

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 March 2021

Title: Continuity and recovery in schools during COVID-19 – Interim report	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and School Improvement	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: None	Key Decision: No
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Summary <p>This report provides an interim update on work undertaken by schools, in close partnership with the Council’s Public Health, Health and Safety, HR, and Education teams, to support continuity and recovery during COVID-19. Please note that some further updates may be provided verbally at the meeting given the continuing and evolving COVID-19 context.</p> <p>The Borough’s schools have worked tirelessly over the past 11 months to stay open safely. On 23 March 2020, the schools, Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs), and special schools closed to most pupils, remaining open for vulnerable pupils and Critical Workers’ children. Most Primary schools re-opened more widely to priority groups across a three-week period from 1 June 2020. Schools were required to re-open fully from September 2020.</p> <p>During the Autumn term 2020, the COVID-19 context became increasingly challenging for schools, owing to rises in positive cases across the Borough and in schools. Nationally, a second lockdown followed in November 2020, followed by a third lockdown from January 2021.</p> <p>Schools, in partnership with the Council, have been focusing on the following areas in particular: tracking and supporting vulnerable pupils; supporting pupils’ and school staff mental health and wellbeing, supporting remote learning in schools, the recovery of provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND); supporting access to IT for pupils that require this; Free School Meals; responding to a rise in Elective Home Education and supporting children and families in the Early Years.</p> <p>For most pupils, there has been, at most, a total of one full term of face-to-face learning over the past 12-months – for many it has been less than that. There is still much that we do not know about the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people of different ages. Schools’ efforts to maintain contact and provide quality learning are remarkable but</p>	

no one would argue that it is a proper substitute for being in school each day. For the youngest pupils, they may have spent nearly a quarter of their lives under COVID-19 restrictions at a crucial time – time which cannot be replaced in terms of their lost growth and development. At the other end of the age range, many young people have had the opportunity to take examinations in A Levels and GCSEs removed. It is unlikely that catch-up sessions during the holidays and after schools' hours will replace the learning that has been missed during the past 12 months.

There is also likely to be an accompanying impact upon pupils' physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Research has shown that areas of disadvantage are more likely to be adversely affected by the pandemic. As one of London's most deprived boroughs, Barking and Dagenham is likely to face adverse impacts on educational outcomes for its young people. Given the multiple lockdowns and ongoing disruption to face-to-face learning, these impacts may be seen for several years to come.

Despite the challenges of the past 11 months and the undoubted damage to children's education and wellbeing, there have been important positive developments and learning which will last beyond the pandemic. These include strong partnership working with schools, including through virtual means; developments in remote learning; responding to Black Lives Matter; supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing; and 'Step Up, Stay Safe', a partnership programme launched successfully in 2020, which focuses on helping to keep children safe from exploitation.

Recommendation(s)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note this report.

Reason(s)

It is timely for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive an update on work being undertaken by schools, supported by Public Health, Health and Safety, HR, and the Education Team, to help mitigate the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on pupils and their families.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. There is still much that we do not know about the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people of different ages. At the time of preparation of this report, schools were still closed to most pupils for the second time within a year. Schools' efforts to maintain contact and provide quality learning are remarkable but no one would argue it is a proper substitute for being in school each day. For the youngest pupils they may have spent nearly a quarter of their lives under COVID-19 restrictions at a crucial time – time which cannot be replaced in terms of their lost growth and development. At the other end of the age range, many young people have had the opportunity to take examinations in A Levels and GCSEs removed. Since the March 2020 lockdown, pupils have seen major disruption to learning outside of the core curriculum; it is likely that a narrower curriculum will contribute to a reduction in learning and development, including for early years pupils.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following the Prime Minister's announcement of the closure of schools on 23 March 2020 for most pupils, schools, ARPs, which provide specialist education for pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, and Special schools remained open for vulnerable pupils (Children and young people assessed as being 'in need' under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, having an Education Health and Care plan, or having been identified as vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities) and the children of critical workers.
- 2.2 Most Primary phase schools re-opened more widely to priority year groups over a three-week period from 1 June 2020, with most schools re-opening to some priority year groups by the end of the week commencing 8 June 2020. Despite initial closure from 23 March 2020, Early Years settings saw a sharp increase in attendance in Nursery, Reception, and Year 1 pupils from 2 June 2020. Across this period there was close partnership working between the Council's Public Health, Health and Safety, HR, and Education teams.
- 2.3 During the Autumn term 2020, the COVID-19 context for schools became increasingly challenging owing to rises in positive COVID-19 cases across the Borough and in schools. This was felt most sharply in December 2020 where a total of 458 school-related cases were reported. As of 22 December 2020, 58 out of the Borough's 60 schools had reported positive COVID-19 cases, with 5,723 pupils self-isolating at the highest point (9 December 2020). Despite this, schools showed remarkable resilience throughout the period, with only one full school closure for a number of days owing to an outbreak.
- 2.4 The Director of Education has met weekly with Primary and Secondary headteachers since the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020 to address priorities, challenges, and concerns. This has been supported by the Director of Public Health.
- 2.5 For most pupils, there has been, at most, a total of one full term of face-to-face learning over the past 12-months – for many it has been less than that. The disruption and loss of learning during this period is likely to have a lasting impact on most pupils' educational outcomes. There is also likely to be an accompanying impact upon pupils' physical and mental health and wellbeing. Any plans for recovery need to be thought through over the medium to long term and must support pupils' wellbeing alongside their academic needs.

3. Supporting schools to safely remain open

- 3.1. Since the Summer term 2020, the Education team, Public Health, Health and Safety, and HR teams have worked with schools to put in place risk assessments for schools' re-opening. These are updated in light of new national guidance as required and will be further reviewed before any wider re-opening from March 2021.
- 3.2. Individual risk assessments have also been developed for school staff and pupils where appropriate.
- 3.3. From September 2020, the focus of schools was to welcome back safely as many pupils as possible, whilst putting in place plans for remote working and to support the recovery of provision for pupils with Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities

(SEND). During term time, the Education team worked in partnership with all schools in the Borough to track vulnerable pupils and broker support for them and their families.

- 3.4. Schools have engaged with the Director of Public Health for Barking and Dagenham as a specific point of contact and advice for dealing with positive cases of COVID-19. Schools have been providing data to the Education team including on staffing, positive COVID-19 cases in staff and pupils, and the total number of pupils self-isolating owing to COVID-19.

4. Tracking and brokering support for vulnerable pupils

- 4.1. Schools, in partnership with the local authority, have been able to work quickly and effectively to identify and support vulnerable pupils. As of 29 January 2021, 2,642 vulnerable pupils had been identified through weekly trackers provided by schools to the local authority.
- 4.2. Since Autumn 2020, the Education team have worked with schools to encourage vulnerable pupils back to education settings where there is concern about the pupils' home settings and/or their engagement with home learning.
- 4.3. The arrangements for tracking the welfare of vulnerable pupils have been recognised as a strength from the Summer term 2020. Building on this model and learning from previous arrangements, the Education team has organised three staff - called 'Education Inclusion Partners' – to work with clusters of schools in the Borough in the North, East, and West.
- 4.4. The new arrangements for tracking and brokering support (Figure 1) has led to the creation of new multi-agency partnership meetings, including the following:

Vulnerable Pupils' Hot Clinics allow professionals to refer to a multi-disciplinary team of professionals from Children's Social Care, the Youth at Risk Matrix (YARM), North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT), and Youth Offending Service (YOS).

Team Around the School (TAS) pilot model: TAS operates at three of the Borough's Primary schools – Richard Alibon, Monteagle, and Thomas Arnold. TAS brings together professionals from Education, Social Care, Early Help, and Health. TAS aims to reduce exclusions and support children who have been identified as an increasing risk.

Team Around the Area (TAA) brings professionals together from across Education, Children's Social Care, the

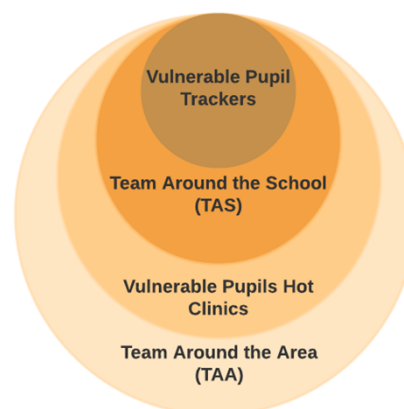


Figure 1 - New arrangements for tracking and brokering support

YARM and Police to share local information about the clusters of schools.

5. Mental health and wellbeing support for pupils

- 5.1. Teachers and schools have worked extremely hard to keep schools open during the COVID-19 pandemic and have responded to emerging concerns about individual pupils quickly and effectively. However, children and young people in the Borough are facing traumatic experiences including bereavement, self-isolation, a loss of routine, uncertainty about their futures, and a breakdown of formal support mechanisms.
- 5.2. Young volunteers from Barking and Dagenham surveyed young people from the borough, Havering and Redbridge in July 2020. From the 1,239 responses: 1 in 4 young people worried about their mental health during lockdown and 1 in 3 young people worried about their physical health, family, and friendships during lockdown.
- 5.3. Since the Summer term 2020, Children's and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have been delivering virtual weekly Hot Clinics for school staff. Staff refer pupils whose emotional wellbeing they are concerned about and who are not already receiving CAMHS support. The Hot Clinics have been well received by schools.
- 5.4. The Education team has supported schools in Barking and Dagenham to enrol in Thrive training. Thrive training gives parents, carers, teaching staff, youth workers, and medical experts an integrated approach to understand children's behaviour.
- 5.5. During the Summer term 2020, 58 staff in 18 schools participated in Thrive online training courses and 31 schools took out annual Thrive membership with the local authority's reduced cost offer. Two schools have become Thrive Ambassadors. Schools have reported that Thrive has been important to managing increased mental health issues and trauma amongst children.
- 5.6. Thrive London, in partnership with the Education team, have been able to plan 'Bounce Forward', a 6-week resilience programme for parents and carers to help them to support their children and themselves during challenging times. The programme has 250 spaces and is being promoted with the Borough's schools.

6. Mental health and wellbeing support for teaching staff

- 6.1. Many headteachers and school staff have worked throughout the holidays to ensure that schools remained open for vulnerable and Key Worker pupils in line with Department for Education (DfE) guidance.
- 6.2. To support staff, the DfE launched a fund to support how schools (staff and pupils) respond to the emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Locally, 16 Primary schools, 3 Secondary schools, and staff from Trewern Outdoor Education Centre have taken part in 'Wellbeing for Education' training funded from this.

7. Remote learning and a blended curriculum

- 7.1. In the Summer of 2020, the Council's Education team along with BDSIP, developed a framework for remote learning and a blended curriculum. This was designed to support

schools in the requirement to deliver effective remote teaching and learning, accessible to as many pupils as possible. The document had three key principles:

- i) Digital learning does not need to be device dependent: push emails with links, YouTube channels, and common school formats (ParentPay and SMS) help ease access for mobiles and tablets.
- ii) Teaching digitally does not need to be onerous: schools may use their own equipment to make content which can be delivered from any setting, including at home.
- iii) A blended approach to learning can support all learners: schools can choose between 'live' learning on platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom and pre-recorded modelling and short clips that are content specific.

7.2. Throughout the Autumn term 2020, schools practised, developed and refined their remote learning offer as classes and bubbles were required to self-isolate. In some cases, this allowed teachers who were self-isolating to continue to deliver their lessons from home. This put schools in a better position to provide remote learning for all from January 2021.

8. Recovery of provision for pupils with SEND

8.1. The local authority and school leaders, with support from a seconded Ofsted inspector, developed a framework called the 'Recovering SEND Provision – September 2021'. This has three priorities:

- i) Early individual reviews
- ii) A support strategy in case of a second lockdown or need for self-isolation
- iii) Getting therapies in place

8.2. During the Summer term of 2020, the Education team worked in partnership with schools to ensure that pupils with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans and those with additional needs were encouraged to attend their school where individual risk assessments determined it was safe to do so. By 8 June 2020, 82 pupils with SEND attended the Borough's ARPs (approximately 1 in 5).

8.3. Since the Autumn term of 2020, the Education team have been supporting weekly network meetings with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENcos). The meetings are supported by a range of professionals from Health, the EHC team, and Educational Psychologists. The Education team, supported by partners in Health, contributes to weekly surgeries with good examples of what Speech and Language teams are doing to support ARPs.

8.4. Partners in Health have created an offer of virtual training to support schools, ARPs, and Special schools to restore therapies. This includes support for Speech and Language therapy, social skills, and improving vocabulary.

9. Educational outcomes and attainment

9.1. Research has shown that areas of disadvantage are more likely to be adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationally, research from the Sutton Trust found that 19% of parents stated that their children do not have access to a sufficient number of devices. This increased to 35% for households with the lowest income and only 11%

for the highest. As one of London's most deprived boroughs, Barking and Dagenham is highly likely to face adverse impacts on educational outcomes for its young people. Given the multiple lockdowns and ongoing disruption of face-to-face learning, it is likely that these impacts will be seen for several years to come.

- 9.2. Sir Kevan Collins, former National Strategy lead, Director for Children's Services and Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets and Head of the National Education Endowment Foundation, has just been appointed as the Government's Education Recovery Commissioner. He has years of experience of working in Education and championing pupils in disadvantaged areas. We are hopeful that his leadership and experience will drive a serious long-term approach to supporting school leaders' work to help pupils catch up and thrive. This approach needs to go well beyond the rhetoric of Summer schools and longer school days, which are unlikely to have an impact in recovering lost learning from COVID-19.
- 9.3. In June 2020, the Government announced a £650 million grant to support pupils in Primary and Secondary schools to tackle the impact of lost teaching time.

10. Testing

- 10.1. Since the start of the Spring term 2021, the Council has worked with schools to ensure that all staff are able to receive a regular COVID-19 test. Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing for staff began on 2 January 2021, with 5288 staff taking a test with 286 positive results returned – approximately 1 in 20. This continued on a weekly basis throughout January 2021 until the government strategy of lateral flow testing for both primary and secondary staff was introduced.
- 10.2. In addition, a programme of twice weekly Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) takes place in two of the Borough's Special schools – Trinity and Riverside Bridge. This was instigated by the Council, supported by the Director of Public Health, in order to help protect some of our most vulnerable students and to help keep provisions open. This programme has been warmly welcomed by both schools.
- 10.3. Testing in schools has played a critical role in supporting the reduction of transmission in the Borough. It has contributed to the Borough's high levels of testing and has helped identify many asymptomatic cases.

11. Access to IT

- 11.1. Schools have worked extremely hard to provide their pupils with access to appropriate devices and sufficient data. The local authority and Barking and Dagenham School Improvement Partnership (BDSIP) have supported these efforts through the DfE's data offer (free data for pupils without WiFi in the home, in years 3-11).
- 11.2. The local authority has taken additional steps to engage internet providers, such as TalkTalk, in discussions about providing free data for disadvantaged families.
- 11.3. The government has provided 3491 devices for schools to distribute to vulnerable pupils. However, we know that despite this many pupils still do not have adequate access. In January 2021, headteachers estimated that around 8,000 pupils (20%) in the

Borough do not have sufficient access to an appropriate device and around 4,000 (10%) do not have sufficient broadband.

12. Free school meals (FSM)

- 12.1. Throughout the three lockdowns, schools have needed to ensure that children who are eligible for FSMs receive a hamper or a voucher. Working with their providers, many supplied good quality hampers to families, including on occasion, delivering them by hand.
- 12.2. In the first lockdown, BD Together delivered 17,000 hampers.
- 12.3. In the current, third lockdown (January 2021), Government funding is moving more towards vouchers, with hampers as an option.

13. Continuation of Early Years' Service and Portage

- 13.1. From March 2020, Early Years settings were asked to close but remained open for vulnerable pupils and children of Key Workers. Concerns were raised by the local authority about the likely impact of closure on children's early development owing to the disparity between home learning and the oversight of education in high-quality early year settings. From 2 June 2020, Early Years settings were encouraged to welcome back children who normally access childcare.
- 13.2. Following the wider re-opening of Early Years settings and schools from September 2020, attendance has remained consistently high, slightly below attendance levels from 2019. At times, attendance has fallen due to the numbers of staff testing positive for COVID-19 in December 2020. From January 2021, attendance has remained low, at approximately 60% of capacity. There has been particularly low attendance in school nursery classes and pre-schools. Day nursery attendance remains buoyant.
- 13.3. The DfE has confirmed that the Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant will be paid on expected attendance rather than actual attendance. There is a minimum funding guarantee of 85% for local authorities. However, there are concerns that a 15% decrease in funding could impact upon the delivery of places.
- 13.4. Without the oversight of face-to-face learning for all pupils, the Early Years team have created a webpage which brings together good practice resources to help parents and carers support their child's learning at home. This has over 20 unique activities. Similarly, the Early Years Advisory Team have developed a range of online 'bitesize' training sessions for providers using a YouTube channel and ran over 35 managers' meetings and information sessions via Microsoft Teams. The Portage Service have developed over 170 individual videos modelling activities for children. The service introduced its own YouTube channel and Facebook page to teach parents and carers new skills to further enrich their child's development.

14. Elective Home Education (EHE)

- 14.1. In response to a government 'Call for Evidence' in Summer 2020, the local authority raised that Elective Home Education was likely to be a challenge from September. This was mirrored in other borough's concerns.

14.2. There was a sharp increase in new referrals from September 2020, starting with the week commencing 4 September 2020 – with 27 new EHE cases. The number of new cases remained above 20 a week until the week commencing 25 September 2020. Current numbers are around double those of a year ago. It will be an ongoing challenge to monitor provision and encourage families to take up a school place so that over time numbers reduce.

15. Section II - Learning and Legacy

15.1 Despite the challenges of the pandemic and the undoubted damage to children's education and wellbeing, there have been some important positive developments and learning which will last beyond the pandemic. Set out below are some of the programmes, projects, and innovations which schools and Council colleagues are working on together.

16. Partnership working with schools, including virtual meetings

16.1. Since March 2020, all partnership meetings with schools have been held virtually. Virtual partnership meetings have been heralded as a success: reducing travel time, increasing attendance, and most of all – reducing the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Headteachers' meetings with the Commissioning Director of Education have been a focal point for the ongoing management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

16.2. Representation of schools at Council panels, meetings, and boards has grown – with regular multi-agency and multi-disciplinary groups including representatives from the Borough's schools.

17. Remote learning

17.1. Even in the first six weeks of Spring 2021 during the third lockdown, much has been learned. Schools have refined their remote learning offer drawing on feedback from teachers, pupils, and parents. Most are offering a mix of live sessions, recorded, and posted clips, and, particularly for younger pupils, some paper-based work. All schools track attendance and engagement and follow up with families where children and young people do not appear to be either registering or taking part in the learning. Headteachers are already seeing the potential of developments for home learning – and providing wider opportunities for pupils who miss lessons to access materials and catch up.

18. Anti-Racist Education – Responding to Black Lives Matter (BLM)

18.1. Following the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, workstreams have been prioritised about race and discrimination. There are three main strands of work which will involve schools:

- Creative cultural education in schools
- Incorporating young people's voices
- Partnership work with BDSIP

18.2. There is an emphasis in the Cultural Education Partnership (CEP), a partnership between the Borough's schools, Arts organisations, Cultural services, and Children's services, about giving children and young people opportunities to experience great art

and creativity. Young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds must be able to see themselves reflected in the artists they work with and in these experiences. The November 2020 CEP 'SlowCo' (a conference over a longer number of days) delivered a discussion session with a panel (comprising Early years and primary and secondary school representatives) and cultural organisations about Black Lives Matter. Many local schools and settings have been reinforcing an anti-racism perspective in the curriculum for some time.

- 18.3. In response to the BLM movement, the BAD Youth Forum held discussions about their experiences as residents and whilst at school. They shared a range of experiences and knowledge about the topics of racism, unconscious bias and racial inequality. The Forum linked with the Black Lives Matter Barking and Dagenham group and invited them to a session. Both groups discussed their issues and what they had planned for the future. Forum members were also invited to a workshop by BLM Barking and Dagenham members.
- 18.4. BDSIP have had discussions with the BAMEed Teachers Network, the Black Curriculum, local Headteachers, and a Professor of Educational Leadership and Social Justice. There are plans under development to facilitate school-led work around the following proposed areas: leadership of cultural change, staff recruitment and progression, behaviour and inclusion, and curriculum and inclusive teaching. A conference with schools is planned and it is anticipated that this will be followed by more in-depth training for school staff and school-led workstreams.

19. Pupils' mental health & wellbeing

- 19.1. In November 2020, the government made a commitment to funding holiday activities and food for children in receipt of Free School Meals. This will fund local authorities with a total of £220 million for provision during Easter, Summer, and Christmas 2021. This will provide a significant opportunity for the local authority to support disadvantaged pupils, including around their wellbeing. The local authority is developing the strategy for how this will be delivered.

20. The 'Step Up, Stay Safe' programme

- 20.1. 'Step Up, Stay Safe' is a multi-disciplinary partnership programme which responded to several instances of serious youth violence that took place over the year of 2018. The approach is led by partners from across Children's Social Care, Community Safety, Education, and the Youth Offending Service and includes schools and community organisations.
- 20.2. The programme has been supported by the launch of the local authority's 'Lost Hours' campaign, which focused on community safety in the hours of 3-7pm. This has already received over 35,000 views on the Council's social media platforms.
- 20.3. The programme is being further developed with the introduction of new projects. The next phase of the 'Lost Hours' campaign is focusing on schools and will work closely with our wider partners in the Borough.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices: None