

Service Director Report - Education

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 29th June 2021

From: Service Director - Education

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref:

Outcome: The report is intended to provide an overview to the Committee of the current challenges in education and the short and longer term objectives as we move into the recovery phase.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to note the report and request any further information on the areas outlined.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Covid-19 situation has meant the work of the education directorate has expanded significantly to provide advice and guidance to all schools and early years settings, whilst many of our statutory functions continue. It has been a hugely challenging time where teams across the Council have stood up to this challenge and worked beyond expectations to ensure our children, staff and communities are protected. This journey has been charted through reports to the Children and Young People Committee. This challenge continues, but we are starting to move towards the recovery phase and this paper seeks to cover the current approach and future plans for the Directorate.

2. Key Issues in Education

Covid 19 Position

- 2.1 Since the start of the summer term (12th April), we have had 177 confirmed Covid-19 cases in Cambridgeshire schools and early years settings. These include cases in independent schools. This has led to 144 members of staff and 2,001 children isolating. We have undertaken regular briefings for Headteachers at each of the stages of the route map out of Covid-19 and provided resources and support to ensure schools and early years settings continue to remain safe places for our children and staff. Weekly member briefings have been produced throughout the Covid-19 pandemic for Members and MPs to ensure they are fully briefed on the challenges we are facing.

Attendance

- 2.2 Attendance has been strong throughout, reflecting parental confidence and the hard work of schools to support children safely returning to school. We have been consistently above national and regional average and we produce a weekly monitoring tool for schools that compare their attendance against other schools in the Local Authority area. This has been perceived as best practice by the Department for Education and shared with other areas where attendance is low.

	Attendance - 9th June 2021		
	Cambridgeshire	East of England	England
Primary Attendance	96.9%	96.0%	95.5%
Secondary Attendance	73.4%	73.3%	72.4%
Overall attendance	87.9%	85.9%	85.2%
Pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan	86.9%	85.7%	85.3%
Pupils with social worker	84.3%	81.2%	81.3%

- 2.3 These figures are impacted by closure of bubbles as the attendance is compared against overall numbers on a school roll.

Exams – Year 11 and Year 13.

- 2.4 Owing to the cancellation of exams again this academic year, schools have been collating evidence on student performance for teacher assessed grades (TAG). This has included the use of tests made available by the examining body, mock results, assessed student work and other evidence. Schools will then submit the TAG information to the relevant board, and these will be reviewed and moderated, with further investigation if required. A period of moderation and review will be undertaken before results are published on the 10th August (A-levels) and 12th August (GCSEs). This is earlier than usual to allow times for appeals and for students to get more support with their choice of the next stage of their education. Students are not notified of their submitted grades.
- 2.5 The appeal process is open to all students. Centres must submit appeals requested by students. There is a prioritised appeal process for those students applying to higher education who did not attain their firm choice (i.e. the offer they accepted as their first choice) and wish to appeal an A-level or other Level 3 qualification result. The appeals process goes through two stages:
- Stage 1: The Centre Review – where there is check for administrative errors (e.g. mis-transposing grades from one spreadsheet to another) and that the centre has followed its procedures properly and consistently.
 - Stage 2: Awarding Organisation appeal. Candidates can appeal to awarding organisations if they feel the Centre Review did not properly resolve concerns about administrative or procedural errors. They can also appeal on the basis of unreasonable exercise of academic judgement in the choice of evidence from which to determine the grade and/or the determination of that grade from the evidence. The independent reviewer will determine the alternative grade. The awarding organisation will then report the revised grade and outcome of the appeal, with reasons, to the centre. The 'independent reviewer' is a subject expert appointed and trained by the awarding organisation.
- 2.6 Priority students have to request Centre Reviews (stage 1) by August 16th, and Awarding Organisation appeals (stage 2) by August 23rd. Non-priority appeals can be processed until October.
- 2.7 Where the awarding organisation finds an issue, they will report these findings to the centre and direct them to revise the Teacher Assessed Grade.
- 2.8 Teaching staff and leaders will be required to be available over the summer holidays. This is likely to be a challenging process for both schools, students, and parents. We are intending to undertake some proactive communication work prior to the publication of outcomes so people can understand the arrangements for this year.

Current Priorities

- 2.9 Covid-19 is very much still part of our daily work. However, we have begun to focus on wider areas which will contribute to our work and objectives moving forward. Upcoming reports to this Committee will outline these areas further but the current areas of priority are:
- Supporting schools with the continued challenge of Covid-19. This is likely to remain until Spring 2022 due to vaccination roll out with children and the impact of the Delta variant in school age children.
 - We have not yet seen the full impact of Covid-19 on families and vulnerable children and young people – behaviour, SEND needs and mental health challenges are emerging. We will need to respond to support this and broker additional services to support children. We do not currently have any additional funding for this.
 - The substantial deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for high needs funding. This is around £27m and we have lobbied Government for additional funding but nothing has been forthcoming to date. We are finalising a recovery plan and have worked closely with the Department for Education (DfE) to outline the challenges we face. Our aim is to bring our spend in line with the annual budget in the next three years. We will continue pushing our case for DfE 'safety valve' funding to write off our deficit. Other authorities have received this funding.
 - Addressing the lack of capacity within SEND services to support the volume of requests for Education Health and Care Plans. We have seen a 38.5% increase in numbers of children in three years and despite investment in the team, we cannot keep pace with the volume of work. The statutory assessment process takes capacity from across the service. We also need further capacity to transform service areas to provide better outcomes and reduce spend.
 - Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on pupil's learning. This is not yet fully understood and will not be established nationally until next year with the first set of published performance data. We are intending collecting information from schools this term to understand where children are against national expectations to help schools to plan.
 - Procure a provider and deliver a voucher scheme for all eligible children from vulnerable families for the 2021 Summer holidays.
 - Recruiting to vacancies across the service - we have been unable to recruit to several key roles within the team including the Assistant Director for School and Setting Improvement. To deliver current and future priorities, we need further capacity.
 - We have recently undertaken a revisit of our LA survey of schools after three years. This has shown significant improvement in the creditability of the LA but also highlighted a number of areas for further development. This will form part of our action plan moving forward.

- Deliver the education elements of the joint administration agreement. This includes ensuring sufficiency of breakfast club provision, supporting schools to remain maintained by the Local Authority and looking at sustainability funding for Nursery schools. Action plans will be written for all of these areas.
- Increasing the take up for free school meal entitlement especially for families who are low income following Covid-19. We also want to increase the take up of 2 year old funded places and the early years pupil premium (3 and 4 year olds) as we know settings are losing out on financial support which is vital to support catch up in these establishments.
- Ensure attendances continues to be high across all groups including a focus on vulnerable groups. We will also offer advice parents who are considering elective home educating their children line with the new requirement brought in during Covid-19.

Long Term Objectives

2.10 Planning for the longer term is challenging at the current time however the key focus areas for the directorate can be listed below:

- Commission eight new schools to meet our growth requirements in the next five years. This will be undertaken through the LA led free school presumption processes and support trusts with free school bids.
- Developed a school improvement strategy that bring all outcomes above national average and to the top of our statistical neighbours. Focus areas:
 - Improving Key Stage 2 outcome. All other areas have seen significant improvements and more schools becoming good and outstanding.
 - Focus our challenge and support to Academy Trusts over their performance.
 - We are 'closing the gap' for pupil premium children at a faster pace than other local authorities but the gap remains one of the largest in the country. With more children becoming eligible for pupil premium, we need to continue to deliver our approach further.
- Ensure there is a sustainable approach to operating our smallest schools. This may involve consideration of different models for delivery and we are working with the Church of England Diocese to ensure we can continue to support these schools in their communities. Cambridgeshire schools are funded at 145th out of the 151st and this is affecting all children. We are hoping that changes to the national funding formula and the inclusion of a revised sparsity factor (rurality) will support schools.
- Develop an action plan for improving prevention and early intervention for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and reduce the need for statutory processes. This will include developing more locally based, school-based provision as part of the continuum of support for children with additional needs.

- Ensure we effectively respond to the Ofsted Inspection of SEND services expected to take place in 2022. The last inspection took place in 2017.
- Sustain the improvement that have emerged in Fenland through the Opportunity area to ensure its academic performance continues to improve.
- Build a strong Local Authority led family of maintained schools to deliver and sustain outstanding school improvement and a culture of self-improvement.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Communities at the heart of everything we do

- Schools and early years settings are at the heart of communities. Ensuring effective recovery from Covid-19 will support communities getting back to normal.

3.2 A good quality of life for everyone

- 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.

3.3 Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full

- The funding will support the most challenging families on low income to support feeding their children during the school holidays.

3.4 Cambridgeshire: a well-connected, safe, clean, green environment

- There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.5 Protecting and caring for those who need us

- Education is the major universal service the council provides as all children are required to access education. School and early years settings play a critical role in safeguarding and protecting the welfare of children and families. Post Covid-19, this role is becoming even more important.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The need to ensure sufficient capacity for the SEND statutory process will be considered as a capacity bid. The funding requirement is currently being considered.

- 4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.7 Public Health Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas:
There are no significant implications within this category.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes
Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement? Yes

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? Yes
Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?
Yes
Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?
Yes
Name of Officer: Simon Cobby

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes
Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?
No implications.

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

No implications

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 Source documents

None