

Report to: Education Advisory Board

Subject: Returning to school - summary of local arrangements and next steps

Date of meeting: 15th July 2020

Report from: Alison Jeffery, Director of Children, Families and Education

Report by: Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director, Education

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To update the Education Advisory Board on the actions that have been taken since schools closed to the majority of pupils on 23rd March 2020 to support children's learning and wider wellbeing during that period, and to lead and support the safest possible return of increasing numbers of pupils since 1st June 2020.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that members of the Education Advisory Board note the considerable work that has taken place across the city to:**
- **Support schools, children and their families in order that more children can return to school during the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year**
 - **Prepare plans for the return of all pupils to school from September 2020**

3. Background

- 3.1 Portsmouth schools have remained open to vulnerable children and children of key workers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, including through normal school holiday and Bank Holiday periods. Between the end of March and the end of May 2020 the proportion of vulnerable and key worker children increased steadily, from just over 300 children per day to approximately 1,100 per day.
- 3.2 Since the beginning of June, with infant, junior and primary schools opening up to some children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6, and with more demand for places for key worker children, pupil numbers have increased rapidly. From 15th June secondary schools have begun to provide some face to face support with pupils from Year 10, although no more than 25% of Year 10 children are allowed in to school at any one time. By the end of June approximately 5,500 children were in school each day - which represents 25% of the total school population.

- 3.3 Despite the increasing numbers of children returning to school, the fact is the majority of children in the city have not been in school and by the end of July will have spent over 4 months out of school.

4. Returning to school - summary of local arrangements

- 4.1 Following the closure of schools on 23rd March 2020 to the majority of pupils the council moved quickly to work with partners in the Portsmouth Education Partnership (PEP) to put in place arrangements to support children, families and schools during the period of the closure, and to plan for the wider re-opening of schools when it became safe to do so.
- 4.2 Some immediate actions were taken by the council which included the following:
- Dedicated pages on the PEP website which schools and partners could access to find helpful information and resources
 - Weekly meetings held with Headteachers: primary (x3 primary meetings - North, Central and South), secondary and special schools
 - Bi-weekly meetings with the CEOs of Multi Academy Trusts
 - Half termly meetings with LA maintained schools
 - Dedicated communications which included: a daily communication from Alison Jeffery to all Heads and MAT leads; the weekly PEP bulletin which consolidated the information from each week; and dedicated pages on the PCC website for local residents to access
 - System of tracking and monitoring vulnerable children and young people who were not at school and which included the set up of LA Link Co-ordinators for every school in the city
 - Revised arrangements for school meals for those schools that were part of the city-wide catering contract including the provision of cold lunches for those in school and provision of food parcels for those out of school and who were entitled to a free school meal (the national voucher scheme has now largely replaced the provision of food parcels)
- 4.3 A core return to school working group, chaired by the Deputy Director for Education, was established with representation from across the city, including all key phases of education from early years to post-16. The group was charged with having oversight of a return to school plan (Appendix 1). In addition, six workstreams were established to take forward and support specific areas of the plan. These were as follows:
- Infection control and health & safety - led by Helen Atkinson, Interim Director of Public Health
 - Safeguarding and a focus on vulnerable children and young people - led by Julia Katherine, Head of Inclusion
 - Emotional health and wellbeing - led by Sarah Christopher, PEP and Inclusion Manager

- Curriculum, home and digital learning - led by Alison Bradley (Ofsted secondee)
- Transition (nursery to reception, Year 2 to Year 3) - led by Ella Harbut, Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Transition (Year 6 to Year 7 and Year 11 to post 16) - led by Amanda Percy, Post-16 Commissioning Manager

4.4 The key element of each of these workstreams is set out in sections 5 to 9 of this report.

5. Infection control and health & safety

5.1 A main focus for the infection control and health & safety workstream has been to work with schools to ensure they have access to clear and up to date infection control and health and safety information, and to be able to give pragmatic advice on responding to issues as they have arisen. Advice has been provided on:

- Risk assessments prior to the wider re-opening of schools
- Use of face coverings and PPE
- The practical application of "bubbles" within schools
- The steps to be taken in the event of a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus.

6. Safeguarding and a focus on vulnerable children and young people

6.1 This workstream has brought together a number of different areas of work to ensure that whether children and young people are attending school safeguarding and meeting the needs of the vulnerable children and young people remain a clear focus of the work across the city council and with school. Key strands of this work include:

- Recording and monitoring school attendance
- Tracking and monitoring of vulnerable children and young people who are vulnerable, supported by LA Link Co-ordinators for every school
- Support for school Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) through action learning sets
- Completion of risk assessments for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, including LA sign. Supporting schools to make adjustments in school or providing additional support for children who remain at home
- Respite provision for children with SEND who are unable to attend school and during the school holidays
- Planning for long term support for children with underlying medical conditions who may not be able to return to school

7. Emotional health and wellbeing

7.1 The existing Children's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Group has refocused its ongoing work to promote wellbeing and resilience in education to work with schools to support their responses to pupils, parents and staff. Key strands of this work include:

- Planning for positive mental health and wellbeing learning opportunities to support pupil's transition back into school
- Collating resources for schools to use with staff and pupils
- Launching the Mental Health Support Team interim offer
- Commissioning training, delivered via Zoom, support Trauma informed responses in school
- Commissioned additional support via the Inclusion Outreach Service for consultation and advice around Loss and Bereavement
- Promotion of supervision and access to consultation to school staff.

8. Curriculum, home and digital learning

8.1 The pandemic has demonstrated significant differences at both a whole school and a family level in the extent to which children have been able to use technology to access learning remotely. At a school level, whilst some schools, particularly secondary schools, were already making a significant amount of use digital technology to support home learning and learning in school, and were therefore able to move more teaching on-line relatively straightforwardly, a number of infant, junior and primary schools were making very limited use of the available technology. Similarly, there is a significant digital divide amongst households in Portsmouth, many of whom can only get on-line through a mobile phone shared between several children, and who may not have access to broadband

8.2 An important focus for this strand has therefore been to understand the range of current practice and learn from and share the many examples of good practice that exist. A baseline survey of home learning has recently been completed which demonstrates the variability across the city, but has also highlighted examples of good practice. The work is informing the development of a digital learning strategy for the city and the preparation of contingency plans for remote access to education which all schools will need to have in place by the end of September.

8.3 Other key strands include:

- Development of home learning principles 'protected learning'
- Drawing together research and current thinking on the application of digital technology
- Showcase successful home learning strategies and use of digital platform - linked to the development of a micro site for resources

- Review and refine the CPD offer to schools that can support home learning and digital learning
- Ensuring all children and young people have access to a device and a broadband connection

9. Transition

9.1 The restrictions on school opening means that the induction meetings and visits that would normally take place during the Summer Term prior to transition to Reception, Year 3, Year 6 or Year 12 have not been able to take place. A focus for the transition workstreams has been to co-ordinate and ensure parents have information about the different arrangements taking place across the City. Two workstreams have been established to focus on nursery to Year R / Year 2 - Year 3; and Year 6 to 7 / Year 11 to Year 12.

9.2 Key strands of the transition workstream focusing on Nursery to Year R and Year 2 to Year 3 have included:

- Publication of 2020 transfer record for EY practitioners
- Develop transition documents for practitioners to use as a toolkit
- Read with Me and 50 things to do before you're 5
- Develop citywide guide for parents to support transition
- Support schools to give year 2 and year 3 pupils some time in junior schools during the summer term

9.3 Key strands of the transition workstream focusing on Year 6 to Year 7 and Year 11 to Year 12 have included:

- Secondary schools to populate agreed transition spreadsheet
- Secondary schools to target vulnerable year 6 pupils with support from services
- Colleges to complete spreadsheet to confirm transition arrangements
- Development of Flying Start, a resource for Year 11 pupils to support their learning and transition to Post 16 provision
- Implement Year 11 intervention programme at The Harbour School using additional AP funding
- Implement Youth NEET Intervention Programme
- Develop post-16 progression campaign

10. Next steps and refresh of the Portsmouth Education Strategy

10.1 The government has announced their intention that they wish to see all pupils back in school full time from September, and detailed guidance on this was published on 3rd July 2020. Over the remainder of this term the council will continue to work with schools, multi academy trusts and partners to follow this guidance to secure the further reopening of schools in the safest possible way. This will include specific support for LA maintained schools in

order to sign off updated risk assessments, plans for September and contingency plans or access to remote education.

10.2 Work will be completed during the summer on a refreshed education strategy for 2020/21. Key priorities will include:

- Development and implementation of a digital learning strategy for the city
- Teacher recruitment and retention
- Improving pupil outcomes in reading/literacy, including improving early language development
- Improving outcomes for vulnerable learners and pupils with SEN, especially those on SEN support
- Improving teaching and learning in the wider curriculum, with a focus on leadership
- Publication of an agreed strategy for securing sufficient SEND / AP school places