

Children, Education and Skills Sub-Committee

9 September 2021

Present: Councillor M Thirlaway (Chair)
Councillor J Cassidy, HP Johnson, C Johnston, M Madden,
J Montague, S Phillips and M Wilson.

Rev M Vine - Church Representative

Apologies: Councillors P Oliver and E Parker-Leonard

CES9/21 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members

CES10/21 Declarations of Interest

Councillor M Madden declared a registerable personal interest in Item 7 Poverty Intervention Fund as she is a member of the Wallsend Memorial Hall and a Director of the People's Advice Service.

CES11/21 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 July 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CES12/21 Children's Readiness for School Response Report and Action Plan

The recommendations of the Children, Education and Skills Sub-Group had been accepted by Cabinet and the Action Plan set out in Appendix 1 had been approved by Cabinet on 6 April 2021.

The Committee considered an update on the Action Plan and in the course of discussion raised the following points:

- The Action Plan proposed that further communication was undertaken with early years providers and settings to ensure the respective Early Help Assessment and early years funding and resources processes and requirements were understood. The Early Years Manager now attended the Early Years and Primary Network meetings, working with the school improvement team to ensure that early year's providers and schools have up to date information and guidance around any new training available or changes to legislation. This has also helped to improve the

communication systems from the local authority to schools and private nurseries, whilst providing a networking opportunity for schools and early years settings to access peer support.

A question was raised regarding take up and it was confirmed that there had been an increase in Early Help Assessments from partners during the lockdowns and that debt was an issue for parents and a clothing and foodbank had been set up in the Riverside Centre.

- It was noted that across Children's Services there had been a significant increase in demand due to the impact of poverty, debt, neglect, family breakdown, mental health issues and substance misuse and this was reflected in the child protection statistics and an increase in the complexity of cases.
- Pilot sessions were to be mainstreamed on both the Ready For School (RFS) and Children's Centre Facebook pages, with the option to join virtual group sessions or face to face options, dependent on Covid restrictions.
Parenting sessions were to be offered to all new parents attending the Ready for School Centre on a rolling basis.
These sessions were also now available to any parent or professional via the Children's Centre and RFS face book pages. The 0-19 team also had access to the modules and could use them with families, to enable a consistent approach.
It was confirmed that attendance at these sessions had increased.
- Reference was made to the external evaluation of the Ready for School offer which had begun in partnership with St John's University in York and would help inform the further development of the offer across the Borough.
It was noted that once completed the evaluation could be shared with the Sub-Committee at the end of 2022.

The Chair thanked the Senior Manager Prevention and Early Help for the informative update and for attendance at the meeting.

CES13/21 Education Update – Covid Recovery

The Sub-Committee considered a report on the academic year 2020/2021, the work of Local Authority Officers in their support of schools, and the impact seen in pupils' attainment and wellbeing because of Covid.

The academic year 2020/2021 was beset by further disruption to pupils' education, because of Covid. High rates of outbreak within schools and repeated periods of enforced isolation led to an extended period of closure in the spring term 2021 which required schools to move to on-line learning at haste.

Previous periods of lock down and isolation had enabled most schools to hone their approaches to home learning and ensure that all pupils had access to appropriate devices and data. The facilitation of regular 'teach meets' by Local Authority officers and the support of the Research School and 'EdTech demonstrator schools programme ensured good practice was shared.

Continuing high levels of infection during the summer term, particularly within the 10-14 age range led to further disruption for pupils. By the time schools began summer holidays over half were deemed in outbreak.

Despite the challenges that Covid had brought, Local Authority Officers continued to work with schools to support recovery and to tackle the priorities outlined within the Ambition for Education document to improve outcomes for all pupils.

The full extent of the impact of two interrupted academic years of education was yet to be realised.

The report also included an update on Attendance, Transition to another phase of education, Curriculum and Assessment, Interventions, Ofsted Inspections and Personal Development.

The Sub-Committee discussed the issues raised in the report and in the course of discussion raised the following points:

- Members highlighted concerns about how children could catch up with work that had been covered but had not been understood via online learning. It was noted that whilst some schools had robust gap analysis systems in place and had been proactive in assessing pupils' attainment throughout the pandemic, others had been less successful in their efforts. A 'Different Summer 2020', primary documents, had been created by North Tyneside Local Authority Advisers and serving practitioners and were based on National Curriculum programmes of study for key stages 1 and 2. They were designed to support subject leaders to plan their curriculum in a more targeted way, by focusing on those objectives that could be delivered remotely and those that required face to face teaching for optimum impact. They were provided free to all schools. These were subsequently extended to include autumn and spring term curriculum plans. Extremely positive feedback was received by those schools who adopted them, with teachers reporting that they gave them a clearer understanding of progression in subjects across year groups and phases. These recovery documents would continue to be promoted in the autumn term to support transition into the next year group.
- Catch up funding had been used in a range of ways as schools saw fit. For example, some did after school booster classes and others did pre-teaching and follow up sessions. The national tutoring programme had been used by some schools with mixed responses: for some it had engaged pupils more and others found it restrictive in what it offered. There had been a similar picture with schools who used the academic mentor programme, the success of which very much depended on the quality of the mentor. Members stated that it had been an unequal pandemic which had affected less affluent young people who had fewer online devices and IT equipment and further funding for catch up was required from the Government.
- Reference was made to 'TeachMeets' and it was explained that in September 2020, the secondary team had produced and shared a detailed paper for Blended Learning. It drew together best practice internationally and evidence and research to support the rationale and development of schools own Blended Learning policies and approaches. This pre-empted subsequent government and Ofsted guidance for remote learning. Emerging and best practice was shared at 'TeachMeets' which were

run by the secondary team. These were virtual sessions where classroom practitioners shared something which worked well for them and attendees were able to ask practical and developmental questions. This has developed into a professional collaborative enquiry group of around 50 teachers from across North Tyneside - a lively and innovative group, which would continue into the forthcoming academic year. Members welcomed this innovative approach and noted that 'TeachMeets' sessions were recorded and could be accessed by practitioners via google.

- To facilitate remote learning, schools were able to access devices for their disadvantaged pupils, with support from the Local Authority officer team and access to DfE and locally funded schemes. For example: one High school had devices in place for every pupil by October 2020 and was able to transition to live learning seamlessly in January 2021. Educationalists in North Tyneside had embraced the opportunity to develop their approaches to blended learning and had plans to bring the best elements of learning in an era of Covid to everyday practice. Google Classroom to support independent learning had been an impactful development.
- The mental health pilot project, delivered on the Mental Health First Aid England plan, had produced some interesting results. Fifteen schools took part in the first tranche of training for universal mental health awareness training. They completed: audits, surveys, accessed training to increase their staff understanding of mental health and created action plans for improvement. Outcomes from the surveys completed by children and young people, parents and school staff showed; an increase in awareness of different types of mental health issues, a better understanding of identifying emerging needs and being able to signpost to appropriate support. Mental Health Literacy had improved markedly in a 6 month period. In each of the 15 schools there were 3 or more mental health first aid trained adults and 5 further adults who had completed mental health awareness training. The schools met at a network meeting each month facilitated by Local Authority Officers to support and challenge each other to improve and to share best practice. The second and third cohorts of schools to complete the project had been identified and would start the process in the Autumn term 2021.
Members welcomed the mental health pilot project in schools and reference was made to work on a mental health strategy which would focus on three strands – how do you take care of yourself, how do you help others emotional wellbeing and we will take care of you.

The Chair thanked the School Improvement Officer Teaching Learning and Curriculum, Secondary for the informative report and for attendance at the meeting.

CES14/21 Poverty Intervention Fund Update

The Sub-Committee considered a report on the use and spend of the Poverty Intervention Fund.

The purpose of the Fund was to help to alleviate the impact of poverty on families and individuals across North Tyneside with particular emphasis on children, by providing support to those who needed it.

On 21 September 2020, Cabinet had agreed the first priorities and initiatives for the Fund. These were to deliver the Fund in a phased approach with the first phase focussed on the following priorities:

- for children – focusing on the key impact which living in poverty has in relation to their experience at school
- for older people – focusing on the key impact of not taking up full benefit entitlement
- for families with children – focusing on the key impact of not being able to afford the essentials of clothing for school and food during school holidays (where they do not have access to free school meals).

The Committee considered an update on progress on the following initiatives in the 2020/2021 financial year:

- Poverty Proofing the School Day (for children)
- benefit advice and support for older residents (for older people)
- school appropriate clothing (for families with children)
- holiday food (for families with children)
- Food for older residents (for older people)

£172,755 had been allocated from the Poverty Intervention Fund for Poverty Proofing the School Day in order to address the impacts of poverty felt by children and young people at school.

The Programme was run by Children North East and delivered through schools and sought to better understand what poverty looks like from a child and young person's perspective. Each school involved was fully supported to be able to put in place an action plan to alleviate this in the school setting and to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by children who live in poverty.

Funding the programme through the Poverty Intervention Fund meant that every school in the borough was able to take part and there was a consistent experience for children and young people.

Successful outcomes for the programme included more equity of experience, opportunity and learning outcomes for pupils who live in poverty. Where the programme had been delivered there had also been improvements in relation to mental health and wellbeing amongst children and young people. Schools had implemented actions such as free musical instrument tuition for all pupils, supplying bus passes, alternatives to non-uniform days for fund-raising, not sending debt letters home with pupils and challenging staff over whether asking pupils to write about their holidays or presents was appropriate.

Members acknowledged that one of the biggest impacts for schools was a cultural shift. One school told evaluators that previously, they had done things without 'necessarily being aware of what the impact on disadvantaged pupils would be', but that after the programme, they 'now considered the impact first'.

The programme would run through all of the 2021/2022 academic year to ensure that no school was disadvantaged due to the impact of Covid.

£253,845 had been allocated from the Poverty Intervention Fund to support families with the costs of school clothing – uniform, coats and shoes.

Part of the funding was used to provide £45 directly to families for every pupil in receipt of free school meals due to low income. This was being provided through a locally managed scheme where vouchers were provided for parents and carers to be able to purchase the clothing for school. Vouchers of £20 per pupil had been provided for use at the eight school uniform suppliers across the borough (for branded uniform items) and vouchers of £25 per pupil have been provided for use in supermarkets which supply school clothing.

In June 2020 there were 6225 families in receipt of free school meals and this number had now increased to 7025 families.

Additional access to school clothing over and above the £45 per pupil had also been provided for families in need via the Community School Clothing Scheme. This was able to be accessed through schools and work was undertaken with schools to identify those in need.

£200,000 of the Poverty Intervention Fund was allocated to provide support for families to meet the costs of food during school holidays. During the October 2020 half term school holiday a trial saw five providers delivering food and activities to children on free school meals and through this, over 1,700 meals were delivered either face to face or remotely through hamper provision. The total cost of this activity was £6,646.

In November 2020, the government announced the COVID Winter Grant which was to support those most in need by providing support over the winter to children and households who were experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, poverty, where they were impacted by the ongoing public health emergency and where alternative sources of assistance might be unavailable. By using this funding for holiday food, it was possible to redirect the remainder of the amount originally allocated for this purpose in the Poverty Intervention Fund to extend the school clothing scheme and also to provide funding for food for older people over winter.

The Government recently announced additional funding to local authorities to provide for holiday activities via the Holiday Activity Fund. North Tyneside's allocation of this fund was £788k. This holiday provision was for children who were entitled to benefits-related free school meals.

Work was currently underway to develop the model for the delivery of school holiday activities across North Tyneside in line with the criteria for the Government funding. This would also contribute to addressing the policy priorities identified for the PIF.

In relation to the Benefit take-up campaign for older residents which was delivered by Age UK and Citizens Advice, Members asked how the Council would ensure that the organisations were giving value for money and it was confirmed that quarterly monitoring meetings were held with the organisations.

Reference was made to families with in work poverty who were struggling but who did not qualify for free school meals and it was noted that due to pressures on schools in relation to the pandemic and school lockdowns, the free school meals criteria had been used but going forward the Council would be working closely with schools who would have the capacity to identify those additional families in need.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.

The Chair thanked the Senior Manager Participation, Advocacy and Engagement for the informative report and for attendance at the meeting.

