

## Children, Education and Skills Sub Committee

Thursday, 25 March 2021

Present:

Councillors M Thirlaway (Chair)  
Councillors T Brady, J Cassidy, N Huscroft, M Madden,  
A Newman, P Oliver, E Parker-Leonard, S Phillips and M  
Wilson.

Mrs M Ord and Rev M Vine.

Apologies: Councillor S Brockbank

### **CES35 Appointment of substitutes**

There were no substitute members appointed.

### **CES36 To receive any declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **CES37 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

### **CES38 An overview of Children and Young People's Mental Health**

The Sub-Committee received a report on the impact of Covid 19 on children and young people's mental health.

Prior to the outbreak of coronavirus, the Local Authority had experienced an increase in the proportion of children and young people presenting with social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) issues. Between 2017/18 and 2019/20 there had been a 45% increase in the proportion of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) issued with SEMH as a primary need, alongside an increase in the proportion of children and young people presenting with emerging SEMH needs.

The government were committed to significantly expand mental health support for children and young people, recognising that young people had been uniquely impacted by the pandemic.

NHS research suggested that 1 in 6 young people might now have a mental health problem, up from 1 in 9 in 2017. It was anticipated that the number of mental health support teams in schools and colleges would grow from 59 to 400 by April 2023, supporting nearly 3 million children. The ambition was that mental health support teams would work in a variety of ways, including enabling children to text their local mental health support team, with a health

professional responding within an hour during the school day offering them advice, or providing families with tips on how to spot that the children and young people were struggling with their mental health.

During the pandemic, Local Authority officers and school leaders had maintained a focus on monitoring pupils' mental health and wellbeing and recognised that many families had experienced raised levels of anxiety and to try to capture some emerging issues they completed a staff survey in February 2021. The outcomes were a snapshot of the views of staff in schools at that point and responses were received from 60% of schools. From this sample, 77% of responses were from Primary and First Schools and this was before the wider re-opening of schools on 8 March 2021 so more issues might arise as pupils returned to school.

From the survey findings, 96% of schools felt Covid19 had a detrimental impact on the mental health of children and young people. It was also felt that children and young people were resilient and would overcome the issues they were experiencing with the right nurturing and support.

Anxiety, loneliness, relationship issues and poor sleep ranked the highest in terms of negative impact. Free text responses suggested that the first national lockdown and period of school closure had less of a negative impact than ongoing periods of isolation due to positive cases, contact tracing and then self isolation.

Young people had spent long periods of time on computers and devices and missed social interaction with peers at lunch and break times. Other issues identified were lack of motivation, lack of resilience, more extreme behaviour and frustration and not being allowed to socialise beyond the bubble.

In terms of the strong link between physical and mental health, restrictions placed upon schools and clubs to prevent the spread of the infection had meant that children and young people had no access to community clubs and sports facilities, no after school clubs and activity groups, no access to competition, limitations on team sports and physical education activities in school.

Of the 114 Fair Access Referrals from September 2020 to the end of January 2021, 85 students had been identified as having mental health which had deteriorated since lockdown 2020 or identified as their mental health being the same, 29 students did not have a Covid mental health question completed and there were no students with improved mental health. This equated to just over half of students considered as part of Fair Access protocols, having experienced a decline in their mental health.

For some children in care, Covid had a negative impact on family time and contact sessions with some reporting a breakdown in relationships with siblings. A number of young people who still accessed school during lockdown found it beneficial and some were more relaxed with foster carers having spent more time at home.

A number of children with special educational needs had experienced anxiety over transport and getting to school and some were physically upset due to lack of access and felt bored and lonely not being able to contact friends.

The positive impacts included increased awareness and discussion about mental health and wellbeing. Increased family time had benefits on behaviour, greater time to focus on vulnerable pupils, strengthened relationships between home and school and some less confident pupils had responded well to online learning.

At the start of the academic year, Local Authority officers, working alongside staff from Moorgate, established a Covid recovery programme for a cohort of Year 11 pupils all displaying mental health issues and with poor school attendance in the previous academic year. Of the original 33 students identified, 31 remained on the programme and were in receipt of mental health support.

Wellbeing for Education Return was a national initiative funded by the Department of Education and Department of Health and Social Care to provide tools to enable schools staff to protect and strengthen the whole school's resilience to wellbeing and mental health impacts of COVID 19. All schools in North Tyneside had accessed training for delivery of these materials and there had been positive feedback on the content with 97% of delegates feeling that they could cope with mental health in schools.

In addition, Local Authority officers began the first phase of a pilot project to achieve an ambition to train all staff and pupils from North Tyneside schools in mental health awareness, with two staff trained as mental health first aiders from each school. The intention behind this universal offer, was to ensure there was a shared language and understanding of the impact of poor mental ill-health. Thus, enabling all staff to provide appropriate responses to all pupils at the point of need. This was intended to underpin more specialist support from 'Thrive' practitioners. There remained ongoing access to: 'Kooth', an online counselling support for young people with mental health issues and the Educational Psychology team who were involved in the project and would manage the critical incidents. The ambition was to roll out to train pupils in mental health awareness so children with mental health pressures would be better able to articulate and share with peers their concerns and receive a strong network of support.

The Mental Health First Aid Project would offer more time for teaching about mental and physical health and well being and more support for parents and more staff would also be involved in mental health advice, guidance and signposting.

The mental health advocates from each school were also part of an online forum which met on a regular basis to share resolutions and discuss best practice.

Members considered if the impact on children's mental health would be long term and it was noted that the vast majority of children with nurturing and care would bounce back and be resilient but young people would continue to experience self isolation due to positive Covid cases for some time to come and mental health support measures would continue to be offered.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director of Education for the informative report and for attendance at the meeting.

## **CES39            Post 16 Education**

The Sub-Committee received an update on participation and the options available in post 16 education, employment and training in North Tyneside and the changes that had occurred during 2020-21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was a requirement of the September Guarantee that a suitable offer of education or training was made to all young people aged 16-17 years. In 2020, the impact of Covid-19 meant that this guarantee became even more important with a focus of the Authority's Connexion Service being to work with schools to ensure that over 2000 young people due to leave school in July 2020 had an early recorded 'intended destination' with 'offers of learning' being secured as quickly as possible.

A key focus for the team was those wanting to progress to Apprenticeships and employment with training; expected to be impacted by the pandemic, as well as vulnerable young people including those at risk of being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), Care Leavers and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The Local Authority continued to track the participation and destinations of all young people aged 16-17 to ensure that they continued to receive appropriate provision of education and training.

In January 2021 in North Tyneside, 94.2% of young people were in Education, Employment or Training (EET), 2.8% were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), for 1.4% destination was unknown, 84.6% were in Full Time Education, 6.8% in Apprenticeships and 2.4% in Work Based Learning.

North Tyneside compared favourably with other North East Local Authority areas and the national average when comparing participation in EET and NEET Rates. In addition, participation in Apprenticeships amongst 16 and 17 year olds, despite a small decline this year, was significantly higher than the national and regional average despite apprenticeship starts falling in North Tyneside since the introduction of Apprenticeship Reforms in 2017 and 2018.

In terms of the destinations, the majority of young people leaving at Year 11 continued into school sixth forms or attended further education colleges. The Local Authority were currently engaging with 31 school pupils with bespoke pathway vocational and skills support who might fall into the NEET category.

The Government had introduced a number of measures to boost job creation including the Kickstart Scheme, Skills for Jobs Plan and flexible Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

The Kickstart Scheme was a £2 billion fund to create 6-month work placements aimed at those aged 16-24 who were on universal credit and were deemed to be at risk of long-term unemployment. Funding available for each job would cover 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week, plus the associated employer National Insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions.

The 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years had been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic with regular changes in restrictions and guidance meaning that all providers had to adapt their offer to provide a mix of classroom and remote learning and to introduce new health and safety measures including Covid Secure classrooms and buildings and the establishment of Lateral Flow Testing for learners and staff. Providers had responded positively maintaining a broad range of provision for young people and had worked in partnership to ensure the young people of North Tyneside maintained their learning.

Thirteen schools offered post 16 provision in North Tyneside including 6 maintained schools, 3 academies and four special schools. In the main sixth forms offered A and AS

level qualifications, alongside a smaller number of BTEC vocational qualifications in areas such as health and social care.

A significant number of Year 11 leavers in North Tyneside went on to study in a Further Education college. In the main students progressed to Tyne Coast College or Newcastle College.

Tyne Coast College offered a diverse curriculum for 16-18's and adult learners which included vocational education, apprenticeships and A Levels.

The College's vocational education provision offered learners more practical skills, knowledge and experience with a curriculum developed in a variety of sub brands including the North East Sports Academy, TMC Construction Centre and the Ignite Centre for Engineering and Innovation which delivered a comprehensive range of training solutions in engineering and science, technology and maths disciplines to increase local skills for the manufacturing sectors operating across the north east.

Newcastle College's Energy Academy had entered into a Strategic Partnership with the Port of Blyth which was additional, and complementary, to the established education and training provision at the Energy Academy in Wallsend, in effect creating two educational portals into the Energy Sector, one in Wallsend, and one in Blyth.

The medium to long term impact of the Covid pandemic on young people and providers was not yet known, but expected to be considerable and policy makers and education providers would need to adapt their responses to respond to these opportunities and challenges accordingly.

The amount of 16-18 funding available from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) continued to represent a challenge for providers, both in terms of the amount of funding per learner and the system for obtaining additional funding (lagged learners) to expand and deliver new programmes. As the numbers of apprenticeship and employment opportunities were limited due to Covid-19 this funding pressure was only expected to increase.

Despite the success in North Tyneside in mitigating some impacts, the downturn in apprenticeship starts, particularly for 16-18 year olds had been significant since the introduction of the Apprenticeship reforms, and the impact of Covid-19 was expected to see a further decline in Apprenticeship starts in 2020-21. Apprenticeships were at risk of not being seen as a viable alternative for school leavers, and as the number of starts continued to diminish, more needed to be done to ensure this option post 16 remained viable.

The reduction in approved apprenticeship standards at level 2 was also impacting now on post 16 apprenticeship starts and would further impact moving forward. The dismissal by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education of any further submissions by the trailblazer group for a business and administration level 2 apprenticeship standard, further removed what had been the realistic starting point for many young people on a journey into higher level learning and better paid employment. More than 160 "duplicate qualifications" at level 3 and below had their funding removed from August 2020 – including 76 BTECs. It was part of an aim to remove "poor quality post-16 qualifications" and followed consultation to decide the future of over 12,000 vocational qualifications at level 3 and below. The government's aim was to make A-levels, T-levels and apprenticeships the "gold standard" option for young people after they had taken their GCSE's from 2020.

These changes had raised some concerns amongst providers regarding a reduction in choice for learners and removing viable routes for more vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. There were also concerns that many providers were not ready to deliver T-Levels from August 2020 and that due to Covid-19 the availability of work placements had become even more challenging.

It was noted that information on employers' provision of training in the new Kickstart scheme was thin on detail and Members welcomed the Council's work to encourage apprenticeship routes and to provide purposeful work placements.

The Chair thanked Officers for the informative report and thanked the Assistant Director of Education for attendance at the meeting.