

Date: 03 November 2021

Wards: All

Subject: Support for pupils after the pandemic

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member: Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Contact officer: Rachel Bowerman, Interim Head of School Improvement and Keith Shipman, Head of Education Inclusion

Recommendations:

Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report, as well as the presentation from a school within the meeting

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on how children and young people, particularly those deemed as vulnerable, are being supported after the pandemic.

2. DETAILS

- 2.1. Following the end of the last lockdown, Merton pupils have been supported in a number of ways by schools, and by officers across the Children, Schools and Families Department, both academically and with regard to their mental health and wellbeing.
- 2.2. Although this report is entitled 'Support for pupils *after* the pandemic', as will be noted from the departmental update report also being scrutinised in this meeting, schools continue to experience outbreaks, and the current and ongoing impact of Covid cannot be underestimated on pupils and their families, as well as on the 'normal' operation of schools.
- 2.3. This report will be supported by a presentation during the meeting by the Headteacher, and Assistant Headteacher (Inclusion), from Poplar Primary School in Morden, who will expand on how support is being provided by their school.

Academic Year 2020/2021

- 2.4. During the academic year 2020/21 schools were given 'Catch Up' funding to target resources towards pupils where engagement with the remote learning and teaching offer had not been so strong, and/or where they had fallen behind in their progress since March 2020. A total of just over £2 million was given to Merton schools.
- 2.5. This year was obviously interrupted by another major lockdown (between January and March 2021) as well as the impact of Covid cases, (and the requirement then to collapse 'bubbles' when there were cases in school), when schools had to return to remote learning offers.

- 2.6. 'Catch up' funding was used in a variety of ways by different schools, as they assessed the needs of their particular cohorts of pupils: some schools provided intervention for particular year groups/groups of pupils directly; others employed external tutors, including, in some cases, through the National Tutoring Programme.
- 2.7. There was also support for pupils in some primary schools through the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI).
- 2.7. Mental health and wellbeing (of both pupils and staff) was high on the list for all schools. This manifested itself in a variety of ways in different schools, again according to the needs of pupils, for example: enhanced/more frequent PSHE lessons; increased 1:1 support (for example from Emotional Literacy Support Assistants/ELSAs); a focus on social skills and 'getting to know each other again'.
- 2.8. As a result of this input, schools reported positively about the impact on individuals and groups. Some schools reported that there was very little difference between the achievement of the summer 2021 cohorts and cohorts in previous years (pre-pandemic). Most schools, however, reported that whilst intervention had had a positive impact, gaps remained for many pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 2.9. As we enter the academic year 2021/22, this is the third academic year that has been impacted by Covid. Some pupils (those in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 for example) have not experienced a school year without disruption). Others (those in Years 10 and 11) will be approaching GCSEs, again on the back of significant disruption).
- 2.10. The support pupils need will need to continue to be a focus not just over the coming terms, but also years. It will be critical to ensuring that they achieve to the best of their ability despite the interruptions of Covid.

Academic Support 2021/22

- 2.11. During 2021/22 there are a number of strands to the Government's post-Covid support for pupils, which Merton schools are able to access:
 - the Recovery Premium;
 - summer schools (summer 2021);
 - a second year of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) for 5-16 year olds;
 - a second year of the funded Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI);
 - the provision of funding for teachers' professional development.

In addition, for the very youngest pupils in school, there are resources from the [Hungry Little Minds](#) website, which parents can also draw on.

- 2.12. The Recovery Premium provides additional funding for LA-maintained schools, academies and free schools in the 2021 – 2022 academic year. This funding is allocated using the same data as the pupil premium: pupils who are or have been eligible for free school meals at any time in the last six years, children looked after (LAC) and post-LAC children. Provisional allocations indicate that there will be just under £1 million available for pupils in Merton schools.

- 2.13. Schools are expected to spend the Recovery Premium funding on evidence-based approaches to support pupils, for example on professional development that improves the quality of teaching, providing academic support such as tutoring and to remove non-academic barriers to success such as attendance, behaviour and social and emotional support.
- 2.14. All Merton secondary maintained schools and academies ran summer schools during the summer holidays, focusing on pupils coming into year 7, though some schools opened this more widely to other year groups.
- 2.15. Through the National Tutoring Programme, schools and academy trusts can access three tutoring routes: tuition partners, academic mentors and school led tutoring.
- If schools choose the tuition partners route: tutors are provided by various agencies (eg supply teacher agencies, dedicated tuition agencies), and the tuition is subsidised by 70%.
 - Academic Mentors are subsidised for 95% of the cost. These mentors are employed by schools on a fixed term contract, helping to deliver a tailored programme of in school support for pupils.
 - Schools would be given a ring fenced grant for school led tutoring which covers 75% of the cost.

The additional cost in each case could be covered by a school's Recovery Premium funding.

- 2.16. The Nuffield Early Literacy Intervention (NELI) is being used by at least 20 Merton schools. This is a programme for children in Reception which has been found to improve children's language and early literacy skills.
- 2.17. Merton schools are using the range of opportunities open to them. Merton Education Partners (MEPs) are asking schools about how they are spending the money available to them, and how this then is integrated with teaching in the classroom, and what the impact is on pupils' outcomes. In addition Ofsted will look to understand how tutoring and other interventions support the school's wider curriculum aims.

Attendance

- 2.18. Attendance is now mandatory again in schools across the country. Schools, Public Health, Education Welfare and targeted services are all encouraging and supporting a return to good schools attendance. Public Health are working with schools to support infection control measures, support around outbreaks and the roll out of vaccinations. These all support better attendance in schools. We are monitoring schools attendance returns daily which allows us to identify schools without outbreaks where reported attendance has fallen. Schools and services are then working with families to support children to be in school regularly.

Attendance rates 20/21

	Merton 2020/21 Spring Term	National 2020/21 Spring Term	Outer London 2020/21 Spring Term	Merton 2020/21 Autumn Term	National 2020/21 Autumn Term	Outer London 2020/21 Autumn Term
<u>Overall (Secondary+ primary)</u>						
Attendance	41.14%	39.04%	37.15%	90.53%	88.50%	88.32%

Source: DfE Oct 2021

2.19 We can see from the historical data how attendance was affected by the lockdown in January and how many children were out of school. We do not yet have the published summer term 20/21 data. This autumn the DfE have published attendance on key dates based on the daily school return. On the 30th Sept, national attendance was 89.5% this rose to 90% by Oct 14th. On the same day, Merton's overall attendance was 92%.

NEET

2.20 Post 16, our targeted youth offer is supporting a wide range of young people who are NEET and working in partnership with colleges and training providers to support access to education post 16 and maintaining these placements. We are tracking young people and we know that there has been a fall in applications for college placements at level 1 across London. There is a rise in job opportunities and applications. In 2020/21 the Merton 'Not in Education, Training and Employment, and Not Known' combined figure was 2.5% this was a 0.2% improvement on 2019/20 (National 5%, London 4% 2020/21 Source DfE)

Mental Health

2.21 Working closely with the CCG, officers are aiming to link every school in Merton to a Mental Health in Schools Partnership by January 2022. These will cover all maintained schools and the FE College. These partnerships also link into a wider offer of support from CAMHS and the voluntary sector.

2.22 Each Mental Health Partnership has a small support team of mental health workers who can work therapeutically directly with children, and provide wider parental support. They work with children with low to moderate needs. They have been working to support transition, on line parental workshops and counselling sessions particularly around low mood and anxiety.

2.23 This extra mental health capacity complements the wider offer of 'Getting Help' services (using the Thrive model) of 'Off the Record' and 'Kooth on line support; and 'Getting More Help' services from the Child and Adolescent mental health services.

2.24 The CAMHS board oversees the mental health offer in Merton. We saw a fall in referrals last year and referrals are now back to slightly above pre pandemic levels. However, services report that complexity and risk is higher in the levels of referral.

2.25 The DfE have also provided access for mental health leads in school to training from various providers, which is free to schools on a first come, first served basis.

Listening to young people

- 2.26 The Council is working with Partnership for Young London and Merton Young Inspectors on a borough wide survey of young people views as we emerge from the pandemic. This is based on a survey of approx. 2000 young people and 20+focus groups led by young inspectors. This will feed into our borough wide planning on Your Merton and the children trust.

Household Support Grant / Holiday, Activity and Food (HAF) programme)

- 2.27. As noted in the Departmental Update, children and their families were supported through the Holiday, Activity and Food programme in the summer holiday, and this will happen again during the Christmas holidays.
- 2.28. Pupils eligible for free school meals will receive vouchers funded by the Household Support Grant for the holiday periods up until the end of March.

'Social Workers in School' and 'Designated Safeguarding Lead Supervision' Projects

- 2.29 Again as noted in the Departmental Update, there is support for our most vulnerable children and young people through these two projects.
- 2.30 The Social Workers in School project provides support for children and young people, liaising closely with the education setting.
- 2.31. There are currently 64 allocated children being supported within statutory interventions in the team (the aim for statutory allocations is 70, with 12 children per social worker). Alongside the statutory allocations each social worker undertakes preventative interventions which include (but are not limited to) mentoring, drop-ins, parenting support, contextual harm support and threshold guidance.
- 2.32 The DSL Supervision project started in Merton in September 2021 providing individual supervision to DSLs in 22 primary schools and group supervision regarding child sexual abuse to 5 secondary schools. This project is expected to run until July 2022.

The Young Adult Covid Champions

- 2.33 The Young Inspectors continue to produce videos in their role as Young Adult Covid Champions to support their peers to understand and feel confident to engage with a range of Covid activity.
- 2.34 The project aims to empower and encourage young people to have greater awareness and understanding of Covid 19. Topics have included testing for Covid; returning to school; and vaccinations.

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