

From: Richard Long TD, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

To: Cabinet

Subject: Whole School opening from September 2020

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

To inform Cabinet of support provided to schools to enable them to open to all pupils from September 2020, following the Government enforced lockdown on 23rd March 2020 and to highlight any issues identified since the beginning of the Autumn Term 2020.

Recommendation:

Cabinet is asked to note and comment on the contents of the report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 When Government took the decision to ask schools to open only to a small number of children from 23rd March 2020, this was done with the aim of reducing transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), to protect the NHS and save lives. As the situation improved, the DfE and Local Authorities supported primary schools to welcome some additional children back on 1st June, focusing on specific year groups being educated in small 'bubbles', and from 15 June secondary schools welcomed back year 10 and 12 students to spend some time in school in small groups, with public health risk reduction measures in place. Since 15 June, primary schools also had the flexibility to bring back other pupils where they have space to do so.
- 1.2 Throughout the period between March and July, where for the majority of pupils, school attendance was not mandatory, there was a specific priority group of children and young people, who in accordance with DfE guidance, should have attended school full time. This group was children and young people who were deemed vulnerable, as they met one or more of the following criteria:
- Children or young people assessed as being in need under section 17 children act 1989 including those subject to a Child in Need Plan, Child Protection Plan or who are looked after.
 - Children or young people with an Education and Health Care Plan, whose risk assessment showed need could be safely met in school.
 - Children or young people assessed as otherwise vulnerable by the school or Local Authority, who are in need of continued education. This category included, by was not limited to, those on the edge of need as determined by social care, adopted children, those at risk of becoming NEET and young carers.

- 1.3 It was clear from information held by the LA and the data collated from school through daily returns, that many of these vulnerable young people were not attending school as expected, meaning support services such as Integrated Children's Services and SEND needed to identify alternative approaches to ensuring these children and their families were supported and appropriately safeguarded.
- 1.4 Returning to school is vital for children's education and for their wellbeing. Time out of school is detrimental for children's cognitive and academic development, particularly for disadvantaged children. This impact can affect both current levels of learning and children's future ability to learn. Therefore, it was essential that all pupils returned to school as soon as possible.
- 1.5 Government and Health experts have reiterated that the risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from coronavirus (COVID-19) is very low and there are negative health impacts of being out of school. School is a vital point of contact for public health and safeguarding services that are critical to the wellbeing of children and families.
- 1.6 Given the improved position in relation to COVID-19 across the country at the time, the balance of risk was overwhelmingly in favour of children returning to school. For the vast majority of children, the benefits of being back in school far outweigh the very low risk from COVID-19. Therefore, on 2nd July, the Government published guidance for schools to prepare to welcome all children back from the beginning of the Autumn Term 2020. While coronavirus (COVID-19) remains in the community, this means making judgments at a school level about how to balance minimising any risks from coronavirus (COVID-19) by maximising control measures with providing a full educational experience for children and young people. To facilitate Kent Schools in doing this, officers within KCC CYPE Services and The Education People (TEP) have worked closely with school leaders, through the Kent Association of Head Teachers, providing support and guidance throughout this unprecedented period. As the guidance was produced to support Primary, Secondary and Special Schools, KAH representatives from all those sectors were involved in the discussions with KCC and TEP officers. TEP colleagues also worked with Early Years providers to ensure appropriate guidance was produced for that sector.

2. 23rd March 2020 to July 2020

- 2.1 During the initial stages, we found that schools primarily focussing on curriculum or more specifically maths linked worksheets and writing. However, as schools settled into the new norm there was a significant increase in the proportion of schools using video lessons that could be linked directly to schemes of work for each year. Many schools broadened their offer to include pre-recorded content such as lesson starters, modelling and demonstrations, this has been particularly valuable in maths. Additionally, many schools offered pre-recorded updates such as messages from teachers, learning for the week overviews and assemblies.

Though it should be noted that there was not one consistent approach across the County with a number of schools opting not to use live lessons due to safeguarding concerns.

- 2.2 Since partial return on 1 June, with the number of pupils in primary schools increasing, staff time was focussed on bubbles. This reduced time available to prepare video learning and as a result, schools became more dependent on video lessons from Oaks and BBC.
- 2.3 Whilst many schools appreciated any flexibility that is afforded them by the DfE, some schools were frustrated by the fact that much of the guidance issued by the DfE was very much open to interpretation. For this reason, KCC, TEP and Cantium BS used the DfE guidance to issue our own robust, detailed guidance ready for 1 June. Services including Area Education Officers, School Improvement, the Early Years & Childcare Service, Safeguarding, Governance, Headstart, Education Psychologists, Fair Access and Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) have all been supporting schools.
- 2.4 This support included; regular correspondence to schools from the Corporate Director, providing key information and updates, webinars, comprehensive guidance on KELSI and The Education People website, welfare calls, regular 1:1 contact through Improvement Advisors and weekly blogs to early years and childcare providers.
- 2.5 Safeguarding was always at the heart of all advice to schools and early years and childcare providers. The Safeguarding Team evaluated each aspect of the COVID-19 return guidance and provided updated toolkits and resources at each stage. Schools and early years and childcare providers were also signposted to risk assessments and encouraged to draw up acceptable use policies (AUP) linked to the following guidance (AUP for remote learning and communication). The advice from Safeguarding was provided to schools through a range of media and forums to ensure complete coverage. This included the use of Headteacher briefings and webinars, newsletters, district based multi-agency Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) catch ups and posting information onto KCC and TEP websites within each toolkit. Reflective tools were also provided for early years and childcare providers online safety guidance.
- 2.6 KCC does not endorse one specific provider of home learning material or platforms. Therefore, TEP Improvement Advisors reviewed many of the materials on offer and primarily used Kent Children's University (KCU) as the route to signposting the most effective home learning resources and activities for children and families. Links to KCU were shared with all schools and signposted on social media/newsletters and KELSI. To supplement this further, Advisors produced a range of home and blended learning materials and resources, shared through the COVID-19 toolkit. These were also signposted to schools through subject leaders briefings.

- 2.7 A large focus for schools was also through the DFE online school “Oak National Academy” <https://www.thenational.academy/> which provided free video lessons every week from Year R to Year 10. Resources from the BBC and DFE website were also accessed.
- 2.8 To support families with pre-school aged children, TEP Early Years and Childcare Service provided a series of family flyers ‘Growing Together’ and links to other online resources available via the weekly blog and website. The closed Childminding Facebook Page was used to provide up to date information for childminders and the brokerage service supported many critical worker families and those with vulnerable children to find childcare.
- 2.9 Following schools being allowed to welcome more pupils back into school prior to the summer Holidays, daily pupil attendance rose to more than 40,000 pupils attending schools in Kent. In addition to allowing Key Worker and vulnerable learners, Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils to attend, more than half of Primary Schools had also welcomed Year 5 pupils back into the classroom. Secondary Schools were only able to welcome back Years 10 and 12 with no more than 25% of those cohorts allowed at one time. Special Schools had c1000 pupils attending each day by the end of the summer Term. Whilst c19,000 children were attending Early years and childcare settings.

3. **Summer Holidays 2020**

- 3.1 **Summer provision:** Government “asked” schools to remain open to keyworker and vulnerable pupils over the Easter and May school holiday periods. It did not ask schools to open over the summer break. However, as lockdown was relaxed, the need for keyworkers to be prioritised reduced, and opportunities for familial childcare arrangements increased.
- 3.2 Only 17 standalone out of school providers, 193 childminders and 56 early years group providers indicated to KCC that they would have places available for school aged children over the summer. 22 schools indicated they would be offering summer activity or catchup classes. This increased as we entered the holiday period.
- 3.3 The Open Access offer from ICS targeted at risk children and young people and included a youth and children’s centre offer.
- 3.4 **GCSE/A Level Results:** For many young people, the Summer was an uncertain time as they waited for GCSE and A Level results that were to be calculated using a combination of OFQUAL’s algorithm and Centre Assessed Grades (CAG). Due to the volume of nature of complaints received following the publication of A Level results, the Government eventually decided to allow pupils to receive the higher of either the CAG or the algorithm grade.

3.5 It should be noted that prior to Government changing the basis of how grades were awarded, KCC was preparing to work with all Secondary Schools and make representations to government. The aim was to collate information from all schools on the numbers of pupils adversely affected and the subjects where downgrading was most prevalent, so that a factual, evidence based representation could be made.

3.6 This confusion delayed many young people in accessing their first-choice university, college or work placement and much has been done since that time to support those affected. Belatedly guidance on an appeals process was published and the local authority skills and employability service continue to provide support and advice where required. Pupils who do not feel their calculated grade reflects their ability will have the opportunity to sit an exam in the autumn term.

4. Preparation for September 2020 and further support being provided

4.1. Whilst general guidance for the return to schools was issued well before the beginning of the summer holiday, there was considerable clarification required on specific areas of concern such as transport and administration of tests and examinations. This information eventually reached Local authorities late in August after much planning had already been undertaken based on our best assumptions. It is fortunate that much of the Government Guidance aligned with our planning, so considerable credit should be given to the officers involved in ensuring as smooth a return to school for as many young people as possible.

4.2. The first key step was to provide comprehensive guidance to schools in Kent that could be easily accessed by school leaders to plan for all children returning in September. This was published on KELSI. Due to the volume of information being provided sections were released as and when they were completed, with the first elements uploaded on 10 July. Eventually the resources available covered all aspects of school life including personnel, health and safety, curriculum, safeguarding, toolkits for addressing learning loss, transition between education settings, cleaning, catering, risk assessments, governance, finance, transport, wellbeing and use of PPE.

4.3. Weekly discussions took place at area level with Kent Association of Headteachers to receive feedback and comments on the guidance and provide another conduit for advising schools.

4.4. With support from the Early Years and Childcare Service, the expectation was that from September 2020 early years and childcare providers who are private business will also be fully operational.

4.5. Some of the key considerations for School and EY&C settings leaders were:

- All pupils can and should return to school in September. Return to school is mandatory.
- Primary schools will operate mainly class-based or year group bubbles. Pupils can move out of these for things like SEN support.

- Secondary schools are encouraged to operate smaller bubbles where possible, for example in Key stage 3, but it is recognised whole year bubbles may be necessary because of the need to access specialist facilities and due to options blocks.
- Peripatetic staff, including supply staff can move between schools. Specialist staff, such as Educational Psychologists, can enter schools.
- Shielding ended at the beginning of August, therefore clinically vulnerable staff and pupils are able to return.
- Early years and childcare providers continue to offer Free Early Education for all 3 and 4 years and eligible 2-year olds. The requirement for bubbles in early years provision has been removed, however providers should minimise group sizes and contact with other groups where possible.
- Out of school provision can operate in consistent groups of no more than 15.
- Settings should gather information on pupils' experience of lockdown prior to them returning, with a focus on their welfare needs.
- Schools needed to consider entry arrangements, including staggered starts.

- 4.6. **Curriculum:** For most schools, their existing curriculum maps have been suspended, with now an emphasis on moving to a recovery curriculum, focussing on pupils being ready to learn (feeling safe, secure, positive wellbeing and attending). This required a particular focus on 'new' year groups such as Year R, Year 7 and Year 12 where appropriate.
- 4.7. This has resulted in some obvious narrowing of the curriculum, though many secondaries aim to offer as full a curriculum as possible.
- 4.8. **Catchup and closing the gaps for disadvantaged pupils:** Government announced a £1bn fund to help provide the means for children to catchup. £350m will be used to commission tuition from national organisations identified by the Education Endowment Foundation, and £650m will go directly to schools. The latter can be used as headteachers determine, but the Government emphasis has been on catch up tuition, either individually or in groups.
- 4.9. TEP developed a range of guidance, training and toolkits to support schools target their resources and interventions to address gaps in children's learning, including curriculum audit tools, pupil premium, disadvantaged and SEN audit tools and a recovery toolkit.
- 4.10. Advisers have been allocated additional time to support early years and childcare providers and schools to develop their recovery curriculum. SEND, disadvantaged and learning gaps have been priorities for all support agendas.
- 4.11. **Government support for Health and Safety and testing:** As a result of updated World Health Organisation advice, the Government revised the guidance on face coverings for staff and children in Year 7 or above in England. From 1 September schools and colleges have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas where social distancing cannot be safely managed, if they believe that is right in their particular circumstances.

- 4.12. Schools and further education institutions will now receive a one-off delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE) containing clinical face masks, aprons, gloves and visors, as well as the hand sanitiser needed to put on and take off PPE. This is being provided free of charge by the Department of Health and Social Care to help build resilience across the education sector to respond to any suspected cases of COVID-19 arising in schools and colleges.
- 4.13. In addition, each school will be provided with 10 free home testing kits. The DfE has published guidance for schools providing information on when these test kits should be provided, how to store them and the usual routes for accessing free COVID-19 testing.
- 4.14. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is continuing their work with schools to ensure all possible steps are taken to help keep pupils and staff safe and reduce the transmission of coronavirus. As part of this, HSE will be phoning schools to check their risk assessments and the arrangements they have in place to reduce the risk of transmission of coronavirus.
- 4.15. In cases where the initial call raises concerns, HSE will work with schools to advise on next steps, which may include a visit if appropriate. This will be on a suitable date and time arranged in collaboration with the school.
- 4.16. A COVID-19 resource pack that PHE has developed for and circulated to educational settings in the PHE South East region. The contents of the resource pack include key national guidance and resources, key messages relating to COVID-19 in educational settings, definitions used by Health Protection Teams, instructions for settings to manage cases, frequently asked questions and additional resources for mental health and wellbeing.
- 4.17. **Local lockdown of infection within bubbles:** Much of the guidance already in place was still relevant providing detailed guidance to schools on managing localised or “bubble” lockdown. PHE have recently issued flowcharts and process cards for all schools to assist them in dealing with local infection cases.
- 4.18. The KCC guidance included delivery of blended learning, signposting resources and online learning should a class/year/school be locked down and Safeguarding advice has been extended to support increased virtual learning. There are clear expectations on schools to put in place e-learning strategies to ensure home or blended learning reflects in school learning e.g. Teams classroom, google class. This will be reviewed in the Term One support visits.
- 4.19. In August the DfE announced the expansion of its programme to provide devices to children who cannot attend school due to COVID-19. More laptops and tablets will be made available for disadvantaged children to access remote education if local COVID-19 restrictions are required. Devices are also available for disadvantaged and clinically extremely vulnerable children who are shielding or self-isolating following official public health advice.

- 4.20. **Transport:** For the full return to school the key advice has been that pupils should avoid using public transport where possible. LAs were encouraged to divert pupils to private hire vehicles on which social distancing measures will not apply.
- 4.21. KCC's Passenger Transport Unit have worked tirelessly with bus and private hire companies to determine how much transport can be commissioned as private hire and to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the network to enable those learners whose parents chose to use buses as their mode of transport to school are able to travel safely.
- 4.22. Bus companies have well tried and tested social distancing and cleaning regimes in place to ensure safety as far as possible. With the companies we have now converted a significant number of services in to dedicated school transport, meaning that social distancing requirements do not have to be implemented in the same way as they do on services designated for public use.
- 4.23. This increases the capacity of the buses from approximately 50% to closer 60-70% depending on the particular vehicle. Only forward-facing seats will be used, hence the reduction in provision from 100% capacity.
- 4.24. Further to this, over 100 additional buses have been commissioned to run on routes where we anticipate capacity issues.
- 4.25. Currently, applications for the 2020/21 Kent Travel pass and Post 16 Travel Pass are at approximately 60% of the normal number we receive, suggesting many parents are making alternative arrangements for their children to get to school. We therefore, anticipate that the current capacity will be sufficient to meet need, but as is the case every September, PTU will monitor all routes closely to ensure this is the case and take action to address any difficulties. We have identified further capacity with bus companies which can be allocated to particular routes if necessary.
- 4.26. In respect of rail travel, KCC has far less influence and ability to influence capacity. Very few season tickets are purchased to transport entitled learners. Pupils traveling on the trains are, primarily doing so at parents' choice and arrangement. If difficulties do arise, we will look to utilise the bus capacity we have identified to lay on an alternative service.
- 4.27. **Kent Test:** In July the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills took the decision to delay the Kent Test by one month and extend parental preferences from four to six.
- 4.28. Following a considerable delay in receiving feedback from the DfE on the proposal, KCC has now received confirmation that the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Schools Adjudicator have agreed the decision.
- 4.29. **Emotional Wellbeing:** Throughout the lockdown, significant concerns have always been raised in respect of the impact on children and adult's emotional wellbeing. Therefore, a large element of the guidance provided to schools

centred on providing access to resources and services for pupils, parents and staff in schools. The guidance produced in conjunction with the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service and Education Psychologists, is designed to support schools in providing different levels of response according to need.

- 4.30. The guidance includes practical Resources for Parents and Carers, Practical and Emotional Wellbeing Support Following Bereavement, Emotional Wellbeing for Vulnerable Pupils, supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and highly anxious students
- 4.31. Staff development sessions have explored resilience and emotional based school avoidance, virtual workshops around whole school approach to emotional wellbeing and staff wellbeing, and the DfE have also been facilitating online workshops for school staff covering emotional wellbeing and returning to school.
- 4.32. CCG's/KCC Public Health have funded the extension HeadStart Kent contract to fund online support and counselling for all young people aged 10-16 years across the County (Kooth.com).
- 4.33. **Supporting vulnerable young people and their families:** Integrated Children's Services are developing a rapid response for attendance issues with our Early Help units and PIAS, to ensure we are putting in an intervention with schools to facilitate the return to school of any child where there is concern.
- 4.34. Social Workers have worked with all open families / Children in Care to ensure they had a return to school plan and any barriers were identified and ways identified to overcome them. This included ensuring all parents were aware that school attendance will be compulsory from September and normal enforcement actions could apply.
- 4.35. The DfE has recently updated its attendance guidance for schools, which provides greater clarification on how schools should look to support pupils and their families.
- 4.36. For pupils with SEND the Government disappplied the requirement for schools and local authorities to ensure ALL requirements of a child or young persons' Education and Health Care Plan were fulfilled throughout the period of school disruption. From 25th September this disapplication will be removed, and schools and local authorities will no longer be able to simply use 'best endeavours' to fulfil the requirements of the plan. All requirements must once again be met in full.
- 4.37. **OFSTED:** From September 2020 Ofsted will begin carrying out regulatory activity in providers that have been judged inadequate or requires improvement and have associated actions to fulfil. Inspectors will look at what action leaders and managers have taken since the last inspection. In these visits inspectors will confirm whether the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) are met. The DfE disappplied the learning and development requirements until 25 September 2020.

4.38. Visits will not result in an inspection grade, but inspectors can use regulatory or enforcement actions if appropriate. Ofsted will publish an outcome summary after a visit, confirming whether a provider has improved and is meeting the requirements of EYFS.

5. Issues identified following the full reopening of schools

5.1 At the time of drafting this report, schools have only been fully open for a matter of days, with the majority of pupils returning on Thursday 3rd September.

5.2 In the main, the return to schools opening for all pupils has been successful with limited problems arising in the first few days of term. However, as is to be expected, some issues have arisen which have been dealt with primarily by Area Education Officers and colleagues in TEP.

5.3 Many of the issues raised relate to either parental anxieties or frustration from some families that certain processes or protocols are impacting negatively on them. A number of parents are exercising their right to defer take up of a place for their child in year R. This is particularly from parents who do not already have school age children. Schools are encouraging children to attend by talking through the measures in place with parents. We are aware that the outcome has been positive in the majority of cases that officers have been made aware of.

5.4 There is an increase in the number of complaints from parents in respect of SEN transport. One key reason for complaint is that parental expectations do not match the guidelines transport providers are working within. For example, some parents have already voiced their concerns that children are sharing transport to and from school. These are being picked up on a case by case basis by colleagues in PTU and Fair Access.

5.5 There have been a number of cases where parents have reported other families for allegedly not self-quarantining after returning from a foreign holiday. We have advised that schools cannot be responsible for checking on every family's circumstance and to some extent these issues need to be built on trust. However, if there is clear evidence that a family has not quarantined when they should have, in those cases the Headteachers have spoken to the families concerned and requested that they keep their children out of school until the quarantine period has passed.

5.6 A small number of parents are insisting that they will not engage with test track and trace should they ever need to if they are affected by a positive COVID-19 diagnosis. Guidance received to date indicates if the family do not have the child tested, and do not want their personal data sent on, there is little the school can do. While the school has a welfare duty and H&S duty, if this was an isolated case and the child is then self-isolated by parents, it would be difficult for the school to go against the express wishes of the parents in regard to use of their personal data. This would no doubt be different if more than one child showed symptoms.

- 5.7 Officers have also been made aware of an online campaign encouraging families to go against the safety measures being implemented in response to COVID-19. However, this does not appear to have had an impact in Kent.
- 5.8 The lack of wrap around support, primarily through breakfast clubs and after school clubs due to limited opening or non-opening is causing issues for working parents and having a knock-on effect for some other schools. Schools and other settings are being encouraged to re-open these provisions (whilst still adhering to government guidance) as soon as possible.
- 5.9 At the time of drafting this report, the number of specific COVID-19 cases in schools was very low, but officers were aware of one case resulting in two-year groups in a 2FE Primary School needing to be sent home to self-isolate, and another case where the class bubble is now self-isolating. This indicates PHE are taking a cautious approach when schools are not able to clearly identify the significant contacts in school of the child affected. Officers are working with PHE and schools to agree how this can best be avoided in the future.
- 5.11 Some concerns are now being received from schools, where they have requested that a family is tested for COVID-19 and the families have been informed that there are no local tests available and some have been asked to attend testing centres in other counties with one extreme case being that a family was asked to be tested in Wales. Current advice is for families to persevere with the booking system and to try at other times of the day.
- 5.12 Staggered pickup and drop off times have caused other schools and parents problems. For example, one school in an area may have changed their school day by more than 15 minutes and this has made it difficult for siblings at other schools to attend on time. In most cases, once schools have realised the difficulty being caused, they have adjusted their timings.
- 5.13 It has also become apparent that a small number of maintained schools have chosen to shorten the school day on one day a week to allow teachers additional planning time or to undertake deep cleans. Where we become aware of such cases AEO's are liaising with the school leaders to ensure the school can fulfil the requirement to provide 380 half day sessions to all pupils and schools' timings do not negatively impact of families.
- 5.14 Education and ICS officers are working together to address concerns around attendance and possible exclusions. Updated exclusion guidance includes additional reasons for exclusion related to COVID-19. There is a concern that this poses the risk of encouraging exclusion for other reasons. In addition, officers will monitor the use of the attendance coding system to ensure all absences are appropriately recorded.
- 5.15 A number of schools are considering how best to influence behaviours of parents outside of the school gate, due to lack of social distancing.

5.16 Following the confusion in respect of GCSE and A Level results, it is clear that not all students have yet secured places, with colleges running with a backlog. The Skills and Employability Service continue to work with these young people to identify a suitable onwards destination for them.

5.17 Schools have now been asked by the DfE to provide data on attendance through a daily online submission. KCC officers have access to this information but currently there is a lag in receiving it, so we currently receive the previous day's information. The data for Monday 7 September showed 384 of our 600 schools completed the return. Between these 140,246 children were attending. 27 of these schools indicated they were not fully open to all year groups. This is being followed up with each school. Attendance at schools which claimed to be fully open was on average 91.5% (estimated).

6. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

Note and comment on the contents of the report

7. Contact Details

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