

**Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

**12 April 2021**

**Impact of COVID-19 on  
Education Services**



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**Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young  
People's Services**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the impact of COVID- 19 on Education Services.

**Executive summary**

- 2 Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on the impact of COVID- 19 on Children and Young People's Service Grouping to its meeting on 2 July 2020 and agreed to receive a subsequent report with a focus on Education Services.
- 3 This report provides information relating to the significant impact of COVID- 19 has had on Educational services within the Children and Young People's Service Grouping and how the service in turn has supported schools and educational settings throughout the pandemic.

**Recommendations**

- 4 Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are recommended to:
  - (a) note and comment on the content of the report.

## **Background**

- 5 The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 2 July received a report from the Corporate Director of Children's Services explaining how COVID-19 had impacted on his service grouping. Members requested that a further update be received to a future meeting of the Committee.
- 6 In accordance with that decision arrangements have been made for the Strategic Manager Support and Development to attend the meeting of the Committee on 12 April 2021 to provide information on the following areas with the Education Service:
  - Progression and Learning
  - Support and Development
  - Performance and Standards

## **Progression and Learning**

### **DurhamWorks**

- 7 DurhamWorks is a Durham County Council led partnership programme that supports young people aged 16-24 who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) / unemployed. It is funded through the Youth Employment Initiative / ESF.
- 8 The Programme has now supported 8,210 young people since its commencement in 2016. 5,117 have completed the programme and of those, 4380 (86%) have progressed into employment, education or training or gained a qualification.
- 9 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on delivery of DurhamWorks. This resulted in face-to-face work with young people being suspended, with elements of support and learning activity being provided remotely through online platforms where it was feasible to do so, in accordance with Government guidance. However, permission has been granted to resume face to face activity from 8th March in a controlled and measured manner.
- 10 This will form the start of a gradual easing of restrictions, including an increase in marketing activity and procurement of additional employment sector routeways. The intention is to create a vibrant employment offer during the final months of the Programme. This will be supported by the creation of a new Employer Engagement team, whose role is to work with Jobcentre Plus to establish and develop new Employment Hubs, support young people to obtain Kickstart job

placements, as well as develop more employment and apprenticeship opportunities for young people.

- 11 The current Youth Employment Initiative / ESF funding for the DurhamWorks Programme is available until December 2021. However, an application for ESF funding (under investment priority 1.2) to develop and continue support for young people through DurhamWorks was recently approved by the Department for Work and Pensions. The total amount of funding secured is for £10m to support 6,300 young people aged 15-24 in County Durham.
- 12 This consists of a preventative element that will support 2,700 young people aged 15-16 who are identified as being at risk of becoming NEET (through a new DurhamWorks Programme for Schools), as well as a re-engagement element to support 3,600 young people aged 16-24 who are NEET. The preventative element is being delivered from 1st August 2020 until 31st December 2023. The re-engagement element will commence from 1st January 2022 until 31st December 2023, following the end date of current Youth Employment Initiative / ESF funding on 31st December 2021.
- 13 The Department for Work and Pensions has also opened a call to run a project to help support young people and respond to the economic impact of COVID-19 in the Youth Employment Initiative / LEP areas, including County Durham. Actions in this priority will help to re-engage marginalised young people who are NEET, with a focus on specific vulnerable groups of young people. £3.0m Youth Employment Initiative / ESF funding has been allocated to County Durham through this open call, to be utilised by December 2023. However, it is a competitive process and there are no guarantees at this stage that DurhamWorks will be successful in securing this additional funding.

### **DurhamEnable**

- 14 Durham County Council has received formal approval from the Department for Work and Pensions for its bid for ESF funding to introduce a new Supported Employment Service - DurhamEnable. This will support 900 County Durham residents with disabilities to move into or closer to employment. The Programme has started to receive referrals and it will operate until December 2023, with a budget of £3.6 million.
- 15 Following the confirmation of funding, significant work has been undertaken including recruitment and training of Job Coaches, working with potential participants to help shape service delivery, as well as engagement with employers.

## **Support and Development**

- 16 The 'Education Durham' Support and Development team has supported schools and settings throughout the COVID-19 period.
- 17 As soon as the first lockdown was announced in March 2020, the impact on schools and their staff was immediately evident. One response of the team was the rapid transfer of the professional learning and training offer from a traditional face-to-face delivery method to on-line remote training. The majority of this continued as live training, and more than 70% of the published training offer was delivered on the days advertised with learning outcomes and content unaffected, despite the remote method of delivery.

## **Income recovery**

- 18 With very few exceptions, the charges for training were suspended during the first months of lockdown. In this, 'Education Durham' was responding in line with most national providers of training to schools. There was a general recognition that the challenges of on-line delivery and the difficulties that some participants may have had to access the offer, balanced with the vital need to maintain professional learning for teachers and school staff during the period of unprecedented challenge, warranted the decision to make the training offer as free to access as possible. Since September 2020, attendance of much of 'Education Durham's' professional learning offer has been charged for, and attendance has remained very good.
- 19 During the time when face-to-face training in our Education Centres has been suspended, the income from the hire of rooms, refreshments and catering has entirely ceased, which will cause a challenge when budgets are assessed after the uncertain COVID period is over. It is unlikely that the provision of a training offer from the Education Centres will ever be fully restored.

## **Quality assurance of the training offer**

- 20 The evaluation of the virtual-live training offer has been consistently high. The innovations of e-learning support materials, responsive use of the chat function in Teams and Zoom training, follow-up contact and conversations with participants and other adaptations have been monitored carefully and appear to have been well-received. One particularly effective innovation is the series of Head Teacher Virtual Round Tables, hosted by 'Education Durham' officers but broadly run through contributions from a wide range of head teachers covering multiple key issues. These events are new to our training offer and are

offered free to those schools with a school improvement service level agreement.

- 21 Contracted support to schools has continued at scale and has been delivered mostly remotely, to individuals, small and large groups. Some face-to-face delivery of training, carefully observing schools' risk assessments and all COVID-19 regulations and guidance, took place prior to the second national lockdown in November 2020. This was always at the request of schools and covered only training and content that was better suited for delivery in school than in a remote learning environment. Since January 2021, all contract delivery has been conducted remotely.
- 22 The development of skills of 'Education Durham' facilitators has been substantial. There has been a wide range of skills-development training provided to facilitators, so that the quality of remote learning has been matched with the very high quality assurance standards applied to our previous, traditional training offer. The following post-course evaluation comment is indicative of many received: "The best virtual training yet. [The facilitator] related to the audience well ... giving helpful support in order for everyone to participate. Explained complicated content with clarity and humour, expanded on points, used plain relatable terminology. No question was "silly," and [the facilitator] was available in break-out time for questions that required a more discreet discussion."

### **Partnership working**

- 23 Work with external partners has flourished: 'Education Durham' has continued its close working relationships with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Teacher Development Trust (TDT), with these organisations providing various leadership and pedagogical programmes jointly with 'Education Durham'. The long-standing relationship between DCC and 'Educate and Celebrate', fostering LGBT+ safe schools, has been maintained with many new schools engaging and others renewing their status.
- 24 In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 'Education Durham' colleagues are putting together a week-long showcase event to celebrate how schools, settings, community groups, children and young people have gone above and beyond with their creativity and innovation since March 2020. This is underpinned by the team's work with lead researchers from the Durham Commission, an Arts Council England and Durham University research project around the importance of creativity in education.

- 25 During 'World Creativity and Innovation Week' (WCIW), which runs from 15<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021, 'Education Durham' will be releasing 5 video showcases that highlight some of the best practice across the County. These will be will shared publicly via a webpage on Durham County Council's commercial services site. The 'WCIW' team, based at the University of Miami, have offered 'Education Durham' the chance to broadcast live as part of their global Creativity and Innovation Day celebrations on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021. This is a truly worldwide celebration which, last year, brought together people from 56 countries. Over 70 submissions from Durham schools have so far been received.

### **Additional funding**

- 26 Recognising that schools have incurred additional costs during COVID-19, officers from Support and Development team prepared and submitted bids for Outbreak Funding which were successful and will be distributed by the end of term.
- 27 Costs covered or contributed towards includes the following:
- Provision of portable handwashing stations to schools, colleges, early years settings and registered child minders. As many school buildings have insufficient hand washing facilities to allow frequent, responsive washing by all pupils, DCC sourced 800 portable stations which can be located in classrooms or outside areas. Although originally intended as provision for schools to purchase at cost, Outbreak Funding has enabled us to provide full refunds. The re-imburement of schools already charged for the supply of units has begun. Schools/settings previously unable to afford units have been invited to request these from existing stock, and requests have been received already.
  - Additional support to schools to cover unplanned COVID operating costs. Some government funding was made available for schools ('exceptional costs for the period March to July 2020' with a second funding window notified in December 2020), covering increased utilities costs, increased costs related to hygiene services and increased costs when schools remained open during holiday periods. Schools submitted claims for other exceptional costs but in the main these were not reimbursed in the first application round and the option to submit other costs was removed for the second application round.
  - Thanks to Outbreak Funding, schools and DCC settings will be reimbursed for significant expenses not covered by the government funding, such as signage and tape, perspex screens (for division between front office and visitors, for instance, or for use in classes to improve staff protection), additional ancillary resources such as

catering trolleys for moving meals to classrooms, bins with wipeable swing lids etc., duplication of educational resources that previously could have been shared between groups but now cannot be shared across bubbles, specific COVID training for all staff, including digital awareness training, remote learning workbooks and additional stationery packs for pupils and emotional wellbeing resources (eg: 'worry monsters'/posters, cards for classrooms etc).

- Support for remote education in schools. Funding has also been set aside to provide a safety net to those schools who are unable to source sufficient devices or who have exhausted DfE resources, Where necessary, schools can put forward a request for additional funding for devices, with requests assessed quickly against criteria for support by officers in Education and ICT Operations.

### **Early Years Supporting the Sector during lockdown and Recovery**

- 28 Throughout the COVID-19 period, DCC's early years and childcare advice and support continued to be fully operational. The challenges of this period meant that the work of the team was far from 'business as usual'. There has been a sharp focus on supporting early years providers to navigate through the 'maze' of guidance and compliance that the Government has published in response to COVID-19 and keeping them fully informed with weekly national and local updates in line with information that went out to schools and a full training offer was taken online.
- 29 Support from the Council has been warmly welcomed by providers: *"Firstly, thank you so much for the support you have all shown over the last long 7 months. It has been very much appreciated at this difficult time. Your emails keeping us updated have been invaluable to my sanity. So thank you all for doing a great job!!"*
- 30 Extended partnership with colleagues in Business Durham in conjunction with the Early Years Childcare places team and the Family Information services enabled provider support sessions that explored:
- Implementaiton of the Furlough scheme with an accountant and HR and Nursery consultant.
  - Extension of the Furlough scheme
  - Innovations – moving the sector forward in the ever changing climate.
- 31 The provider support sessions were offered to all group-based early years settings, free of charge. They were delivered on-line, these sessions continue to be available to all group-based early years settings. Sessions were made available from the start of lockdown. A

total of three sessions have been delivered (by October 2020) accessed by 80 providers.

- 32 Support was given to access Recovery Grants and additional funding available through the Government financial support packages and local funding streams including local coalfield regeneration and Social Enterprise Support funds. Business bitesize workshops were promoted to all settings, with identified settings being encouraged to book online if not registered.
- 33 Several settings also benefitted from 1:1 support in the form of email and telephone conversations with Business Durham. The workshops were promoted directly through the Early Years team and information included within and promoted via weekly updates to the sector and included within any sustainability applications.
- 34 There was a workshop on business support which included the Bounce Back Loan, Digital Drive and the Business Energy Efficiency programme. There were also several emails sent out around both the Small Business Grant and Discretionary Grant that the Local Authority administered.
- 35 Business Durham worked with the Early Years team and DCC rates team to ensure that everyone eligible was made aware of the business rates holiday. The Additional Restrictions grant has been widened to include the childcare sector.

### **Support to settings**

- 36 The Early Years team introduced a dedicated COVID-19 email line to address specific questions which supported the team to assess need and build and deliver workshops based upon sector specific issues.
- 37 Originally there was a focus on questions around furloughing staff then around information required to apply for either the small business or discretionary grants. More recently there have been enquiries around further business training and additional queries relating to charging parents where there are bubble closures and what to do around staff self-isolation are being addressed via additional workshops. This support has been in place since the start of lockdown and remains on-going. All settings have had the information and opportunity to attend and an estimated 200+ settings have been supported through the workshops or on a one-to-one basis to date.

- 38 A full online training directory continues to operate and in the summer term, the focus is to reflect on the lessons learned through COVID, in order to support children where needed.
- 39 A Nursery based business consultant offered peer to peer support, in conjunction with applications for sustainability funding support and in response to sector-specific questions on business development (e.g. charging, accessing Government financial support etc.) The nursery business consultant supports the Business Durham workshop to provide an 'on the ground' perspective.
- 40 HR support provided a session focusing on handling tricky situations, staff management and redundancy.
- 41 Information was provided on supporting safe delivery in a COVID environment which included 'Making the Bubble Work' which is a COVID-19 operational toolkit that was developed as an online training tool to support providers with considerations for re-opening and on-going operation within COVID secure guidelines. In addition, a palette of useful resources has been developed for this sector called 'The Library'. Early Years team members also contacted individual providers to discuss risk assessments and provide advice on safe operations and remain COVID secure.
- 42 A Childcare Sufficiency risk assessment was commissioned to sense check the impact on COVID and the childcare market and Education Outbreak Control procedures were developed with Public Health colleagues in relation to test and trace procedures for early years providers.
- 43 Early Years Test and Trace resource packs were sent to childcare providers. These contained advice, guidance an online reporting and template letters for providers to use in suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19. The team worked in partnership with Public Health to provide track and trace advice in suspected/ confirmed cases of COVID-19, including outbreaks.
- 44 All early years settings were provided with PPE starter kits and Public Health have delivered sessions on outbreak control and the importance of the Flu vaccine. The sector is now undertaking home testing of Lateral Flow Device.
- 45 From the start of the pandemic the Early Years team has worked collaboratively with the Family Information Service (FIS) to broker individual placements for families when closures etc. took place. The strength of brokerage is based on the team's local intelligence of

settings, geography and relationships between the team and early years providers.

- 46 Specific settings have been signposted to AAPs (Area Action Partnerships) to access support for children at home through community hubs access to food grants and a range of community support services and the distribution of the Winter Food grant Vouchers.
- 47 Early years settings have supported the families through a range of varied and creative solutions to check in on vulnerable children, remote learning through the provision of activity packs, online story time and physical exercise sessions.

## **Performance and Standards**

- 48 The 'Education Durham' Performance and Standards team has provided timely and responsive strategic and operational support and advice to schools and settings throughout the COVID -19 period.
- 49 The team rapidly adjusted the school and setting monitoring, intervention and improvement protocols to provide regular remote visits, focused on key challenges through the pandemic alongside ongoing advice and support to headteachers.

## **Support through the pandemic**

### **Remote offer**

- 50 From 5<sup>th</sup> January until 5<sup>th</sup> March, national restrictions have required pupils, other than those of key worker families and pupils identified as vulnerable, to remain at home and access remote education. Schools across all phases have continued to develop the quality of their existing curriculum through the use of technologies to ensure an appropriate offer is in place for all.
- 51 During spring term visits, Education Durham School Leadership Advisors have been supporting the quality assurance of the remote offer and capturing evidence of impact through professional dialogue which continues to inform future planning, development of resources, advice and guidance.

### **Weekly updates and briefings**

- 52 Regular Head Teacher updates from the Head of Education to schools and settings inform and support leaders to share national messages and guidance and respond to emerging issues to help schools deliver

their ongoing blended offer to children and young people. Recent briefings have included Special Head Teacher briefings (10/02/21, 03/03/21 and 17/03/21) and Nursery & Primary Head Teacher Briefings on (02/03/21 & 04/03/21). The briefings were attended by over 150 school leaders.

### **Safeguarding / Vulnerable Children**

- 53 We continue to place the safeguarding of vulnerable children at the heart of our work, with many of our team shifting the focus of their work to incorporate this. Working very closely with both early help and social care teams, our safeguarding lead developed systems and protocols to ensure there is an action when schools are concerned because they have not been able to contact families. The attendance team changed their work focus to contact any school which had not returned the vulnerable children list so that none were missed. Our teams also developed challenge and support around elective home education requests and have been successful in securing reintegration to school. The inclusion team has continued to drive the Inclusion Strategy forward and they have now secured buy-in from an impressive number of school leaders to work together to reduce exclusion. One of the positives to come out of COVID- 19 has been the improved interface between early help, education and social care teams and we intend to build on this going forward.
- 54 Our teams focused support and challenge on the attendance of children with a social worker and those with an EHCP (which was initially low compared to national averages) which brought results. As of 22/03/21, attendance for children with a social worker is above the national average and for those with an ECHP is in line with the national average.

### **Virtual School**

- 55 The Virtual School continued to support schools and settings throughout the recent lockdown. Where schools felt that the child was not engaging with home learning, they brought them back into school. Support and advice were given to Carers who were sometimes finding the new formal approach of remote learning offered by schools more challenging than the systems that were in place during the first lockdown. (This was due to trying to establish a routine with some children who have limited concentration spans).
- 56 School attendance for Children who are Looked After increased during this lockdown with around 60% of children attending school compared to 18% in the previous lockdown.

- 57 During the Spring term we have held 621 Personal Educational Plan (PEP) meetings. Of these, 606 PEP documents have been signed off and graded by the Virtual School Team. Of the 606 documents that have been signed off by the Designated Teacher/Social worker and rated by the Virtual school, 92.41% have been quality assured as Green (High Standard) PEPs, This is an increase of 7.81% on those rated green in the Autumn term. 7.59% of the PEPs were rated as amber. There are no red PEPs. Those that have not yet been signed off are within the time frame.

### **Staff and pupil anxiety and wellbeing**

- 58 A cross team working group from Education and Early Help first produced a handbook to support schools during the first lockdown. Safe happy Settled has been very well received and we updated the content in February 2021 to support children and young people returning to school.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bIL5cKQHoSiiJNM0fLP4eO63NAQOfpXI?usp=sharing>

### **Governance**

- 59 Further support for school leaders is captured through the Education Durham Governance Service. This term, during full governing body meetings, the clerking service captures strategic support and challenge through questions raised and recorded within the minutes of each meeting. This includes: the remote policy being shared and adopted by the governing body, an awareness of vulnerable pupil numbers in school and whether all pupils who were entitled to a place did attend, and how has the school's EYFS curriculum been adapted to meet the needs of pupils working and learning remotely.

### **Ofsted**

- 60 On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Ofsted carried out interim visits to schools during the autumn term to fully understand the impact of COVID-19 on schools.
- 61 From January 2021, they have been carrying out additional monitoring inspections of schools judged inadequate and requires improvement to ensure that leaders and managers are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances. These have been carried out remotely.
- 62 We have had 17 of these monitoring visits in Durham; 12 reports have been published which show that in all of these schools "leaders and

those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances.” We are awaiting publication of the remaining schools, so the verbal feedback remains confidential.

- 63 We have supported our schools in preparing for inspection by ensuring they are kept up to date with Ofsted expectations through Richard Crane’s emails to schools and in head teacher briefings. Targeted questioning of leaders during leadership adviser meetings is focused on areas that Ofsted will cover, and we have shared advice and audit documents to help leaders in their preparations. We have carried out safeguarding and website reviews to ensure all statutory requirements are in place have and Ofsted training led by the professional support and development arm of the service has taken place.

### **Recruitment**

- 64 Leadership Advisers have continued to work in partnership with Education Durham Governance Service to ensure that leadership capacity is secured across our schools and settings. During this term, we have appointed to 6 Deputy Head Teacher and 10 Head Teacher positions.
- 65 Where school leadership is requiring additional intensive support due to absence of the substantive post holder, Education Durham’s knowledge of our schools and current intelligence has supported short term provision through shared Head Teacher arrangements.

### **Partnership working with public Health**

#### **Duty Rota**

- 66 Since November, the education team has supported public health colleagues by volunteering for the duty rota to provide advice to schools, and to quality assure actions following a positive Covid 19 case. We continue to support in this way, whilst three members of the team act as single points of contact for Covid 19 education queries for the Community Hubs, schools and colleagues in other teams. In this capacity, we continue to update our knowledge in the light of the changing guidance so we can provide responses for members of the public, elected members and MPs.

### **Contribution to reporting tools**

- 67 Members of the education team have contributed to the development of the new CRM reporting tool being used by all workplace settings, including education settings. We continue to evaluate and review the information this provides for us to be able to report corporately and to the DfE. We have worked closely with PH colleagues to ensure it also

provides the detailed information we need to support schools and settings to reduce transmission.

### **Lateral Flow Device Testing**

- 68 The DfE announced its testing programme before Christmas and the DCC was very quick to recognise the significant implications for all of our schools. A successful partnership including Education, Public Health, Leisure, Health and Safety and the Talent Management team, worked successfully on advising and supporting schools and settings around plans for the return of all children from 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The need for regular on-site asymptomatic testing has now been removed. Our secondary schools have now carried out 3 tests for all consenting pupils within the first two weeks of the return. Secondary age pupils and staff now test twice weekly at home.
- 69 In addition to the support and training provided, leisure staff supported the significant workload this brought to schools. Their support and professionalism have been universally praised. Our health and safety team have supported with risk assessments, including for reducing transmission of the Kent variant. This really has been a fantastic joint effort and hugely appreciated by our schools.

### **Vaccination for Special School Staff**

- 70 We worked closely with colleagues across the authority to secure agreement to vaccinate colleagues working in special schools who provide close contact support, including support for medical conditions, for children and young people with complex needs. This has helped to build confidence amongst staff and parents as all children return to school.

### **Background papers**

None

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Not applicable

### **Finance**

Not applicable

### **Consultation**

Not applicable

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

Not applicable

### **Human Rights**

Not applicable

### **Climate Change**

Not applicable

### **Crime and Disorder**

Not applicable

### **Staffing**

Not applicable

### **Accommodation**

Not applicable

### **Risk**

Not applicable

### **Procurement**

Not applicable