

REPORT TO: Education Committee

MEETING DATE: 8 June 2021

BY: Executive Director for Education and Children's Services

SUBJECT: Update on the Impact of COVID-19 on Schools and the Wider Education Service during Session 2020/2021

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide an update on the impact of COVID-19 on schools and the wider Education Service during session 2020/21.
- 1.2 To provide an update on lessons learned including areas which the service and schools plan to build on and areas where further support will be required as a result of any negative impacts of COVID and school closures.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:
 - i. Note the considerable work undertaken by the Education Service and school staff in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in session 2020-2021.
 - ii. Note the lessons learned including positive developments that we plan to build on and areas where further support is required.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Since March 2020, schools and the wider Education Service have been operating within a series of unprecedented constraints, restrictions and implications associated with the COVID-19 global pandemic. During the first lockdown, school buildings closed and all staff worked around the clock to put in place remote learning for all learners. At the same time, staff from across the Council and partners also put in place childcare for children of keyworkers and those considered to be more vulnerable. Following this first lockdown, schools were able to reopen fully from August until December

2020. During this time, extensive mitigations were put in place as directed by the Scottish Government. This included ensuring physical distancing between staff and between staff and learners, increased hand washing and the use of hand sanitiser, additional cleaning and the restriction of learners mixing within the school. During this time, school staff worked hard to support all learners taking account of the impact of COVID-19 on their wellbeing and learning. Our approach has been focussed on 'Nurture, Recovery and Reconnection' and the service has also prioritised mental health, taking account of the impact that the pandemic may have had on learners and their families. The Education Service put in place robust systems to deal with cases of COVID-19 in both learners and staff and worked closely with NHS Health Protection teams, ensuring that information was available to support Track and Trace. A senior member of school staff was seconded to support the Education Service with all aspects of dealing with positive test results including responding out of hours. This has ensured the East Lothian response has been swift and responsive and that communication has been issued appropriately in liaison with NHS Lothian.

Following the subsequent lockdown in January 2021, all East Lothian schools reverted to remote learning for the majority of learners. From January until early March 2021, 14,600 learners across primary and secondary schools engaged in remote learning with almost all making use of Google Classroom. School staff also connected directly with families to provide other forms of learning and support that were required. Towards the end of February, very limited numbers of senior phase learners returned for practical subjects and in early March, children from nursery to P3 were able to return to school. From 15 March 2021, all primary learners were permitted to return to school buildings with some limited face to face provision for those in secondary. All secondary students returned to in-school learning after the Easter break with the removal of 2m physical distancing between students in secondary schools. Mass asymptomatic testing was introduced for staff working across all early years and schools settings and for senior phase students from February 2021. The use of testing was then further expanded to include all secondary students from after the Easter break.

From January until March 2021, all local authorities were required to put in place in-school provision for children of keyworkers and for those deemed as vulnerable. Learners with additional support needs attending all of our specialist provisions were able to access in-school learning. School staff also provided ongoing support for those learners who were more vulnerable including ensuring access to learning materials and making weekly calls.

Significant work was undertaken with all schools to further improve the Remote Learning offer for all learners. The Education Service provided clear guidance and set consistent expectations of the quality of learning to be provided. This included live and recorded lessons, direct teaching, Google Meets for assemblies and other gatherings, independent tasks and other learning opportunities, such as baking and outdoor learning. East Lothian's approach to Remote Learning has also been praised in a series of Education Scotland national reviews of remote learning carried out during this period.

- 3.2 Following the cancellation of SQA examinations for session 2020/21, all local authorities put in place an Alternative Certification Model to ensure a range of evidence of student achievement is gathered prior to the awarding of final grades by the SQA. Throughout the summer term, secondary schools have been gathering assessment evidence to inform the final grades to be submitted to the SQA by the end of June. Education Scotland conducted a review of the Alternative Certification Model arrangements and reviewed East Lothian's approach in late April 2021. The results of the review were very positive, noting particular strengths in the leadership of the approach, the collaboration between central staff, school staff and the Trade Unions and the work that had been undertaken to ensure staff understood standards and that robust quality assurance and moderation was in place. Schools and the quality improvement team continue to work together on this complex piece of work to ensure East Lothian's compliance with SQA expectations, reduce student's anxieties, manage staff workload and ensure that students can be awarded the grades that they deserve.
- 3.3 Early Learning and Childcare - Local authority and funded provider settings were required to close (other than to children of keyworkers and vulnerable children) during each lockdown. Significant COVID-19 restrictions have been put in place, as advised by Public Health and Scottish Government each time they have been permitted to reopen. These restrictions remain in place and include limitations on the number of children who can play together in a group, restrictions to staff working with different groups of children and the requirement of rigorous cleaning of playrooms and toys between sessions. The Council's Early Learning and Childcare support team have provided extensive support to settings throughout the last year, to assist them in implementing the guidance and have provided ongoing advice in support of children's development and learning.
- 3.4 Since April 2020, the Education Recovery Group has maintained rigorous oversight of the planning and implementation of any new Scottish Government guidance to ensure the safe operation of schools buildings and continued provision of education in the event of school building closure. A number of Recovery working groups have also supported specific areas of focus such as supporting the workforce, adapting the physical environment and advising on health and safety considerations for children with Additional Support Needs. A range of staff from across the Council and representatives of the Trade Unions support the work of these groups and both consider the implications of revised Scottish Government guidance as well as providing practical advice and support to staff in schools. In addition, regular meetings also take place with Trade Unions in order to ensure a collaborative approach is taken to supporting the delivery of education across our schools and nurseries.
- 3.5 **COVID-19 – Lessons learned**
- 3.5.1 Throughout the Pandemic, schools and the Education Service have regularly reviewed our plans and progress in line with national guidance and good

practice. This approach to continuous self-evaluation has enabled us to move swiftly when changes have been announced by Scottish Government and to adapt our approaches as and when necessary.

3.5.2 Critical childcare – Following our experience from the first lockdown and from our summer provision in 2020, we were able to review our systems and processes thereby ensuring we were able to respond quickly if a further lockdown was required. In January 2021, we adapted this model to put in place the limited in-school provision as previously outlined in this report. During the second lockdown, there was greater equity in the provision of learning for all learners with those allocated a place in school able to access the same remote learning as others in their class.

3.5.3 Remote Learning - Following the first lockdown, staff carried out a rigorous review of remote learning. This enabled us to refine and further improve our plans including the use of digital learning and teaching so that we were ready in the event that children needed to self-isolate or a further lockdown was required. This review and improvement activity proved to be essential when we moved in to the further lockdown in January 2021. Schools were quickly able to revisit their plans and ensure high quality learning and teaching was able to continue. A national review carried out by Education Scotland on the overall quality of Remote Learning, concluded that East Lothian's approaches were very effective. HM Inspectors sampled the work of Aberlady PS, Ormiston PS, Knox Academy and North Berwick High School and provided positive feedback and highlighted good practice which was later included in a national overview - link to the review [National overview of practice: reports | National overviews | Supporting remote learning | National Improvement Hub \(education.gov.scot\)](#)

3.5.4 Instrumental Music Service (IMS) - Through a creative blended delivery model, the IMS has continued to offer our learners weekly lessons, as well as expanding our provision through the offering of a broad range of digital experiences. With ongoing COVID-19 restrictions in schools, the IMS delivery model has constantly adapted, in line with Scottish Government advice, to offer the best possible learner' experience. While restrictions continue to limit the number of learners the service can currently engage with, most instructors' timetables remain at capacity. There are currently 725 learners registered for lessons, with 274 new learners having been welcomed to the service and a waiting list of 60. From May to December 2020, we focused on the upskilling of instructors and development of best practice with learners in the use of digital engagement and delivery. From January 2021, the IMS delivered an entirely digital service, with instructors offering video lessons into children's homes and from the outset had 87% engagement from our learners. From 15 March 2021 we have carefully reintegrated our service, physically back into school settings. The majority of our lessons are now face-to-face, with the exception of wind and brass, which continues to be delivered via two-way video. The IMS wanted to ensure that they continued with our ensemble provision, and provided performance opportunities for our learners that explored the potential of our

digital provision. Hosting these projects digitally removed the barriers of location and enabled us to collaborate with a much broader range of organisations. The service collaborated locally with the Youth Music Initiative Team, Lammermuir Festival, and Haddstock Festival and recently hosted our annual Piano Festival as a digital event. Nationally the IMS has worked with Royal Air Force Music, Countess of Wessex String Orchestra and the Royal Marines Band Service. The Lass of the Loch Project with RAF Music, is now being used as a UK wide initiative, with over 1000 young people having performed the piece, from 15 different music hubs and local authorities. Our inaugural Piping Competition, in collaboration with Preston Lodge High School Pipe Band, attracted almost 1000 entries, some from as far as Hong Kong and the USA. In August we will launch the pilot programme for our PEF Funded Musician in Residence Scheme, which will see a professional piper establish a pipe band in two of our Primary Schools. This will assist with our aspiration to develop our piping provision across the authority and continue to consolidate our links with the local community.

3.5.5 Digital devices - Schools have continued to work with parents and carers to determine learners' requirements for access to digital devices and connectivity to the Internet and where appropriate, schools have also engaged learners to better understand their access to digital devices. Alongside a lending system put in place by all schools to ensure that any learner with no suitable device was able to access one, we have also purchased 1400 Chromebooks and 196 connectivity devices with additional funding provided by the Scottish Government. We are now reviewing our Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy to take account of the acceleration in use of digital devices and to continue to support staff in transforming learning and teaching and in revising the curriculum offer. Following the announcement of further Scottish Government funding, we are ordering a further 500 Chromebooks which will supplement our existing stock and ensure all learners can access devices when required. There continues to be a national delay in the supply of laptops from manufacturers.

3.5.6 Engagement with children, young people and families – Throughout the last year, the importance of timely and clear communication has never been more important. Schools have developed new and innovative ways of communicating with their learners and families and have made very good use of social media and other digital means such as via Google Classroom. Many parents have reported that they prefer digital solutions for meetings such as for Parent Councils and for parent consultations. Schools also report a higher level of engagement of parents who prefer this method of communication. Looking ahead it is clear that whilst schools will want to build on this very good progress, they will also need to continue to review their approaches to take account of those families who prefer fact to face contact. Frequent virtual engagement with the East Lothian Association of Parent Council Members and the Education management team has been very well received, ensuring that Parent Councils have the opportunity to engage, ask questions and feedback on their experience. We plan to build on this in the new session and continue to seek new ways to gather and act on the views of families to improve our service.

The Executive Director has also written regularly to learners, parents and staff. Our stakeholders have reported that this, along with the variety of means in which schools engage directly with their learners has worked well. The Education Service has begun a programme of engagement sessions with senior phase young people and plans to develop this further in school session 2021/22 to include younger secondary students and children of primary age.

3.6 Impact on children and young people

3.6.1 Between October and December 2020 and since Easter 2021, the Education Service and schools have been reviewing the approaches that have been put in place in schools to find out what has worked and what more needs to be done to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

Whilst many children and young people were very keen to get back to school, we know that some have been more anxious. We have adopted a nurturing approach to reopening and reconnecting and this has been essential for our children and staff. A number of schools have adopted flexibility in the timings of the school day, for example in putting in place a 'soft start' whereby children do not need to 'line up' in the playground but can arrive at school and go straight to their class. Children, staff and parents have reported the benefits including a more relaxed start to the day and this approach reducing children's anxiety. Many schools plan to continue with this approach in the new school session.

3.6.2 There is no doubt that the many disruptions over the last year have impacted in a range of ways on our learners. From our engagement with them, their parents and our staff, we know that many children thrived on remote learning and coped well with new routines, engagement in digital learning and that they have made good progress. Others have been more anxious about returning to school buildings and on return have needed more support to reconnect with other children and staff and to re-engage in their learning. Staff have been assessing children's engagement and progress since their full-time return to school. Overall, East Lothian schools report almost all learners have had a positive return to school and re-engagement with in-school learning since schools fully reopened. The continued focus of schools on nurture, reconnection and relationships will continue to build on this further. For a small number of learners across schools, the impact of COVID school closures has had a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and their progress in learning. Schools have identified these learners quickly, many during the period of remote learning, and planning of interventions is already under way to provide additional support throughout this term and in to next session.

3.6.3 A number of different tranches of additional Scottish Government funding has been received and this has been used, in accordance with grant conditions, to appoint additional teaching and support staff in order to aid the recovery programme and also for the purchase of digital devices and connectivity solutions for those who required it in order to engage with

remote learning and to provide additional family support for families in hardship.

3.7 Conclusion and Implications for session 2021/22

Since March 2020, our children, families and staff have been through unprecedented change and disruption as a result of the impact of COVID-19. Through strong collaboration, leadership, engagement and careful planning, we have put the needs of our learners at the heart of everything we have done. Our staff have worked tirelessly to support all of our learners and have responded at pace to the many and varied demands placed upon them.

Plans are now well-advanced for session 2021/22 with schools evaluating this year's school improvement plan and setting new priorities for next session. Given the impact on children's wellbeing and learning, we will continue to prioritise support that ensures all children and young people are able to make appropriate progress. We will continue to make the best possible use of all available resources to support our staff working directly with learners.

Following a range of assessments carried out during the summer term, schools have in place a range of interventions to support children. This includes direct teaching support and small group interventions to enhance learning where gaps have been identified. We are also working with our partners to put in place a further year of the East Lothian Tutoring Initiative which in year one supported around 200 young people from S4 to S6 across all six secondary schools. Work continues with our Education Scotland Attainment Advisor to learn about what is working elsewhere and to plan further interventions that will support our children and young people.

In recognition of the impact of COVID-19 on children's progress, all schools are required to prioritise recovery and improving outcomes in their school improvement plan. Schools have been asked to reduce the number of priorities in order to focus on these critical areas. In addition, time has been set aside as part of teacher's Working Time Agreement which is put in place each year as a framework of allocated time for all teaching staff. Staff will also be supported through their professional learning and review and development to focus on these areas.

It is likely that we will continue to see the impact of the pandemic for years to come on our learners. Schools and the wider education service will do everything we can to mitigate this impact, learn the lessons of what has worked and what we need to improve and ensure that we continue to improve outcomes for all.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 Equalities – the impact of COVID-19 has had and continues to have an impact on the wellbeing and learning of children, families and communities. Work continues to seek to mitigate this impact in all schools.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – The Scottish Government provided £214.833 million of additional Education funding for financial year 2020/21 and is providing a further £111.667 million of additional funding in 2021/22 for Scottish Councils. East Lothian's share of this funding was £3.689 million in 2020/21 and is £2.159 million, to date, in 2021/22. Table 1 below sets out the funding for 2020/21 and Table 2 sets out the funding for 2021/22.

Table 1 – 2020/21 Additional Education COVID Funding

Funding Purpose	Scottish Total £m	East Lothian Allocation £m
Recruitment of Additional Teachers	33.333	0.635
Recruitment of Additional Teachers (2nd Tranche)	20.000	0.380
Education Recovery Fund	20.000	0.403
Additional Education Recovery	45.000	0.859
Additional Education Recovery Funding	70.000	1.412
Digital Inclusion – Revenue	3.600	0.070
Digital Inclusion – Capital	21.400	0.401
School Transport - Capital	1.500	0.028
TOTAL	214.833	3.689

Table 2 – 2021/22 Additional Education COVID Funding

Funding Purpose	Scottish Total £m	East Lothian Allocation £m
Recruitment of Additional Teachers	16.667	0.318
Recruitment of Additional Teachers (2nd Tranche)	10.000	0.190
Additional Teachers	25.000	0.482
Education Recovery Funding	60.000	1.169
TOTAL	111.667	2.159

The council faced a number of additional Education related cost pressures throughout 2020/21 and as well as the additional costs of teachers and support staff there were increased cleaning and transport requirements.

In order to ensure effective management of financial resources to aid the education recovery in 2021/22, an education recovery finance workstream including senior members of the Education Management Team and the Finance Manager for Service Accounting has been established by the Education Recovery Group.

6.2 **Personnel** – Funding for additional staffing for schools has been allocated by Scottish Government to compensate for any loss of learning suffered during the COVID-19 lockdown. We appointed 35 full-time equivalent teaching staff (20.5 for Primary and 14.5fte Secondary) on a temporary contract until the end of this school session to provide additionality in our schools. Additional support staff have also been temporarily recruited to help with recovery. We are currently undertaking a recruitment campaign to appoint additional teachers across the Primary and Secondary stages to progress the recovery work in schools next school session and these additional teachers will be in place until the end of the next school session, June 2022. Additional staff have also been required in Facilities Management to ensure adequate cleaning and catering for schools.

6.3 Other – none.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None

AUTHOR'S NAME	Lesley Brown
DESIGNATION	Executive Director - Education and Children's Services
CONTACT INFO	Email – lbrown@eastlothian.gov.uk
DATE	8 June 2021