

## 8 September 2020 Scrutiny Briefing: The Council's Covid-19 response to support children and young people Hackney Learning Trust

<b>Date of meeting:</b> 8 September 2020
<b>Title of report:</b> The Council's Covid-19 response to support children and young people Hackney Learning Trust Update Report
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<b>Authorised by:</b> Annie Gammon, Director of Education
<b>Brief:</b> This report provides an update on Hackney Education's response to the Covid-19 situation

### 1. Background & Introduction

- 1.1. This paper provides information on activity to date supporting educational progress of children & young people in the borough and the wider reopening of schools.

### 2. Update on examinations/Covid-19

- 2.1. Following a welcome, late change by government, final grades at A Level show a positive picture in Hackney. Results were based on teacher assessment much to the relief of students. This has led to a fairer system than that produced by the algorithm which prioritised keeping grades close to last years. .
- 2.2. Even with the original Ofqual 'calculated' grades, many students achieved significant success, gaining access to the full range of universities. The new system means that there will be even more young people from Hackney going onto higher education.
- 2.3. At GCSE, following a difficult, disrupted and uncertain year, results show significant improvements.
- 2.4. Overall the strong pass (grade 5) in English and mathematics is up to 54% from 48% (national last year was 44%).
- 2.5. Standard pass (grade 4) English and mathematics is up to 73% from 69% (national last year was 64%). This is in line with national trends.
- 2.6. We congratulate our teachers, support staff and leaders for doing their best for Hackney's young people. The GCSE outcomes bode well for our sixth form enrolment.

### 3. Schools

- 3.1. During the Summer break, 17 schools provided summer camps for children, with approximately 700 places offered. Activities include Creative and Sport Summer School, cookery, singing and art projects as well as academic/ catch up classes. Schools have identified key vulnerable pupils for these activities including those in transition years as well as pupils who have not engaged well with online learning.
- 3.2. Government guidance re the re-opening of schools was updated on 7 August. Schools have updated protocols and risk assessments to allow for pupils to return in greater numbers. There is an expectation that all pupils will return to school from the first week of September and Hackney schools have indicated that this will be the case.
- 3.3. The government has revised its guidance on face coverings for staff and children in Year 7 or above in England. Nationwide, while the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary, schools will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas if they believe that is right in their particular circumstances. The guidance states that it is not necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective measures already mean the risks are lower, and where they can inhibit learning.

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- 3.4. Government guidance includes the expansion of the number of pupils who can be included in a 'bubble'. Schools have planned adjustments to timetables, including staggered start and end times to the day to support social distancing. Curriculum content has been adjusted and inclusion of core learning content which may have been missed. Schools have also been asked to prepare for the possibility of further localised closures which might necessitate the resumption of online learning at short notice.
- 3.5. HLT have given local guidance and shared good practice amongst Hackney schools in order to implement government guidance on the return to school of all pupils in September 2020. We have given advice centred on the following:
- Engaging all children and families with returning to school, with much communication/reassurance in advance, ensuring all children are welcomed and expected back
  - Ensuring routines, including those around safety, back in school are clear and reinforced, with reasonable adjustments for individuals as needed
  - Reconnecting to the full curriculum suitably swiftly, with appropriate additional input for any gaps in learning
  - Providing particular times for reflection and support re the experiences of the past months; promoting wellbeing and positive mental health strategies, in liaison with partners
- 3.6. Anticipated issues include attracting the most vulnerable pupils to attend when a high level of parent concern persists. Teaching unions continue to raise some concerns over the safety of their members and this has necessitated a significant level of local negotiation and reassurance to ensure adequate staffing.
- 3.7. There is a requirement for schools to close to groups of pupils following any confirmed cases. Schools are expected to plan for this eventuality and provide remote learning opportunities as needed. Whilst schools will provide both paper and online materials and there have been a number of initiatives to loan laptops and ipads, a concern persists over the ability of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, many of whom live in cramped housing conditions, to study remotely successfully.
- 3.8. Regular bulletins and updates will continue to be issued to schools in the autumn term. Headteacher and governor forums have also been planned for September to support and continue to share best practice.

### **4. Early Years Settings**

- 4.1. By the end of the summer term, 111 Early Years settings were open. This included Children's Centres, playgroups and private and voluntary nurseries. 22 nurseries remained closed - the most common reason cited was due to a lack of demand for places from parents. 85 childminders had reopened. Attendance of children aged between 0 and 4 years had reached a peak of 4,495 before playgroups and Children's Centres closed during the summer.
- 4.2. During the final two weeks of August, 47 settings and 72 childminders were open looking after 1233 children.
- 4.3. Early Years Service have continued to support settings throughout the summer and with preparations for the wider reopening in September 2020. Guidance and advice has centred on the following:
- Engaging with all children and families to provide reassurance that all measures have been taken to ensure children's safety and that all children are welcomed and expected back
  - Completing risk assessments, ensuring routines and procedures are clear and reinforced, with reasonable adjustments for individuals as needed

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- Providing a curriculum that reflects the needs of children; activities that support a smooth transition into setting; a focus on personal, social and emotional aspects of learning and promoting effective language and communication.
- 4.4. Settings continue to receive regular early years briefings to support both compliance and business continuity. The Local Authority Discretionary Fund has been extended and settings have been encouraged to make an application in order to support childcare sustainability.
- 4.5. It is anticipated that all settings will resume normal business in September, however, we will continue to monitor the residual impact of Covid-19 on the sustainability of settings during the Autumn term.

### 5. Home to School Transport for Children & Young People with SEND

- 5.1. The Department for Education (DfE) issued Transport to School for Autumn 2020 guidance on 11 August. The guidance has two sections, part A) Local Authority guidance on managing capacity and demand and part B) home to school transport including those pupils with SEND who may need transport assistance to and from school. The first section reiterates the active travel advice, encourages investment in routes to schools and suggests the staggered opening of schools to reduce congestion at peak times.
- 5.2. Part B dedicated school transport for autumn 2020 outlines the stages local authorities must take to mitigate and adopt measures to reduce the risk of Covid -19 infection. For the autumn term the guidance states that *“local authorities will not be required to uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport on dedicated school or college transport. However, the full opening for schools guidance also sets out that distancing should still be put in place within vehicles wherever possible”*.
- 5.3. For children with SEND local authorities should take into account particular needs and if required introduce enhanced measures e.g. sanitiser to lower the risk of infection, however, special schools are smaller and use of smaller vehicles lowers risk of infection.
- 5.4. To mitigate against the risk of infection, where social distancing is not possible we have asked parents to help their child to understand the importance of wearing a face covering and supply them with one each day if they feel this can be tolerated. Children will be transported in dedicated bubbles with children on a school round (bubble) allocated a seat on that round with the same driver and two Passenger Assistants. There will be hand sanitiser on board all vehicles and all pupils will be expected to use it upon entry to the vehicle. The crew will use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

### 6. Digital Divide / Laptops

- 6.1. The Department for Education (DfE) Covid-19 Technology Support Scheme offered laptops and 4G routers for two eligible groups of Children & Young People. The two groups were disadvantaged Year 10 Pupils (taking GCSEs next year), and Care Leavers and Children with a Social Worker aged 0-19
- 6.2. We received 233 laptops and 102 4G routers for disadvantaged Year 10 children attending maintained Hackney settings. These were sent directly to schools in the first two weeks of July. Ownership of the devices was transferred to schools. The decision to lend or give devices to children rested with schools
- 6.3. We also received 1,347 laptops and 102 4G routers for Care Leavers and Children with a Social Worker aged 0-19. Of these, 724 were sent directly to schools in the first two

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weeks of July to distribute to eligible pupils. Ownership of the devices was transferred to schools. The decision to lend or give devices to children rested with schools.

- 6.4. The remaining devices are being distributed by Children's Social Care to ensure eligible children not attending a Hackney school were able to access the offer. Of these 510 have been allocated to identified children/young people with a high number delivered to date.
- 6.5. To supplement the devices distributed from the DfE, Hackney Education has launched the Hackney laptop appeal, asking local businesses and the community to donate unwanted laptops to help children and young people access online learning and education. The appeal also asks for financial donations to help purchase additional laptops. The appeal was launched in late July and, depending on the level of response, may run for up to 12 months. Distribution of devices to schools will happen periodically depending on the volume of donations received
- 6.6. Allocation of donated laptops to schools will be made proportionally based on free school meals take up. Schools will be responsible for distributing their allocation to children and young people they identify as needing a laptop to access learning.
- 6.7. The appeal has been promoted in local publications, internal newsletters, on social media, the Hackney Business Network newsletter, Hackney Council website, and through direct approach by the project team to partners, businesses and suppliers.
- 6.8. As at 14 August, just over 2 weeks after launch, the appeal has had responses indicating potentially 45 - 50 laptop donations and £1,125 in financial donations. We are awaiting confirmation of donations as they are received.
- 6.9. Where possible, the project team are establishing a link or collaborating with other local initiatives or schemes aiming to improve the level of support to Hackney schools, children and young people.

### **7. Covid-19 notifications in schools & settings**

- 7.1. Since the last Scrutiny meeting on 13 July, we have been notified of 2 positive COVID-19 cases in 2 early years settings. The instances were not linked and, in each case, the setting has worked with the London Coronavirus Response Cell (LCRC) to respond and take appropriate follow up actions. We continue to monitor situations and support settings.
- 7.2. At the start of the summer holiday period, we were also alerted to a number of positive COVID-19 cases in independent settings.. This was in line with an increase in positive cases identified in the north of the borough and work with the community was undertaken to respond; this responsive and preventative work is ongoing and is being delivered in partnership with the community. Protocols have also been developed to ensure Public Health are involved and a robust multi agency response is implemented at an early stage where positive cases are identified in independent schools & settings (including Unregistered Educational settings).

### **8. Education Services Staffing**

- 8.1. The majority of Education Services staff continue to work from home whilst the offices at 1 Reading Lane remain closed to staff and members of the public. There are 3 education service areas working with corporate IT piloting the use of home working equipment and remote working alternatives.
- 8.2. One of the teams outlined above is also working with corporate IT to pilot new ways of working, looking to maximise the use of technology to improve service delivery, whilst still enabling the most vulnerable residents to have face to face appointments if needed (when HSC re-opens).

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- 8.3. As schools open again from the start of September, relevant staff will, however, begin to visit schools & settings. To support this, guidance for staff to ensure the health & safety whilst off site and when visiting schools & settings has been drafted and will be published for the start of term. .