

## **Meeting: Children Education and Skills Sub Committee**

**Date: 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

**Title: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education since the start of the new academic year September 2021**

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**Wards affected: All**

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. To provide members of the subcommittee with an overview of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and education, including the number of outbreaks from September 2021 and an update on the vaccination programme in schools.

### **2. Introduction**

#### **Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children and Young People**

- 2.1. As highlighted in the recently published report the 'Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and socio-economic inequalities in North Tyneside', children and young people have been disproportionately impacted in terms of missed education and social interaction.
- 2.2. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was already a significant gap in educational attainment between children living in deprived areas and their peers within North Tyneside. Many children experienced digital exclusion and were unable to access remote learning as families did not have laptops or internet access. The disruption to school-based learning during the pandemic is thought to have further widened that gap.

- 2.3. Across the North East, the learning loss for primary school pupils throughout the year was 2.8 months, which increased to 3.3 months for secondary school pupils. Nationally, pupils in schools with high take up of free school meals experienced the largest learning loss, which has likely widened the attainment gap.
- 2.4. According to the Children's Commissioner's 2020 report Childhood in the Time of COVID, two in five (40%) children in low-income families had insufficient desk space at home to undertake their schoolwork during the first national lockdown of the pandemic, while between 1.14 – 1.78 million children had no access to a computer or tablet.
- 2.5. Evidence from Childhood in the time of COVID suggests that, nationally, 70-80% of parents whose children had an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) said their mental health had declined and 54% said their physical health had declined during the pandemic.

### **National policy changes from September 2021**

- 2.6. As the Government moved to step 4 of the roadmap in July, a new phase of continued caution came into operation to manage the risks of COVID-19.
- 2.7. Since the beginning of the new academic year in September 2021 the national and local priority is to protect time in face-to-face education, minimise disruption and ensure the response to COVID-19 is proportionate to risk to children and young people. The risk of severe illness in children and young people is low, however in contrast there are significant harms associated with missed education.
- 2.8. Self-isolation guidance changed on 16 August and children below the age of 18 years and 6 months are **not** required to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19. Close contacts are now advised to take a PCR test but can remain in school as long as they do not return a positive result or display symptoms.

### **Operational changes for schools for the new academic year**

- 2.9. New education guidance was issued to schools with a contingency framework outlining the principles of outbreak management that education settings must have in place for the new academic year.
- 2.10. Education settings are no longer directed to maintain “bubbles” or for staff or pupils in secondary schools to wear facemasks, but the following control measures are maintained:
  - Ensure good hygiene for everyone.
  - Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes.
  - Keep occupied spaces well ventilated.
  - Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- 2.11. Education settings are no longer responsible for contact tracing for single positive of COVID-19 cases in their settings, but they must notify the local authority if they reach

thresholds for an outbreak and have up to date risk assessments in place, in line with DfE guidance.

- 2.12. The definition of an outbreak for different settings is outlined below:
- For special schools, residential/boarding school/holiday camp settings and settings that operate with 20 or fewer children, pupils, students and staff at any one time:
    - 2 or more children, pupil, students and staff who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period
  - For other settings:
    - 10% or more of children, pupils, students or staff (approximately) who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period
    - 5 children, pupil or staff or more who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period
- 2.13. Lateral flow testing was encouraged for all school staff and for secondary age pupils before they returned to school in September and it continues to be encouraged twice weekly.
- 2.14. Local authorities, Directors of Public Health and Health Protection Teams continue to be responsible for managing localised outbreaks and providing support and advice to education and childcare settings.

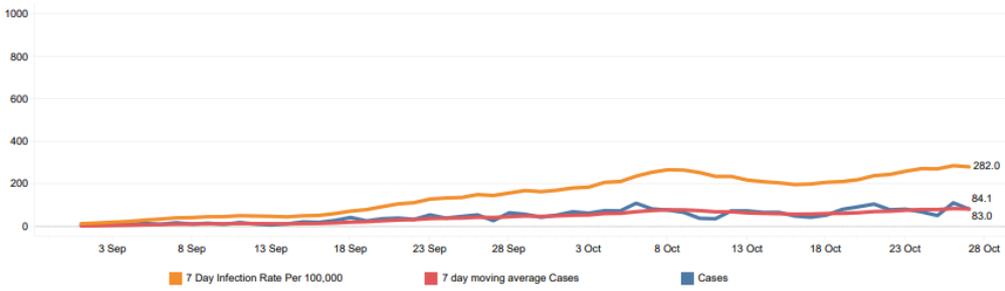
### **Infection rates and outbreaks since the start of the new academic year**

- 2.15. Since the beginning of the autumn term there have been a total of 30 outbreaks in North Tyneside education settings, as notified to the local Outbreak Control Team. Of these outbreaks 13 were in the Coast locality, 5 in the North West, 2 in Central and 10 in the South West.
- 2 in first schools
  - 14 in primary schools
  - 3 in middle schools
  - 7 in secondary schools
  - 4 in special schools
- 2.16. In the same time period last year there were 22 schools in outbreak.
- 2.17. The number of cases of COVID-19 in children and young people under 19 years is 3,448 compared with 479 same time period last year (data as of end of October 2021)
- 2.18. As can be seen clearly in Figure 1 the trends show that rates are far higher across all age groups, compared with the same time last year. At the end of October, the overall North Tyneside rate was 743 per 100,000 compared with 282 per 100,000 last year. The rate has started to decline since October half term.
- 2.19. Figure 2 shows that the 7-day infection rate per 100,000 is far higher across all school age groups than the borough's overall rate, compared with the same time period last year. For the 10-14 age group the rate is 2,573.6 per 100,000 compared with 320.7 per 100,000 last year.

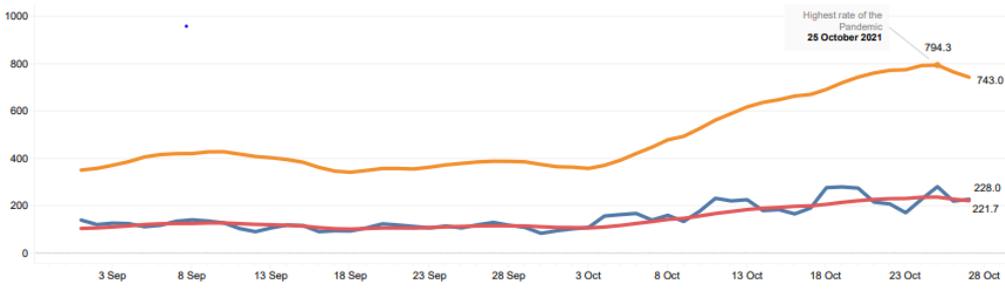
**Figure 1 : Cases and rates across North Tyneside (all ages)**

**Cases & Rates**

September 2020 - October 2020



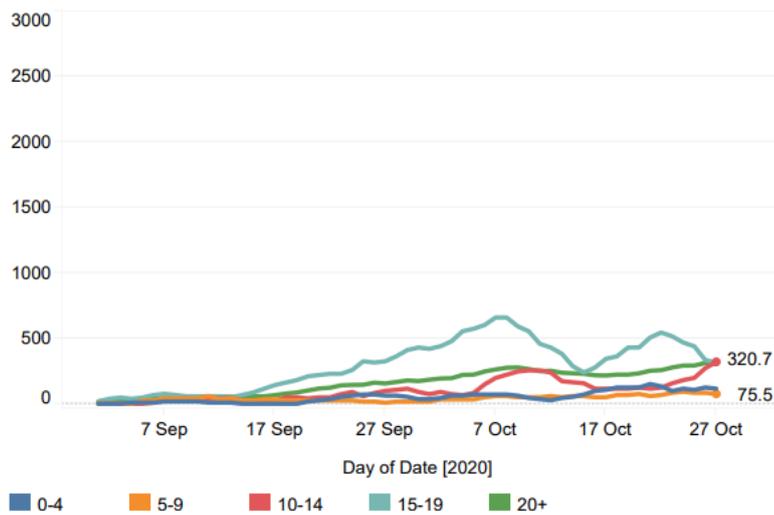
September 2021 - October 2021



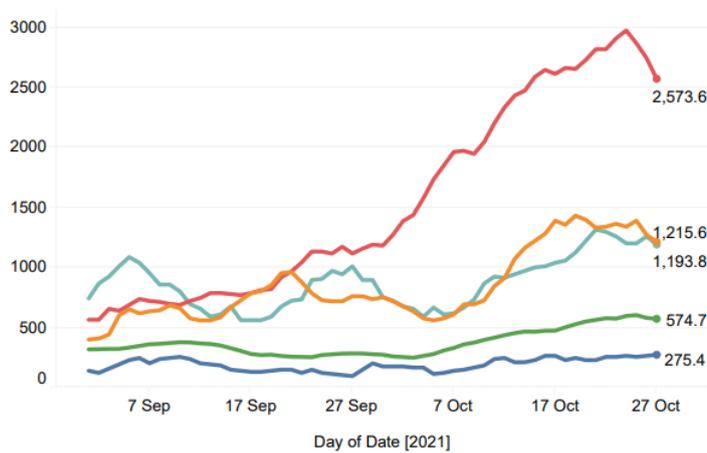
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**Figure 2: 7-day infection rate per 100,000**

Sept 2020 - Oct 2020 '0-19' 7 day infection rate per 100,000



Sept 2021 - Oct 2021 '0-19' 7 day infection rate per 100,000



- 2.20. The North Tyneside rates reflect national infection levels which have also been rising since the end of the summer. There are a few possible interacting factors which may explain the rise.
- The UK started its vaccination programme earlier than many countries and may now see the effects of vaccine waning. This is the reason for the current booster programme.
  - Some vaccines are less effective at preventing the onward transmission of Delta than other vaccines, though they are still highly effective at preventing serious disease.
  - The UK removed all restrictions while some countries have retained some measures.
  - The UK began vaccinating school age children later than some other countries.
- 2.21. Despite the higher number of cases in the 0-19 age group far fewer children have been impacted and had to miss school due to the changes in self-isolation requirements.
- 2.22. A small number of schools have had larger outbreaks and have been supported by the Council's Outbreak Control Team to manage the outbreak and help the school with communications to parents. In these instances, parents have been advised to obtain PCR tests for their children if they are in a year group with many positive cases. Schools have deep cleaned their premises and health and safety risk assessments have been reviewed.

#### **Additional short term public health measures from 1 November 2021**

- 2.23. In response to current infection rate the Director of Public Health and Assistant Director of Education jointly issued some additional short term recommendations prior to the October half term for all education settings to consider implementing on return on 1 November, with the aim of reducing the spread of infection, bringing cases down, and minimising the risk of further disruption to education.
- 2.24. Recommendations to be implemented from 1 November for all education settings include:
- All adults encouraged to wear a face covering in communal areas
  - All adults encouraged to participate in twice weekly asymptomatic LFT testing\*
  - All adults and pupils encouraged to follow national guidance if they are a close contact of a positive case and access a PCR test\*
  - All adults who are a household contact of a positive case and are exempt from isolation to test daily for 7 days with an LFT (from the date symptoms started or if asymptomatic from the date the person in the household tested positive)\*
  - Careful consideration given to whether educational visits and residential trips should go ahead
  - Consideration be given to whether open days or events could move to a virtual format
  - Additional attention given to ventilation, cleaning and respiratory and hand hygiene

In addition to the measures above for secondary school settings the following have also been recommend:

- All pupils encouraged to wear face coverings in both communal areas and classrooms
- All pupils encouraged to participate in twice weekly asymptomatic LFT testing\*
- All pupils who are a household contact of a positive case and exempt from isolation to test daily for 10 days with an LFT (from the date symptoms started or if asymptomatic from the date the person in the household tested positive)\*

*\*Note: People who have tested positive with a PCR test within the last 90 should not be encouraged to test unless they develop new symptoms*

These recommendations will be reviewed on 11 November 2021.

### **COVID vaccinations in 12–15-year-olds**

2.25. The UK's four chief medical officers agreed in mid-September that Covid-19 vaccinations were to be offered to all 12-to-15-year-olds with an ambitious roll out programme to be delivered via schools.

2.26. The school-based vaccination programme in North Tyneside is on track:

- 9443 students are eligible
- 71% consent forms returned
- The schools that have been completed to date cover 6610/ 9443 eligible students
- 3533 students were vaccinated in schools before half term (37.4% uptake)
- Session for home educated students held in half term - 11 students attended (total number listed by service 69)
- Outstanding schools to be completed in the next 2-3 week
- Mop up sessions will be arranged with schools.

2.27. To increase uptake by 12-15 year olds the NHS national booking service (NBS) is now available to book a COVID-19 vaccination at a convenient location out of school hours. Walk in sessions are also available. This means that those who have not yet had the chance at school, or were unable to have the vaccine at school, can get vaccinated elsewhere, as quickly as possible.

2.28. All parents with eligible children have been contacted to promote the increased access in order to increase vaccination uptake.

### **Conclusion**

2.29. COVID-19 remains a highly infectious disease which spreads easily from person to person. Stage 4 of the Government's Roadmap eased restrictions for educational settings and new guidance focused on protecting time in face-to-face education and minimising disruption.

- 2.30. Despite the higher numbers of cases and outbreaks in schools there has been less disruption overall to schools and far fewer instances of classes or schools having to move to remote learning.
- 2.31. Local Authority Officers from a range of departments will continue to support schools to prevent and protect the onward transmission of COVID-19, with the expectation that the rate will peak and will continue to decline.
- 2.32. The full extent of the impact of two interrupted academic years of education is yet to be realised, however this is being monitored at both national, regional and local level on an ongoing basis.

### **3. Background Information**

The following documents have been used in the compilation of this report

[Contingency Framework: education and childcare Settings](#)

[Schools COVID-19 operational guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)