

**From: Richard Long TD, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**  
**Matt Dunkley CBE, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education**

**To: Cabinet – 25 January 2021**

**Subject: Learning loss and vulnerable pupil gaps**

**Classification: Unrestricted**

**Past Pathway of report: None**

**Future Pathway of report: None**

**Electoral Division: All**

**Summary:**

This document outlines the range of work taking place to support schools to recover and to respond to learning loss amongst its pupils. This includes direct support for students for their engagement and learning with a particular focus on vulnerable children and young people.

It covers work that has been ongoing from the first lockdown and includes the initial plans for the recently announced current lockdown.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet is asked to note the report.

**1. Introduction and Context**

- 1.1 From Friday 20 March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the government asked early years settings, schools, and colleges to close to all children except those of critical workers and those classified as vulnerable. Schools provided remote and, where possible, online learning until the 1 June, when the government asked schools to welcome back children in nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6, alongside children of critical workers and vulnerable children from all years. Early years settings were also asked to begin welcoming back all children from 1 June.
- 1.2 From 15 June and with adherence to COVID-19 guidelines, secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges were asked to begin providing face-to-face support to students in year 10 and 12 to supplement their learning from home, alongside full-time provision for students from priority groups. Primary schools were given the flexibility to bring back pupils in other year groups, where they have space to do so until the end of term.

- 1.3 From the beginning of the Autumn term in the 2020/21 academic year, all pupils, in all year groups, were expected to return to school full-time. Attendance rates started at 95% but by the end of the Autumn term fell to 67%. This was due to rising case numbers amongst staff and students and the consequent impact on teaching bubbles. The new strain of the virus led to numbers in Kent continuing to rise despite tighter Tier restrictions.
- 1.4 On 5 January 2021, schools were again closed to all children except those of critical workers and those classified as vulnerable leading to learning taking place remotely. The legislation relating to the national lockdown, presented to Parliament 7 January, gives the potential for the full restrictions to continue until 31st March and then be replaced by another tier system. It therefore seems likely that we are entering a period where schools will be closed to many pupils for some weeks.
- 1.5 Teachers and leaders in schools believe the learning lost over the first national lockdown was extensive and point out a further loss of learning during periods of self-isolation throughout the autumn term and that the current period of school closures will impact further. Lost learning is contributed to by absence, lack of engagement, lack of resources, the child or young person's circumstances, and the schools' ability to provide. As the Children's Commissioner points out, these risks are at their most severe for vulnerable children, but recent reports from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and the Education Policy Institute (EPI) also suggest that they can be serious for those who are simply disadvantaged. They conclude that: 'there is increasing evidence that the most disadvantaged pupils across the UK are disproportionately affected.'
- 1.6 A survey of the summer term, published by the UCL Institute of Education found that the average amount of schoolwork that pupils were doing in the first lockdown was low (two and a half hours), with large differences between pupils' home learning experiences when broken down by deprivation. An estimated 20% of FSM pupils had no access to a computer at home, and an estimated 25% spent no time or less than one hour on schoolwork in a day.
- 1.7 The EPI estimates show that, on average across England in the autumn term, primary school children lost 3.5 days and secondary school children 6.3 days. Pupils in several local authorities have lost more than 10 days on average, however given the generic nature of the data and low return rates it is quite likely to hide more significant variations at school level, and even greater variation at pupil level.
- 1.8 This culminates in schools remaining under considerable stress. They are currently having to rapidly adapt to changing government guidance, master the delivery of remote learning, teach vulnerable and keyworker children, continue to safeguard well-being during a time of dislocation, adjust to meet the needs of external examinations, ensure a good curriculum offer for pupils in school as well as those learning at home,

and manage significant staffing issues while dealing with the cumulative lost learning from the start of the pandemic.

- 1.9 In Kent we have significant cohorts of children and young people who fit into the vulnerable and disadvantage groups and who may, therefore, be hardest hit by the current situation. As of the 12 January 2021, there were 5,916 children in education (from Reception to Year 11) with a Social Worker. Of the Kent cohort of children and young people on roll in education the following numbers and percentages of children and young people fall into categories indicative of vulnerability or disadvantage.

	Number on Roll October 2020	Number Eligible FSM**	% Eligible FSM**	Number EHC Plan	% EHC Plan	Number with SEN Support	% SEN Support	Total SEN	% Total SEN	Number EAL	% EAL
<b>Kent Total - All Schools</b>	<b>241385</b>	<b>39002</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>9213</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>23791</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>33004</b>	<b>13.7%</b>	<b>27866</b>	<b>11.5%</b>

## 2. Targeted Early Help Support for Vulnerable Pupils

- 2.1 Since the full reopening of schools in September 2020, the Integrated Children's Service teams have offered enhanced school link workers to support the engagement of vulnerable pupils. The team aim to work together to provide support as soon as a problem emerges and take early and concerted action to reduce the need for intensive or specialist children's services involvement. They work collaboratively, always putting the best interests of the child or young person first.
- 2.2 Where Integrated Children's Services support is needed, they work together with schools to ensure the best possible package of coordinated support is implemented and share evidence of what works so it can adopt approaches and deliver interventions that are most effective. These arrangements do not replace the requirement for Schools to refer any immediate safeguarding concerns to the Front Door.

## 3. Digital support

- 3.1 Early during national lockdown one VSK (Virtual School Kent) as a service managed to ensure by mid-April their young people had access to over 100 iPads; 300 Chromebooks and 170 laptops in addition to those young people that who had already been supplied with a device via the Kent Pledge scheme.
- 3.2 In late April, the Government introduced the IT devices initiative to ensure the most vulnerable young people had access to IT to support with their education during the COVID crisis. The government initiative targeted two cohorts of vulnerable young people:

- i. **IT Devices for young people with social workers and care leavers.**

KCC's allocation from the DFE for this cohort of young people was 3563 devices and 502 4G routers. Following the forecasting from Social Work Teams, VSK and the 18+ Service the number of devices required was circa 1500 devices and circa 520 4G routers. A request for additional 4g routers was submitted and agreed by the DFE. The decision was made to request all 3563 devices to ensure a surplus stock was available and to ensure a wider cohort of vulnerable young people would benefit from access to a device if required.

These devices were distributed by Social Work teams to the young people during July. The remaining devices were allocated to Kent LA PRUs, Kent Health Needs Education Service and the 18+ Service. VSK received an additional allocation to support the high numbers of UASAC arriving in the Country. 40 LA Secondary schools all received an additional allocation.

## **ii. IT Devices for vulnerable year 10 young people.**

KCC also received an allocation of devices for vulnerable year 10 pupils who attend a LA maintained school. Following forecasting with these schools a request for additional devices and 4G routers to meet demand was submitted and agreed by the DFE. In total Kent maintained Secondary and Grammar schools received 281 4g routers and 437 devices. These devices were delivered directly to the schools in July 2020. All schools that are part of an academy chain received their own allocation of devices and were responsible for their own forecasting and ordering.

## **4. Catch up support for schools**

### **4.1 The use of catch up funding by schools as supported by The Education People**

In line with the statutory expectation for primary schools to publish their intended spend of Covid-19 premium, all schools have been provided by The Education People (TEP) with a model catch up plan which identifies the most common learning gaps or barriers. In addition, the plan outlines suggested strategies and support to inform spending. This advice closely aligns with Education Endowment fund research and guidance.

4.2 The key areas of spend in primary schools links directly to learning and includes one to one or small group tuition delivered by school based staff or tutors, targeted intervention programmes linked to specific needs, extending provision for some pupils through breakfast or after school learning clubs and additional learning support resources. Staff training around the recovery curriculum has also been prioritised. This profile of spend is consistent across all areas.

4.3 Additional areas of spend include additional support for parents for e.g. family liaison support, improved access to technology and support for transition.

#### 4.4 **Catch up support for schools through the EEFective Kent Project**

The [EEFective Kent Project](#) is a pot of £600,000, jointly created by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Kent County Council. The fund is available to schools as match-funding for EEF approved approaches to improve outcomes and school effectiveness. The project's timeframe and aims have, fortuitously, coincided with the need to respond to the impact of COVID particularly the increased learning gaps and the needs of vulnerable children.

4.5 Although paused for part of the first lockdown, the project is now running two strands of work. Both are focused on evidence-based practice, closing learning gaps and the needs of vulnerable children. The two strands of work are:

##### **i. Promising Projects.**

There are seven different projects covering a wide range of subjects such as literacy, maths, and assessment for learning which can be delivered remotely. The providers of these are working online with schools to deliver targeted or whole class interventions. All the projects on offer have strong evidence of improving outcomes for children. Currently 74 schools have applied to participate in a promising project.

##### **ii. Evidence-Based Training**

This involves EEF Research Schools delivering four different training programmes based on EEF produced reports on best practice.

The programmes are:

- a. Training and Retaining Great Teachers
- b. SEND and Learning Behaviours
- c. Delivering Remote Learning
- d. Characteristics of Deprivation

Each training programme is the equivalent of three days of training, comes with the offer of wrap-around support, is delivered by recognised experts and is delivered online. There are currently 102 places booked by schools for the programmes which start at the end of January 2021.

4.6 In addition, there is an array of external providers offering support such as the recently launched BBC live lessons, the National Oak Academy and some charitable organisations such as the Kent based Invicta Academy. These organisations are providing a range of support including free content and in some cases access to on-line tuition.

#### **5. Troubled Families extended grant**

5.1 Kent has received confirmation that the MHCLG is extending the Troubled Families programme for a further year. The programme is fully embedded within our Intensive Early Help service, and this grant funding supports the running of our Early Help Units.

- 5.2 The principles of the Early Help approach in Kent are:
- Building on families' existing resources with a culture of high aspiration and empathy
  - Building family wellbeing and resilience that leads to sustainable change
  - Listening to the voice of children, young people and families and using their voice to shape our support
  - Joining up services to support families at the right time and in the right place with a focus on reducing transitions
- 5.3 Early Help Units have seen an increase in demand since September 2020, and we are supporting children, young people and families with a range of issues. Following Early Help support, children and young people should be more able to access education (where that was an identified issue within the Early Help Assessment). A key Troubled Families outcome is improved school attendance.
- 5.4 The Dover Schools project aims to demonstrate how closer alignment and collaborative working with high referring schools can reduce the demand into Children's services and tackle persistent absence. Three secondary schools have benefited from identified Intensive Early Help Workers working in the school setting with a focus on early identification of emerging need, up skilling school staff around making good quality referrals, focus on attendance issues, improved communication and targeted transition support. The project will identify specific operational and practice developments that can be implemented County wide within the existing Early Help resource. As a result of the learning in the first year of the project, an Enhanced Early Help Schools Link role has been developed across Kent to support children receiving the right service and the right time through improved communication in schools with the greatest need. The development of this role formed part of the response to the anticipated demand surge following children returning to school in September 2020.

## **6. Headstart Kent Support**

- 6.1 HeadStart Kent has also been supporting schools and young people to recover from the impact of the pandemic and the disruption to learning.
- 6.2 Back to School guidance and resources to support young people's, parent's and staff's emotional wellbeing and resilience was developed and coordinated with education, health and voluntary sector partners. The websites [The Resilience Hub](#) and [MoodSpark](#) are updated monthly to ensure that resources are available to everyone across the County. The back to school resources were also supported by google document drives produced by the Specialist Teachers service which can be used with children and young people across Kent.
- 6.3 The Guidance and Resources can be seen here using the Chrome or Edge Browsers here at <https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/covid-19-resources/support-for-young-people-during-covid-19/>

6.4 The Wellbeing for Education Return training for schools and colleges is taking place delivered by The Education People and Headstart Kent. It provides training and resources to all schools and colleges in England on supporting staff and pupils with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their mental health and well-being. Materials are intended to be shared with the school staff and leadership to ensure all staff are empowered to understand and respond appropriately to emerging needs.

6.5 The training includes tools, framework, techniques and case studies that can be adapted for pupils of different ages, staff and parents and carers.

## **7. Secondary School Improvement, Skills and Employability as supported by The Education People**

7.1 Guidance for remote learning has been rewritten since central government made it mandatory to have a remote learning policy from 22nd Oct. TEP's updated guidance focuses on the engagement of 'hard to reach' students with a 'toolkit' for schools to re-evaluate their provision and consider safeguarding and wellbeing, equality of access and communication and engagement. The team have also delivered training on remote learning and how to evaluate its effectiveness.

7.2 Guidance on how to access the National Tutoring Programme has been developed. Schools found DfE website links difficult and time consuming to navigate and it was unclear what was offered. Secondary School Improvement (SSI) analysed what was available and has advised schools on what they can access and how to do so. Since this time, a TES article written by the lead of the National Tutoring Programme has acknowledged the lack of accessibility. <https://www.tes.com/news/ntp-responds-5-main-teacher-complaints>

7.3 SSI will contact schools in Term 3 to collect case studies of good practice to publish to all schools. Visits to schools have focused on COVID recovery plans which are being reconsidered to look at long term impact. Behaviour and attendance systems are being reviewed with support from the team as well as quality assurance systems and renewed focus on teaching and learning. Middle leaders network meetings are focusing on types of assessment and how to identify gaps in learning and address those gaps in curriculum planning.

7.4 SSI team is also poised to develop guidance for schools on exam adjustments as soon as there is any information from exam boards. TEP's advice to schools is to examine what lessons were learned from Summer 2020 and how schools can plan for the worst-case scenario as there is considerable anxiety among parents and students of 2021 exam cohorts. Regular check ins, both remotely and on site continue for all maintained schools and all academies are offered check in and support

## **8. Further areas of work**

8.1 In addition to the above-mentioned support delivered by Kent services, schools also worked hard to reach out to and support vulnerable children during the first lockdown. The safety and well-being of vulnerable children will remain our focus during this next phase of the pandemic. The response to the new lockdown and the 5 January school closures has already begun and includes investigating the delivery of the following areas of further support.

**i. Better links between Social Care workers and Schools to support the attendance of vulnerable children**

We want vulnerable children and young people to continue to attend school full-time where it is appropriate for them to do so. In line with practice in other local authorities, work is currently taking place to establish a new process for schools to report the regularly the attendance status of each vulnerable child with a social worker. Our staff will be following up non-attendance with the families. This aims to ensure that the most vulnerable children continue to be visible to someone in the children's workforce, and that they and their families are supported in these challenging times.

**ii. Continued work to improve access to remote education**

Ensuring every child can access remote education remains a priority shared by Government, the County Council, and schools. The DfE is working with mobile network operators to help schools support disadvantaged pupils in years 3 to 11 who rely on a mobile internet connection. Disadvantaged families may be able to benefit from free increases to their mobile data. Schools can request these free mobile data increases for families during the spring and summer 2021 terms.

**iii. Further work with Children in Care**

The County Council is the Corporate Parent for all Children in Care and Care Leavers in Kent. Good corporate parents, just like all good parents need to understand and know what is happening to their children and young people. As part of our duty to ensure the education needs for these children and young people are appropriately assessed and supported, we will be working with their carers to ensure they are participating in education, be that in school or remotely, and that the remote offer made to them meets the minimum requirements set out by Government.

**iv. Supporting and improving the quality of remote education**

Along with the ability to access remote education, the quantity and quality of each school's offer continues to be variable. Through sharing clear criteria, creating best practice case studies, delivering training, signposting quality resources and joint working we will work to assist all schools to effectively evaluate and improve the quality of their provision. Colleagues in TEP are also working to further develop resources to support schools to improve their provision. This will build on the resources developed and shared over the last 9 months. Advisers will be discussing the remote learning offer with head teachers to ensure compliance with the national requirements.

**v. Responding to the government decisions about exams and assessments**

To ensure that best chances for all young people, particularly vulnerable learners, we will explore what support schools need to provide accurate, unbiased teacher assessments.

**9. Recommendations**

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet is asked to note the report.

**8. Contact details**

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