service reported 2,908 enrolments in 2020/21 comparing favourably with pre pandemic levels of 3,000 enrolments traditionally recorded.

3.33 The Council's Leaving Care Service provides support to over 300 Wirral young people eligible for leaving care services between the ages of 16 and 25. Support is provided by a Personal Adviser (PA) who will provide intervention and direct support. During the Covid pandemic PA contact with the young people on their caseloads was significantly increased. All young people were assessed and rated in terms of their vulnerability and contacted as a minimum every 2 weeks. Contact was a mix of face to face and telephone / social media.

3.34 The service was focused on ensuring young people had access to sufficient food and access to utilities during the pandemic winter months; including delivery of emergency food parcels. Also, during periods of lockdown the local authority Participation & Engagement Service played a key role in facilitating regular online social events, including bingo and cooking sessions to improve mental wellbeing and reduce social isolation for those living independently. The Leaving Care Service also provided art materials to care leavers and ran a creative arts competition which included poetry, fine art and song writing from several young people.

3.35 During the pandemic the Leaving Care and 14-19 Services acquired the Callister Building to redevelop as a bespoke HUB for care leavers. The building was repurposed during the Covid pandemic by Council Officers and contractors with safe / secure access enabled for care leavers. The care leavers HUB was also used a vaccination HUB on two occasions in partnership with colleagues from Public Health. This boosted the numbers of care leavers accessing a first and second Covid-19 vaccination. This was a key measure in protecting our care leavers and those Council officers working with them. Overall positive participation rates for care leavers in employment, education and / or training during the pandemic remained good at between 55% and 59%.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Containment Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) supported the additional capacity within the 0-19 service to support the additional support requested.

4.2 The COMF is monitored and managed by Public Health and was subject to a member working group that agreed its priorities.

4.3 Schools and Colleges did receive additional funding directly to support COVID-19 education catch programmes, support activities and tutoring programmes. Schools have a responsibility to publish the used of this funding on schools' websites.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The local authority has a statutory responsibility to provide sufficient education across Wirral. The actions taken throughout the COVID-19 response have supported the return of young people to school.

7.2 The use of local authority resources has enabled additional support to be put in place to address the areas articulated that have been identified as a risk to the return of pupils and supporting additional pressures that have been identified.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The feedback and views of headteachers, LA officers and wider partners have contributed to the information provided within this report.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and published and can be found using the link below:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications within this report

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The service areas covered will continue to target its resources to support young people, families and schools as the education system continues to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the borough's most deprived communities.

11.2 Within the 2022/23 academic year further work will continue with partner agencies to identify further areas of support that need to be addressed as the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic become clear.

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APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Bouncing Back and Blues Programme Slides \(Action for children\) 07.04.22.pptx](#)
[Wirral CAMHS offer to Education Institutions - Spring 2021.pdf](#)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date