

Service Director Education Report

To: Children and Young People's Committee

Meeting Date: 10th November 2020

From: Jonathan Lewis - Service Director, Education (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough)

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: Not Applicable

Key decision: No

Outcome: To provide an overview of the activity in the Education Directorate during the COVID-19 crisis.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the issues outlined in this paper and comment as appropriate.
- b) Provide its support to the Executive Director (People and Communities), in writing a response to Baroness Berridge around the lack of basic need demand for a new secondary school in Soham.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the latest position on COVID-19 and restarting education in Cambridgeshire. The report also outlines key service updates / topical issues from across the Education Directorate so members are fully briefed on the challenges we face moving forward in the second half of the autumn term.

2.0 Update on COVID-19 and Education

- 2.1 Since the 20th March, schools, colleges and settings have remained formally closed. During the spring and summer term, they opened first to critical worker and vulnerable children before wider opening to children in early years, reception, year 1, year 6 and years 10 and 12. On the 1st September, schools and settings formally reopening in line with the Education Act 1996.
- 2.2 The latest highlight report for responding to the COVID-19 position can be found in Appendix 1.

Key issues to note are –

- Remote Learning Requirements – schools have a formal legal requirement from the 22nd October to ensure they can meet a specified level of education remotely. The LA has reviewed all maintained schools remote learning plans and supported with the development of policies to ensure education is uninterrupted.
 - The national laptop scheme has been launched to provide access to ICT equipment for those pupils who are ‘digitally’ disadvantaged. Maintained schools in Cambridgeshire were originally allocated access to 1,589 laptops in the scenario there were children who were unable to access learning remotely. Following a review by government this number has been reduced to 419. We are trying to establish the rationale behind this change especially in light of the high deprivation in parts of Cambridgeshire. Details we have received to date suggest laptops have been reallocated to areas of greatest need following closure of bubbles for COVID-19.
 - Attendance in Cambridgeshire remains high, consistently in the top 20% in the country. We have also seen higher attendance relatively for those children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and those children with a social worker.
 - Take up of Free School Meals in Cambridgeshire continues to increase as we see the economic impact of COVID-19. We have heavily marketed access to this funding – both for a meal but a school also having access to the Pupil Premium grant.
- 2.3 Schools have worked diligently and appropriately with these cases, following Department for Education (DfE), Public health England and Local Authority guidance. Remote learning has been put in place and vulnerable pupils continue to be supported directly.

3. Key Service Updates

St Bede’s Wave 12 Secondary Free School proposal at Soham

- 3.1 On 12 October 2020 Baroness Berridge, Under Secretary of State for Education confirmed in writing (see Appendix 2) to the Executive Director of Children, Families & Adults, that the proposed project for St Bede’s Inter-Church School Trust to open a new secondary free

school at Soham *should continue towards an opening date of September 2023*. As a faith designated school, if oversubscribed, 50% of places would be allocated on the basis of faith.

- 3.2 Soham has never been identified by the Council as an area of basic need such as to require a new secondary school. No application has ever been put forward by a MAT to establish a free secondary school at Soham. The Soham proposal came about as a result of the Department for Education's (DfE) property arm identifying a potential site in Soham. The DfE then proceeded to build a rationale for establishing a free school there.

In short, the Soham free school proposal did not originate from a basic need argument but rather from the DfE's desire for a well-respected and successful single academy trust to open a free school after its application to open one at Waterbeach was turned down.

Background

- 3.3 In September 2016 St Bede's Inter-Church School was one of two trusts which submitted an application under Wave 12 of the government's central free school programme to run the first secondary school on the new development at Waterbeach Barracks. Neither application was successful, the reason being that the need for the first secondary school was several years into the future and beyond the life of the parliament at the time.
- 3.4 However, the DfE was keen to work with the St Bede's Trust to identify an alternative location where the Trust could sponsor a free school and suggested Wisbech. Having considered the idea, the Trust confirmed to the DfE in the spring of 2018 that it did not wish to pursue the option of opening a new secondary free school in Wisbech. It did not fit with the Trust's preference for the location of any other school they might sponsor to be within easy reach of its existing school in Cambridge.
- 3.5 In the autumn of 2018, LocatED (the property arm of the DfE) identified a site at East Fen Common, Paddock Street in the Eastern Gateway development area of Soham. The local schools and officers expressed their concerns to the DfE over the Soham location and the lack of a basic need case for a new secondary school in this part of the county. The DfE reiterated that it was committed to exhausting all options to enable St Bede's *'to replicate its outstanding offer in Soham but will take into account the latest updated forecast information and consider the impact of a new school on existing local schools before coming to a final decision.'*
- 3.6 Various meetings took place between officers, the Trust and DfE representatives between December 2018 and summer 2019 to discuss the proposal further. Officers also made representations to the Regional Schools Commissioner setting out the Council's position summarised as follows:
- whilst a modest increase in secondary school places equivalent to 3FE is required across the East Cambridgeshire district over the next 10 years, the Council do not believe it is of a sufficient scale to justify a further new secondary school, in addition to the one recently opened in Littleport
 - if the new school is to be of a size to make it viable it has the potential to create surplus capacity to the detriment of existing schools in the district but also in Cambridge City where

St Bede's is located and to which families seeking an education in a faith based school currently send children from a wide area

- the option to expand existing schools incrementally and in a phased way will better match the supply of places with projected demand
- the Council's clear preference is to continue to work in partnership with its existing schools and academy trusts on small scale expansions when and where the pupil population justifies it.

3.7 In summary, officers have questioned throughout the value for money, sustainability and the impact on the Council's basic need allocation of a group of pupils which the forecast data suggests could be accommodated through expansion of existing schools.

Implications of a new free school at Soham

3.8 As a result of its religious ethos, the proposed free school is likely to serve a wider area hence it is reasonable to consider the whole district. The 5 secondary schools in the area currently have a combined Published Admission Number (PAN) of 1140 places. If the new free school is established this would add a further 120 places to this total, taking the number of Year 7 places to 1,260, 60 of which would be reserved for faith based applications. The Year 7 cohorts in 2023/24 (the proposed opening year of the Soham free school) and the following two years, 2024/25 and 2025/26 are forecast to be lower than in recent years. As a result, there could be a relatively large number of surplus places across the area.

School Year	Y7 Existing Capacity in East Cambs	Y7 Catchment Forecast ¹	Capacity including 120 places at new free school	Surplus places in the District with new free school
2019/2020	1140	1058		
2020/2021	1140	1065		
2021/2022	1140	1094		
2022/2023	1140	1191 ²		
2023/2024	1140	1114	1260	146
2024/2025	1140	1116	1260	144
2025/2026	1140	1081	1260	179
2026/2027	1140	1175	1260	85
2027/2028	1140	1106	1260	154
2028/2029	1140	1165	1260	95
2029/2030	1140	1117	1260	143

¹ Catchment forecasts show the population living in the area regardless of which school they attend. They are the Council's preferred forecasts for determining demand for school places in an area.

² Officers have already met with the sponsors of Witchford Village College and Ely College with a view to creating additional capacity. The academy sponsor of Soham Village College has also confirmed the school would be able to admit above their Published Admission Number (PAN) in the short term, and to expand the school's physical capacity in the longer term, should housing development in the local area require it to do so.

- 3.9 Members of the committee are asked to consider the issues raised above and support a response by the Executive Director: Children's Families & Adults to the Baroness Berridge setting out the Officers view of the opposition to the decision.

Elective Home Education

- 3.10 During the summer, we saw increase in the numbers of children and young people being off rolled from schools to be educated at home. This wasn't entirely unexpected, and we recognised that the environmental impact of COVID-19 led many parents to decide to take full responsibility for their child's education, either in the short/medium term but perhaps also permanently. The rise in pupils being home educated isn't an isolated issue relating to Cambridgeshire but a trend being seen nationally and has been commented on by Ofsted. From the end of term until the middle of October, we have seen an increase of over 200 parent's choosing to educate at home to bring the current number to 1276. Whilst there is no comparative figures on recent situation, the number of EHE in Peterborough grew proportionally in line with Cambridgeshire.
- 3.11 However, locally there does appear to be a recent decrease in the numbers off rolling to home education, which might indicate that the numbers are beginning to stabilise.
- 3.12 A current Education Select committee inquiry into 'Home Education' aims to explore the impact of COVID-19 on home education as well as seeking to "understand the extent to which current arrangements provide sufficient support for home educated children to access efficient, full time and suitable education". The regional LA groups (including those for lead members for Education) have been pushing hard to get additional power / support into these arrangements to make sure children are adequately safeguarded and have effective education whilst at home. We have shared our concerns to Essex who are leading the regions response to the Select Committee.
- 3.13 On the 22nd October, we receive some new guidance for dealing with EHE –
- The DfE now strongly recommend that LAs work with schools, parents and carers, and other key professionals (such as social workers) to coordinate a meeting before the parent makes a final decision. This ensures the parent fully considers what is in the best interests of each individual child. This is particularly important where vulnerable children, children with a social worker, and those at greatest risk of harm are involved.
 - LAs normally become aware of a child who is electively home educated once the name has been removed from the school roll. We expect schools and other professionals to engage with LAs where a parent is considering withdrawing their child from school for EHE before the child's name is removed from the roll. This will enable the LA to coordinate a meeting ahead of the child being withdrawn from school and the parent confirming in writing that they are being electively home educated instead. If a child attends a special school and this was arranged by a local authority, the local authority **must** give consent for the child's name to be removed from the roll.
 - The aim of the meeting is to ensure a positive choice taken without pressure from their school and signpost the guidance on gov.uk. LAs, schools, and other professionals have a responsibility to help parents fully understand the implications of withdrawing their child for EHE and their ongoing obligations, making clear that:
 - Parents assume full financial responsibility.

- Their child may not be able to return to the same school if they change their mind.
- Support from schools will not continue, including any special educational needs support, and in cases where LAs are not satisfied a child is receiving a suitable education, the parent may be issued with a School Attendance Order and / or the court may make an Education Supervision Order.
- LAs should also make parents aware that in extreme cases, where concerns over the suitability of education extend to safeguarding matters, a Care Order could be made by the court.

3.14 Significantly, there is a clear statement that Ofsted will continue to look for any evidence of off-rolling. The DfE guidance makes clear that pressuring a parent to remove their child from the school (including to home educate their child) is a form of off-rolling.

3.15 This change, whilst welcomed, does not bring with it any resources and additional capacity will be needed to deliver this requirement. We expect further guidance to be forthcoming to support this significant change. We also feel there remains significant risk around children being home educated, both in terms of safeguarding and quality of education.

Coronavirus Catch Up Premium

3.16 The Department for Education has established a £650m fund for the 2020 / 21 academic year to ensure all state schools have the support they need to help all pupils make up for lost teaching time. Schools' allocations will be calculated on a per pupil basis, providing each mainstream school with a total of £80 for each pupil in years reception through to 11. Special, Alternative Provision and hospital schools will be provided with £240 for each place for the 2020 to 2021 academic year. This will be paid in 3 tranches in autumn 2020, early 2021 and Summer 2021. Schools are required to use this funding for specific activities to support their pupils to catch up for lost teaching over the previous months, in line with the guidance on curriculum expectations for the next academic year. The Education Endowment foundation has released a guide for schools on how to spend the funding. Schools have the flexibility to spend their funding in the best way for their cohort and circumstances.

3.17 Schools should have "costed plan" for delivery and have to be able to account for how this money is being used. When routine inspections restart, Ofsted will make judgements about the quality of education being provided, and that will include how leaders are using their funding (including catch-up funding) to ensure the curriculum has a positive impact on all pupils. Given the low value per pupil, support will be targeted at pupils that are most in need of support. Although funding guidance refers to being spent on 'disadvantaged' it does outline that teachers and school leaders will be able to exercise their professional judgement to determine which pupils are in most need of support.

National Tutoring Programme (NTP)

- 3.18 This is a separate £350m programme which is split into 3 programmes -
- a 5 to 16 programme that will make high-quality tuition available to 5 to 16-year olds in state-funded primary and secondary schools from the second half of autumn term 2020;
 - a 16 to 19 fund for school sixth forms, colleges and all other 16 to 19 providers to provide small group tutoring activity for disadvantaged 16 to 19 students whose studies have been

disrupted as a result of COVID-19 - guidance setting out further detail of this element will be issued shortly; and

- A reception year early language programme that will make training and resources available at no-cost to schools where additional targeted support for oral language would be particularly beneficial.
- 3.19 The clear focus on the use of tutor is based upon extensive evidence that demonstrates the potential of one-to-one and small-group tuition as a cost-effective way to support pupils who are falling behind in their learning, suggesting that it can boost progress by up to 5 months. Schools have to apply for this fund, unlike the catch up premium.
- 3.20 Tutoring has long been accessed only by parents who can afford it. The Department for Education is offering 75% subsidy on costs of tutors accessed through the National Tutoring Programme for 1:3. They have undertaken a procurement exercise to identify accredited NTP Partners will be published at the beginning of November. Partners are required to evidence access to high-quality, evidence-informed tutors with a rigorous quality assurance process. The tuition is designed to be flexible using different timing and different mediums of delivery.
- 3.21 We have been working with our Teaching Schools to join with the Schools Partnership Tutors (SP Tutors), part of the Unity Schools Partnership. We are keen to use existing capacity who are known to the school to ensure continuity and impact. Whilst not confirmed yet, the indicative costs are £50/hour (qualified teacher tutor) or £40/hour (tutor). The school pays 25%, i.e. £187.50 (qualified teacher tutor) or £150 (tutor) for three children to have 15 hours tutoring with the other 75% of the costs being reclaimed from the DfE. Tutors will receive training including safeguarding. We expect an announcement on the commencement of this scheme to come in November and we hope all Peterborough schools engaged. A briefing held with Headteachers on the 22nd October covered the proposed arrangements.

School Improvement

- 3.22 Our direct school improvement work has been challenging as we have tried to avoid formal Autumn visits. However we have had regular contact with schools and the general emerging themes seem to be -
- The hard work on Risk Assessments seems to have paid off. Getting pupils back into school seems to have gone relatively smoothly;
 - Schools seem to striking a good balance between quickly getting to grips with where pupils are in their learning now whilst also being mindful of a broad curriculum and PHSE type work;
 - School leaders are finding creative ways for the school to come together whilst also maintaining distancing - e.g. virtual assemblies etc.;
 - Most pupils are glad to be back in school and seems to have settled into new routines well. Any children with well-being type issues were already known to the school before COVID-19;
 - Now that pupils are back in head teachers seem to enjoy being able to refocus some more of their time on school improvement priorities.
- 3.23 The emerging challenges seem to be –

- Creating a quality plan for remote learning which is also manageable, especially in a scenario where some pupils are at home and others are in school
- Concerns where there are high numbers of pupils without access to ICT at home;
- Teacher well-being and workload; teacher tiredness and illness is leading to pressure linked to covering staff absence
- Anxiety about the volume of health related work support staff, pupils and parents.

3.24 To support Headteachers, we have written to all Chairs of Governors with advice on how best to support Headteacher wellbeing.

Ofsted Supportive Visits

3.25 A number of schools have had 'supportive visits' from Ofsted over recent weeks. The aim of these visits is to gather information from schools about how they are responding to the challenges of COVID-19 that can be fed back nationally. The HMI-led visits have a number of foci, including how schools are catching pupils up with the curriculum; the plans leaders have in place around remote learning; how schools are promoting good attendance and behaviour; how leaders are identifying the needs of pupils with SEND and ensuring these are met; the school's safeguarding arrangements, including for pupils who need early help; and how leaders are managing safer recruitment and allegations against staff.

3.26 The visits typically begin after the pupils have arrived at school, and finish before they leave. Inspectors do not visit classrooms or tour the school; instead they speak with leaders during a series of socially-distanced meetings. Ofsted does not regard the visits as 'inspections', so formal feedback is not given at the end of these. The visits cannot result in a change of Ofsted grade, as only a Section 5 inspection can do this. We are advised that very brief letters will be published; at the time of writing, none of these are in the public domain but we anticipate that they will be rather generic.

3.27 Thus far, school leaders report that the visits have been positive rather than a source of intense additional pressure on school leaders. Some inspectors have offered helpful comments, thoughts and suggestions during their conversations with school leaders. Inspectors have not raised concerns during any of the visits that have taken place, or indicated that any further inspection activity will occur as a result of them.

3.28 Ofsted have published an overview from 121 school visits from the 14th to the 18th September for the pilot phase of the supportive visits. Key findings are -

Remote learning 'not aligned' to curriculum - Leaders reported that in some subjects their remote education was only aligned with their pre-existing curriculum "to some extent". In others, it was not yet aligned. The report found that schools were using remote learning to educate pupils at home, the materials were in many cases not fully aligned with the regular curriculum. Ofsted said pupils must not lose the progression that a strong, well-sequenced curriculum brings. Without that structure, remote education becomes more about filling time than about effective learning. Meanwhile some schools had reported safety concerns over the use of live lessons, "such as pupils being alone in a room while the lesson was taking place, and had chosen not to use live teaching because of these concerns".

Primaries focus on reading, secondaries re-order curriculum - Ofsted said secondary schools were “teaching most of the subjects they usually teach, though many have reordered topics within subjects, however some had suggested that pupils may need to drop an option”. Primary schools were giving “even more attention to reading than usual”, including phonics, as they “wanted to make sure that if there have been any losses in learning, particularly in reading, these are quickly put right”. The schools said that they planned to return to their normal curriculum by the summer term 2021 but many said they thought they would be able to achieve this earlier”.

Pupils are struggling to concentrate - While pupils were adapting to schools’ COVID-19 rules, some were “finding it more difficult to concentrate on their learning than usual. Leaders felt that some were showing less resilience, for example becoming quickly upset if the work seemed difficult, or giving up more easily.”

Testing failures are ‘real barrier’ to keeping schools open - School leaders were concerned about not being able to keep their schools open when staff had to isolate to wait for coronavirus tests and test results. Many leaders saw the lack of availability of COVID-19 testing in their area as a real barrier to getting – or staying – properly up and running again. Concerns over safety also meant leaders were struggling how to work out including practical subjects such as PE, design and music.

COVID-19 ‘anxiety’ leads to home education rise - Over a third of schools reported that some parents had removed their children to electively home educate them, or were about to do so, because of their anxiety over COVID-19.

Teachers recruited on fixed-term contracts because of online interviews - The report also touched on recruitment: it found schools had generally continued to recruit over the summer, with interviews done online. However the “biggest concern expressed by leaders was not being able to see a prospective teacher teaching”. “Occasionally, schools had recruited teachers on fixed-term contracts for this reason”, Ofsted found, although some schools said online interviews had “worked much better than they had anticipated”. A small number of leaders “did not like the idea of interviewing virtually so had delayed the process until this term”.

- 3.29 This is a useful overview of many of the issues schools have faced. Reassuringly, we have provide advice and guidance to schools on these issues previously. It is a surprise however that neither the costs of funding COVID-19 compliance or the pressure on school staff were included.

GCSE and A-Level Examinations 2021

- 3.30 Following the use of centre assessed grades in the summer 2020 examinations, the DfE have announced that students will be given more time to prepare for their exams next year, as most AS, A levels and GCSEs will be held 3 weeks later to help address the disruption caused by the pandemic. The government’s view is that that exams are the fairest and most accurate way to measure a pupil’s attainment. The summer exam series will start on 7 June and end on 2 July for almost all AS and A levels and GCSEs. Results days are Tuesday 24 August for A and AS levels and Friday 27 August for GCSEs so students will start the following academic year as normal.

3.31 However, the government is going to continue to review this situation as the current rising case numbers and the battle to suppress the virus mean further changes might be needed. Risks are currently being identified to allow mitigation for issues such as student unable to sit exams due to illness or self-isolation, or schools affected by a local outbreak during the examination season meaning centres cannot open. Ofqual have already made some proposed changes to the examinations to allow for students not being taught fully during this time. Further details on the exam approach is expected in November.

SEND

- 3.32 Special Schools have been able to offer access to placements for the vast majority of pupils since September 2020 and were able to offer placements for all pupils apart from a small minority of pupils who have complex health needs which include Aerosol Generated Procedures (AGP) or issues in relation to their care which require ventilation equipment. This cohort of children are mainly placed within Special School environments although there are 2 pupils in this bracket who are on roll at mainstream schools.
- 3.33 The challenges for this group of pupils have been based around a lack of national guidance for settings in the effective management or the confirmation of the levels of risk associated with AGP and the COVID -19 virus. The SEND team have worked closely with health colleagues within the CCG and Public Health to push for the guidance to be finalised and we are very close to that position now. It remains an ongoing issue that there is a lack of PPE 'fit testing' training to ensure that settings have the appropriate skills in place to effectively mitigate any possible risks. We are working to identify solutions to this as quickly as possible to ensure that all pupils are given access to a school place, where ever appropriate.
- 3.34 All pupils have been given access to an educational offer, remotely or through communication with their school or setting, but it is clearly important to return to children / young people to schools as quickly as possible and within safe parameters.
- 3.35 There are a range of other challenges that have created potential barriers for the return of all children and young people to their schools placement. COVID-19 symptoms and the following of national guidance with regard to test and trace is responsible for some of the gaps in the data and this is having an increased impact across Peterborough. However, there are groups of pupils who have not yet returned to school due to the level of anxiety being felt either by the children and young people themselves or by parent carers, who may well have complex health needs themselves. The SEND team are monitoring the individual cases across Cambridgeshire and supporting the reintegration of pupils into school by utilising a recording system for all pupils who are not yet attending full time. This is an agreed policy that requires settings to regularly review the attendance of pupils not yet attending full time. A working group made up of members of the attendance and inclusion team are now monitoring these cases closely.
- 3.36 Attendance policies have been implemented to support the work of this team, in partnership with settings, however, we have taken a more flexible approach to ensure that we are applying empathy for families who have genuine anxieties due to the current situation. Nevertheless, there are families who have historical issues in relation to attendance and for

these cases we are capturing the full extent of the attendance procedures and thus supporting the right message about the importance of regular attendance.

3.37 The anxiety being felt by families has also created a spike in interest for Elective Home Education (EHE). Some families (in discussion with Pinpoint, our parent carer forum) have shared that they have recognised additional benefits to providing education from home, especially for children who may be on the Autism Spectrum. This may be due to the removal of anxieties based around uniform, transport or leaving and returning to the home environment. LA officers have been working closely with schools to ensure that parents are fully aware of the risks and full consequences of EHE and we have set up additional monitoring of these cases to try and limit the move towards this option. We are trying to collate our positive learning from these difficult times and we are looking to alternative options that we may be able to offer such as a blended approach, however, this is still in the very early development stages.

4. Alignment with Corporate Priorities

4.1 A good quality of life for everyone

4.1.1 Providing high quality education should enhance the skills of the local workforce and provide essential childcare services for working parents or those seeking to return to work. Schools and early years and childcare services are providers of local employment.

4.2 Thriving places for people to live

4.2.1 There are no significant implications for this priority.

4.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's Children

4.3.1 There are no significant implications for this priority.

4.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050

4.4.1 There are no significant implications for this priority.

5.0 Significant Implications

5.1 Resource Implications

5.1.1 There are no significant implications.

5.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

5.2.1 There are no significant implications.

5.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

5.3.1 There are no significant implications.

5.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

5.4.1 There are no significant implications.

5.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

5.5.1 There are no significant implications.

5.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

5.6.1 The reports cover issues collectively across the county. The County Council members for Soham have been notified of the content of this report.

5.7 Public Health Implications

5.7.1 Public Health Directorate and Education Directorate working closely on the COVID-19 response and safe reopening of schools.

6. Source documents

6.1 Source documents

- Recovery Plan
- Ofsted Review of Pilot Supportive Visit

6.2 Location

[Cambs Learn Together website](#)

[Schools Briefing Covid-19](#)

7.0 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 – Highlight report October 2018

7.2: Appendix 2 - Letter from Baroness Berridge to Wendi Ogle-Welbourn