



## Report to Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020

**Report of:** Executive Director, People Services

**Subject:** Update on Schools opening fully

**Author of Report:** Andrew Jones, Director of Education and Skills  
Stephen Betts, CEO, Learn Sheffield

### Summary:

All schools were partially closed from 23 March 2020 except for vulnerable children, children with EHCPs and children of key workers. From 15 June, Sheffield schools opened more widely offering provision to children in Foundation Stage 1 and 2, Year 1 and Year 6 as well as the original groups of children. Children and young people in Year 10 and Year 12 were also offered some face to face part time education. This report provides an update on the return to schools from September and the support provided during the pandemic so far.

**Type of item:** The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	<b>x</b>
Other	

### The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

The Committee is being asked to do consider the briefing paper and provide views and comments on the update.

**Category of Report:** OPEN

# **Report of the Director of Education and Skills**

## **Update on schools opening fully**

### **1. Introduction/Context**

- 1.1 The local authority has communicated regularly (often daily) with all schools and academies throughout the period of the pandemic.
- 1.2. Our planning and support for schools opening fully this term has, therefore, built on and developed the planning and support provided throughout the period of the pandemic so far.
- 1.3 Our support for schools is a whole-Council response. Here is summary of key plans and support from:
  - Public Health
  - School Transport
  - Health and Safety and Wellbeing

### **2. Public Health**

- 2.1 The PH team have supported early years, schools and University settings with planning ahead of the new academic year. This has included:
  - Continuing to provide updated Public Health guidance and information to all settings, including supporting schools to interpret and implement national guidance.
  - All settings will continue with the social protective bubble model of cohorting pupils in classes or year groups. This supports contact tracing.
  - Settings have been supported with scenario testing planning (what action to take if settings have cases, clusters or outbreaks). This has included attendance at head teacher virtual meetings arranged via Learn Sheffield (in the primary, secondary and special sectors) and individual meetings with Sheffield College, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield.
  - Working with DST and the Comms Team a Getting Back to School Safely campaign was launched on Monday. This included social media advertising and a web page written by Public Health to advise and reassure parents/carers planning their child's return to school <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/BackToSchoolSafely>
  - Each setting has a Standard Operating Procedure written jointly by PHE and the LA Public Health Team. This provides and process and plan to follow to manage cases and outbreaks.
  - PH guidance and advise has supported the development of a robust template risk assessment for schools to follow and the PH team has

provided bespoke advice to individual settings based on their particular buildings, circumstances and logistics.

- Schools will often open with staggered start and finish times. PH have advised on school transport and minimising virus transmission via the introduction of a zoned travel approach on school buses where pupils sit in designated year group seating areas. There's also been a requirement placed on schools to obtain a list of pupils who will be frequent bus travellers over the autumn term.
- Following the announcement re face coverings guidance and information has been distributed to all schools and information uploaded for parents/carers on the Getting Back to School Safely campaign.
- The LA PH team has a dedicated inbox for EYs, Schools and Universities. This is monitored 7 days a week and responses are provided across the 7 days. This inbox also is used to report positive confirmed COVID-19 cases.

2.2 A STORM phone line has now been set up and contact details will be shared with all settings. This will operate alongside the Inbox. Consideration is being given as to whether this should be available during Mon-Fri and also across the weekend. Discussions are ongoing about capacity to cover this alongside the 7 day rota that is currently in place.

### **3. SEN Transport**

3.1 We have worked closely with Transport Services, Public Health, School Leaders and Directors/Managers across the council to ensure that all appropriate steps have been taken to enable children and young people using SEN Transport to return to school on a fulltime basis from the start of the new academic year. This follows government guidance, and has been approved by colleagues in Public Health as well as IMG.

3.2 This work has included the creation of 'transport bubbles', clear advice around sanitising of hands before and after travelling, seating plans to support contact tracing, staff use of PPE and robust cleaning arrangements, as well as clear plans to respond to symptomatic pupils or where a case is confirmed.

3.3 Communications for parents/carers have been developed with the Parent/Carer Forum and SENDIASS, and sent direct to all service-users, as well as asking schools to distribute electronically to parents. In addition this has been published on the Local Offer and the PCF Facebook page, and sent to schools via the weekly email bulletin.

3.4 In addition, the bulletin has included information aimed at schools, which has also been via direct email to Special and IR Heads.

### **4. Mainstream School Buses**

4.1 We have worked closely with the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (SYPTTE), Public Health, School Leaders and

Directors/Managers across the council to ensure that the safety and capacity of school buses are maximised for the start of the new academic year. Again this follows government guidance, and has been approved by colleagues in Public Health as well as IMG.

- 4.2 This work has included gaining DfT approval to re-categorise school buses so they are no longer accessible to the general public and are instead classed as 'dedicated school transport', the provision of additional routes to ensure capacity and minimise the number of pupils using public transport where possible, and engaging with all schools (predominantly secondary) affected by transport to understand their local context and needs. Year group bubbles are supported by creating clearly identified zones for each cohort on buses, and schools are to keep a list of pupils who are likely to use each route during the autumn term – both measures support contact tracing. In addition, robust cleaning arrangements have been established, as well as clear plans to respond to symptomatic pupils or where a case is confirmed.
- 4.3 We have developed clear advice about the sanitising of hands before and after travelling, use of tissues and hand sanitiser, maintaining distancing (especially at pinch points such as bus stops), the use of face-coverings for ages 11+ (unless exempt), no food or drink to be consumed on transport, and no sharing of food or drink at any time.
- 4.4 Communications with parents/carers have been jointly developed with SYPTE, and shared with all schools to distribute to parents via the weekly schools bulletin, as well as being published online by SYPTE. In addition, the bulletin has included information aimed at schools, which has also been sent out via SchoolPoint. A 'child-friendly' version is being created and will be published shortly.

## **5. Health, Safety & Wellbeing**

- 5.1 We have produced the model risk assessment (Version 8) for Schools to adopt and amend to suit their individual setting. Once Schools have completed their risk assessment they have shared it with us for comment.
- 5.2 We have been in regular contact with Headteachers throughout the pandemic providing support and helping them with any concerns they may have.
- 5.3 In addition to the model risk assessment we have produced:-
  - A risk assessment for staff working from home
  - An individual risk assessment for staff who are shielding / BAME / pregnant / extremely clinically vulnerable / clinically vulnerable
  - A cleaning guidance for Schools
  - A guidance for Administering first aid, administration of medicines and providing intimate care in Schools
  - A risk assessment for support staff (based at Moorfoot) visiting Schools with SEN
  - A risk assessment for support staff (based at Moorfoot) visiting SEN pupils in the Home

## **6. Free school meals**

- 6.1 A significant challenge during the pandemic lockdown was ensuring the consistent provision of food to children eligible for free school meals. There are a number of catering providers operating within the city, and there were also a number of schemes that were available to schools. An audit was conducted in May which showed that almost all schools in the city had signed up to the National free school meals voucher scheme which was launched during the Sheffield schools Easter holiday. However, there were significant operational and delivery issues relating to the National scheme. So, where as almost all schools had signed up to the scheme, not all successfully managed to issue vouchers from the scheme to parents and families.
- 6.2 Prior to the national scheme being launched, schools and their catering providers had used a variety of approaches, including: issuing locally purchased vouchers; making individual food grab bags for parents and families to collect; making hampers with sufficient food in for the week. All of these arrangements were paid for from school budgets. The national voucher scheme was paid for directly by the government. The value of a national voucher is £15 per child per week, which is slightly above the cost of five days of school meals. This recognised the fact that parents cannot bulk buy in the way that catering providers can.
- 6.3 We encouraged schools to use the national voucher scheme for a variety of reasons: it is fully funded by national government, it is funded above the level of a regular free school meal, and vouchers are a more resilient way of getting a food resource to families. Initially, the range of supermarkets included in the scheme was limited, but was extended to include Aldi and McColls.
- 6.4 Even where schools successfully registered and issued the national free school vouchers, some of them continue to provide food over and above the voucher. Watercliffe Meadow Primary School, for example, issued the national voucher to all its eligible children, and on top of that also issued over 100 hampers to families each week, with varying ingredients, week by week, and recipe ideas to go with the ingredients.
- 6.5 Schools that were successful in issuing the national vouchers continued with local arrangements, which included local vouchers, hampers and grab bags. We lobbied hard to our representatives at the DFE about school holidays, and also the longer six week summer holiday. We highlighted to the DFE that food poverty and hunger is likely to be cumulative.

## **7. Position last month**

- 7.1 All schools in Sheffield have opened successfully for all children. We have been in regular contact with schools. We have been informed of a number of parents who are refusing to return their children to school – some on

medical grounds and some through not feeling that schools are safe. Attendance officers are contacting any families in this position to explore concerns and to provide relevant advice and support. There has been an increase in the number of children whose parents have decided to electively home educate (EHE) them.

- 7.2 Attendance figures are collected by the DfE and not the Council. The Council accesses the DfE portal in order to determine attendance and, so far, attendance in all types of school is lower than the norm at this time of the year. Sheffield secondary school attendance is in line with the currently national average but attendance for primary and special schools is below the current national average.

## **8. Learn Sheffield COVID Recovery Festival**

- 8.1 Learn Sheffield organised a COVID Recovery Festival which took place across the month of September. This is comprised of a series of events throughout September to support the COVID recovery work that is happening across the city. All of the sessions in this festival were held online and available for participating schools to attend and also recorded so that colleagues can access the sessions whenever it is most convenient. It is hoped that this will also enable colleagues to use the content in their own leadership meetings and staff training.

- 8.2 The programme of events is available on the Learn Sheffield website: <https://www.learnsheffield.co.uk/Training-and-Events/COVID-Recovery-Festival>. The range of sessions covered four themes: Curriculum, Leadership, Mental Health and Sheffield and the contributors are a mixture of national and local speakers.

- 8.3 The reflections on the sessions will contribute to the development of a COVID Recovery Plan which will outline the key areas of COVID related work for Learn Sheffield over the coming months.

## **9. Issues**

- 9.1 Despite all schools opening for all children this term, there has been a rising number of children and adults in schools who have contracted COVID19 in their home or community settings. As symptoms are not always apparent, these children and adults have worked in schools, sometimes exposing other children and adults to the virus. All schools in this position have received help, support and guidance from Public Health England (PHE) and the Local Public Health Team in Sheffield City Council (SCC PH). Clearly, any confirmed or reported cases tend to be unnerving for children, parents and school staff alike. Many cases have been openly reported in the local media.

- 9.2 Schools have reported issues in being able to report cases to PHE. This is largely due to capacity issues. Schools have, alternatively, contacted SCC PH who have, instead, provided advice. Where cases have been confirmed this has resulted in children and adults needing to go home to self-isolate. We continue to gather information about home learning work provided but

schools have not yet been able to take full advantage of the new DfE laptop scheme which provides laptops for children working at home where they do not have sufficient “kit” at home to do this. Another issue that we are watching is that these children are self-isolating at home – not just working at home, as before the Summer. This means that they cannot have any direct contact with other professionals providing support e.g. CAMHS.

9.3 There has been an issue with access to tests for those in schools. Because of increased demand for tests it has proven harder to secure test appointments for symptomatic children and adults alike. This, potentially, means that children are at home for longer than they need to be (if they ultimately test negative) and, also that adults working in schools awaiting in tests are not able to work. There is a risk that the testing situation will lead to significant levels in the closure of school bubbles caused by staff absence rather than positive cases. Whilst some level of this is inevitable the testing issues have the potential to transform this quickly into a significant problem.

## **10. Home learning and catch up programmes**

10.1 Schools are now under a duty to ensure that children working at home, by virtue of self-isolation, receive quality provision that is commensurate with that which would have been delivered in school. The DfE have introduced a new laptops scheme designed to provide devices to children working at home who do not have sufficient kit to work effectively. This is currently being administered and while no orders have been completed yet, schools have been promised a quick turnaround once orders are initiated. An imminent review of lessons learned for schools will look at the adequacy of provision for children at home.

10.2 The DfE is planning a national catch up programme. Nationally £1bn has been set aside for this. £350m has been ringfenced for a national programme of 1:1 tutoring which schools can access for their children provided they commit 25% of the cost. The remaining £650m is being allocated directly to schools for them to provide individualised support. This is early days for this programme but we anticipate that schools will benchmark where children currently are in order to plan for personalised programmes. Individual school allocations have yet to be agreed but Sheffield’s overall allocation is c£5m to be used in the current academic year up to June 2021.

## **11. Summary**

11.1 Schools have made substantial and significant plans to open fully in September and school leaders report positively about the positive way that pupils and staff have returned. However, there are a number of variables some of which are entirely unpredictable. It is currently very challenging as schools navigate new public health systems and significant challenges in the availability of testing, as well as dealing with cases of infection while, at the same time, endeavouring to maintain the confidence of the children, the parents and the communities that they serve.

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