

REPORT TO: Education Committee

MEETING DATE: 21 June 2022

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 2021/2022

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide a final update on the impact of COVID-19 on schools and the wider Education Service during session 2021/22.
- 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-19.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:-
 - i. Note the considerable work that has been undertaken by the Education Service and school staff in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic across session 2021-2022.
 - ii. Note the lessons learned including positive developments that we plan to build on in our School Improvement Priorities and areas where further support is required.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Please see Education Committee COVID-19 Update Reports of November 2021 and March 2022 for further background information.

3.2 COVID ARRANGEMENTS IN SCHOOL SESSION 2021/22

3.2.1 The Scottish Government published the [Strategic Framework update](#) on 22 February 2022 which sets out a change to our overarching strategic intent: "to manage COVID-19 effectively, primarily through adaptations and health measures that strengthen our resilience and recovery, as we rebuild for a better future."

3.2.2 Of relevance to schools, the Strategic Framework sets out that a small number of routine protective measures will remain, and that;

- *mitigations in schools should be retained for no longer than is necessary based on the state of the epidemic and evidence about risk*
- *there should be a presumption against placing a greater restriction on children and young people than on the rest of society*

The framework has taken careful account of the evolving risk environment in schools and wider communities. It also seeks to ensure that only those mitigations that are necessary and proportionate to ensure the safety of school communities are retained.

3.3 **Face coverings** are no longer legally required in school communal areas, or on home-to-school transport. This brings schools into line with the position in wider society, workplaces and on public transport.

3.3.1 The new guidance states that "*...this means that the wearing of face coverings will not be mandatory, but it will remain encouraged in indoor communal areas in line with the workplace guidance.*"

3.3.2 The Scottish Government continues to strongly recommend that face coverings should still be worn in indoor communal areas, including on transport. This is to protect learners, staff and drivers and reduce the likelihood of further disruption.

3.3.3 Schools have been empowered to make their own local decisions about the use of face coverings, and as previously stated, any individual learner or member of staff who wishes to wear a face covering in a school should be supported to do so.

3.3.4 Consideration will also be given to staff who work with learners who have additional support needs as part of the individual risk assessments that are in place.

3.4 Schools have also been empowered to make their own **local decisions** about the cessation or retention of some COVID mitigations. For example, for some schools, one-way systems have proved to be particularly successful, as have staggered entry and exit times. In these cases they will be retained.

3.5 Many of our schools will also retain some **virtual meetings** with parents and carers, such as parental consultation times, as feedback has been positive and attendance has increased.

- 3.6 Parents and carers have continued to receive **regular communication** regarding changes to mitigations, and the risk of remote learning under exceptional circumstances, however since schools returned from the Easter Break, there have not been any instances of remote learning by either primary classes or secondary year groups.
- 3.7 The **East Lothian Association of Parent Council Chairs** has met virtually on 4 occasions across the course of the year, giving updates on Scottish Government Guidance and on current Their feedback and suggested questions, which have kept us informed about the concerns and aspirations of our parent body, have been greatly valued.
- 3.8 **Asymptomatic testing** has now stopped for school staff and for young people in secondary schools and COVID isolation rules are now consistent with the rest of society.
- 3.9 The **Education Recovery Group** has been in place since April 2020 and has continued to have rigorous oversight of the planning and implementation of any new Scottish Government guidance to ensure the safe operation of school buildings and continued provision of education in the event of school building closure. The group held its last meeting in May 2022, with the expectation that any further COVID related decisions can be made on a service by service basis.
- 3.10 We will continue our productive and solution-focused meetings with Trade Unions in order to ensure a collaborative approach is taken to supporting the delivery of education across our schools and Early Learning and Childcare settings.
- 3.11 **IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**
- 3.11.1 Overall, East Lothian schools continue to report that almost all learners are engaging well in their learning. The continued focus of schools on nurture and relationships supports this.
- 3.11.2 **Pedagogy Team-** in the November COVID Update for Education Committee, it was reported that using Scottish Government Funding received this session for 21 teachers and 10 support staff in a £1.042M investment for East Lothian, a number of interventions were planned to support schools to continue to identify and tackle lost learning and support recovery.
- 5 full time Principal Teachers were appointed to work with the centrally based Pedagogy Team supporting attainment across Early Learning and Childcare, Primary and Secondary

- 9 full time Class Teachers were appointed to work across ASGs to support the raising attainment agenda. The allocation of these teachers was based on the needs of each ASG.
- 3.11.3 The Pedagogy Team is currently supporting four schools in the local authority; Wallyford Primary, Whitecraig Primary, Macmerry Primary and Preston Tower Primary. These schools are being provided with this enhanced support for a number of reasons including closing the poverty-related attainment gap, other identified gaps in attainment and achievement, follow-up from inspection and review, and to progress the priorities within the Education Service Plan.
- 3.11.4 The support provided to each school aligns with the priorities within individual school improvement plans and has been developed in partnership with the School Senior Leadership Team, Quality Improvement Officers and the members of the Pedagogy Team. Currently the support provided includes the development of play pedagogy, planning for learning teaching and assessment, improvements in numeracy and reading and support for individual classes or year groups.
- 3.11.5 The Pedagogy Team is also leading professional learning for staff at school level. Careful planning and evaluation of their work forms part of the ongoing engagement with the schools. This evaluation of the impact of the support is at the early stages although initial feedback has been very positive. This support for these schools will continue next session to build on the positive start made, to ensure that the support continues to build capacity and has appropriate time to have a positive impact on outcomes. The Pedagogy Team will also begin to engage with additional schools as agreed through their Service Level Agreements to provide further support next session.
- 3.11.6 The Pedagogy Team is also establishing strategic roles to support the development of professional learning, policy and practice across schools within East Lothian and the South East Improvement Collaborative. Initially this will include literacy, numeracy, STEM, play pedagogy and assessment and moderation.
- 3.11.7 As you will all be aware, there remains in some of our communities an issue with anti-social behaviour. This has been particularly prevalent in the Prestonpans, Musselburgh, Haddington and Dunbar localities. It has been recognised that greater holistic use of resources is needed across Education, Children's Services and Communities, working in collaboration with Police Scotland and the third sector in order to tackle this robustly.
- This is linked to a small cohort of learners with challenging behaviour in our schools for whom alternative strategies are required.
- 3.11.8 Several engagement sessions have now been held with a range of professionals from Education, Children's Services and Communities, culminating in an Education and Children's Services Conference

The conference, which started with a keynote from the Chief Executive, was the first step in developing a model of Locality Networks and Partnerships to harness local knowledge and expertise by working collaboratively and preventatively to make a positive difference together in a locality for our children, young people and families. Such collaboration provides opportunities for creative solution focussed joint working that meets the needs of your community.

- 3.11.9 A model of Locality Partnership Groups is planned to harness local knowledge and expertise by working collaboratively and preventatively to make a positive difference together in each locality for our children, young people and families. Collaboration like this provides opportunities for creative solution focussed joint working that meets the needs of each community. This is not a new model – there are already successful locality partnership working groups in East Lothian and we wish to further build on that.
- 3.11.10 No one action in isolation can make the change needed. It is the cumulative impact of action across sectors, by all partners which will make the difference for children and families. It is more important than ever that our services work collaboratively to share our local knowledge and problem solve – collaboration with our community planning partners, including health, police and 3rd sector is essential.

3.12 Conclusion and Further Implications for session 2021/22 and 2022/23

- 3.12.1 Over the course of this term, we have used self-evaluation information from our schools and their communities to formulate our draft improvement priorities for next school session. These will be formalised in our Progress and Improvement Plan which will come to Education Committee in November 2022.
- 3.12.2 Recovery will be a key focus, with creative thinking about the delivery of the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners and increased opportunities for professional learning to ensure we are equipped to bring our learners and their families out of this challenging period to support us to resume our focus on increased attainment and achievement.
- 3.12.3 We will continue to prioritise support and collaboration 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.

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 has provided 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.
- 6.2 Personnel – We have recruited the equivalent of 21 teachers and 10 support staff from the latest tranche of Scottish Government Funding.
- 6.3 Other – none.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None

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