

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 8 SEPTEMBER 2020

COVID-19 EDUCATION UPDATE

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills and the Director of Children's Services have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on the work being undertaken preparing for and supporting education settings and schools in the Autumn term including:
 - i. arrangements for home to school transport;
 - ii. advice on the use of face coverings in and around schools;
 - iii. progress in online learning; and
 - iv. the handling of outbreaks in schools and other settings.

Background

2. The Panel requested an update on the work being carried out to support Education settings and schools during the Covid19 period.

Preparing for September full re-opening of school provision

3. As part of the next phase of the response to the Covid-19 outbreak, Government guidance plans for the return of all children and young people, in all year groups, to school full-time from the beginning of September.

Risk Assessments for September full opening

4. Worcestershire Children First (WCF) provided all Local Authority (LA) maintained schools (including voluntary aided) with a Risk Assessment addendum form including additional questions to highlight risks in relation to: Public Health, Health & Safety, Accommodation, and Staffing. The letter was sent out on Friday 10 July to 126 schools and settings including all Special Schools (Academy and Maintained). Schools had until 31 July to return this addendum.
5. As of 27 August 2020, 126 completed Addendum to Risk Assessment forms have been received, 123 have been reviewed by all specialist teams, and 111 of them are fully supported. There is 1 school which currently cannot be supported after being reviewed by the specialist teams. WCC's Health and Safety Team are liaising with this school to organise their safe reopening. Queries have been raised by schools including the use of portable sinks, safe introduction of lettings, face coverings, hand washing, water dispensers and wall cleaning. In all instances additional support and guidance has been given to these schools individually, and all queries with the appropriate guidance is currently being collated to be shared with all schools.
6. Of the four sites identified with ventilation issues, solutions have been found in all cases which will enable the sites to reopen as planned at the beginning of term.

Additional storage for schools

7. All schools in Worcestershire were asked to respond to a survey outlining their storage requirements to enable full re-opening. As at 27th August this solution project has been fully implemented and been positively received by schools as support from WCC.

Transition visits

8. As schools have been unable to hold transition and introduction dates for new starters, schools are relying on the first few weeks of the Autumn term to ensure a comprehensive introduction into school life, particularly for reception children and transition year groups. This does mean that some reception children will experience a staggered lead in to school full-time through the first weeks of September, however in most cases this is in line with their usual staged approach and families are supportive of this proposal.

Reception start dates

9. There are 5 schools identified who have planned to start reception children in week commencing 14th September (including 2 academies). The 3 maintained schools have been contacted and confirmed that all families with reception starters have been individually notified and supportive of this decision and have been offered places if needed, although no families have taken up this offer. The DfE have been working with the academy schools to understand and mitigate issues.

Technology support

10. As of 14 August, WCF successfully delivered 1206 devices to vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people in Worcestershire in order to support their continued education during the coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic. We are working with our partner IBS Schools to deliver an additional 58 devices.

11. In addition, 16 individual Academy schools received laptops for Year 10 students. Academy schools will also have received an allocation for their vulnerable children via WCF.

12. The DfE have recently announced that as pupils return to school in the autumn term and in the event of further disruptions, laptops and tablets will be distributed directly to schools affected by a local coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. These will be available for disadvantaged pupils in years 3 to 11 and clinically extremely vulnerable children from all year groups unable to attend school.

13. Schools will work directly with the Department for Education in making requests and receiving delivery of further IT devices. Before the start of the autumn term, local authorities and academy trusts in England will be contacted to request contact details for each school to progress this facility should it be required.

14. All nominated contacts will receive detailed instructions for how to place an order in the event of a local coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak that affects their school(s) or pupils. Allocation of devices will be assessed at the time of ordering based on availability and the extent of coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreaks. Once delivered, these devices will be owned by the school and provided to children and young people who would otherwise be unable to access remote education.

The handling of outbreaks in schools and other settings

15. Public Health in Worcestershire County Council has responded swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic: publishing a robust Outbreak Control Plan (OCP) which has a Local Outbreak Response Team (LORT) at its centre, responding to local outbreaks in settings and communities and working with partners such as Public Health England, Herefordshire & Worcestershire CCG and Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to reduce the risk of further transmission of COVID19 as well as the national Test & Trace service. The LORT is now fully operational 7 days a week from 9am to 6pm. The OCP has been stress tested at a recent tabletop exercise lead by the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum Tactical Command group. A revision of the OCP has been published incorporating the recommendations of the tabletop exercise. The OCP will be continually tested and is seen as a dynamic document. As part of the local arrangements, the LORT now incorporates additional Infection Prevention Control nurse capacity and has access to a range of testing facilities.

16. The LORT continue to identify and work with high risk settings proactively to reduce the risk of an outbreak of COVID19. In respect of schools and other children's settings, Public Health have worked closely with WCF over the last few months on a range of preventive and protective measures and communications as well as reactive work and responding to potential outbreaks in settings. A full suite of bespoke guidance has been provided to early years and educational settings and children's residential settings. The guidance for Special Schools was identified as good practice by the DfE. As part of the OCP a set of standard operating procedures have been implemented and tested with early years and schools since the reopening of settings in June and during the summer holidays. In preparation for the new term a variety of scenarios will be further stress tested on 18th September. The scenarios will further test the protective measures and controls that schools have put in place, the OCP standard operating procedures and the resilience of both local settings and the wider system.

17. Since June, the LORT has taken enquiries from early years and educational settings, provided precautionary advice to settings with symptomatic cases and advised and supported a number of settings with confirmed positive cases. Upon notification of symptomatic or confirmed positive CYP or staff, the LORT will undertake a risk assessment, support testing, provide infection prevention control and self-isolation advice, contact tracing and public health action to prevent any further transmission within the setting or wider community.

Face Coverings

18. The World Health Organisation have recently advised that "children aged 12 and over should wear a mask under the same conditions as adults, in particular when they cannot guarantee at least a 1-metre distance from others and there is widespread

transmission in the area.”

19. Nationwide, the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary in education settings generally because a system of controls, applicable to all education environments, provides additional mitigating measures. Schools and colleges will have the discretion to require face coverings for Year 7s and above in communal areas where social distancing cannot be safely managed, if they believe that it is right in their particular circumstances.

20. Examples of where education leaders might decide to recommend the wearing of face coverings for pupils and staff in communal areas of the education setting include:

- a. where the layout of the school or college estate makes it particularly difficult to maintain social distancing when staff and pupils are moving around the premises
- b. where on top of hygiene measures and the system of controls recommended in the full opening guidance to schools and FE colleges and providers, permitting the use of face coverings for staff, pupils or other visitors would provide additional confidence to parents to support a full return of children to school or college.

21. On the basis of current evidence and in light of the mitigating control measures education settings are taking, and the negative impact on communication, face coverings are not necessary in the classroom even where social distancing is not possible. There is greater use of the system of controls for minimising risk, including through keeping in small and consistent groups or bubbles, and greater scope for physical distancing by staff within classrooms. Face coverings can have a negative impact on learning and teaching and so their use in the classroom should be avoided.

22. Consistent with WHO’s new advice, schools and colleges should take additional precautionary measures in areas where the transmission of the virus is high. These areas are defined as areas of national government intervention. In these local intervention (lockdown) areas, in education settings where Year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain. As in the general approach, it will not usually be necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective measures already mean the risks are lower, and they may inhibit teaching and learning.

23. In the event of new local restrictions being imposed, schools and colleges will need to communicate quickly and clearly to staff, parents, pupils and learners that the new arrangements require the use of face coverings in certain circumstances. This updated guidance on face coverings for areas of national government intervention will come into effect on 1 September.

24. It is vital that face coverings are worn correctly and that clear instructions are provided to staff, children and young people on how to put on, remove, store and dispose of face coverings in all of the circumstances above, to avoid inadvertently increasing the risks of transmission.

25. Safe wearing of face coverings requires cleaning of hands before and after touching, including to remove or put them on and the safe storage of them in individual, sealable plastic bags between use. Where a face covering becomes damp,

it should not be worn and the face covering should be replaced carefully.

26. Education settings will take steps to have a small contingency supply available to meet such needs. WCC / WCF will provide 2 face coverings per child, and a storage bag in order that no child is disadvantaged from accessing education because they don't have a face covering.

27. Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. For example people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability, or if you are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate. The same exemptions will apply in education settings, and we would expect teachers and other staff to be sensitive to those needs.

28. Some professionals that visit schools are likely to be wearing a fluid resistant face mask as part of their required PPE. This is because they are not part of the consistent group in that school and may well have to visit or mix with other groups, schools or settings during that day.

29. Face coverings are required to be worn on public transport for children aged 11 and above. As a precautionary measure we also want all children in Year 7 and above travelling on dedicated school transport to wear face coverings. The exception to this is that face coverings (or any form of medical mask where instructed to be used for specific clinical reasons) should not be worn in any circumstance by those who may not be able to handle them as directed (for example, young children, or those with special educational needs or disabilities) as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission.

Education Transport

30. Worcestershire County Council provides dedicated Home to School Transport (HTST) for over 9000 pupils to Mainstream schools, SEND and Alternative Provision through a variety of methods including Coaches, Minibus, Taxi and public transport.

31. Over the summer term the transport team ensured that the provision of dedicated HTST is safe, available and compliant with the most up to date guidance issued by both the Department for Education and the Department for Transport.

32. Continuous liaison with both transport providers, schools and colleges has been essential to achieve this goal and this partnership working has led to various additional resources and procedures being identified that will deliver HTST that is compliant with the guidance and has the capacity required based on pre Covid-19 levels.

33. Additional resources for the delivery of dedicated HTST have been organised in the form of:

- a. 11 new HTST transport contracts have been procured in order to maintain school bubbles and eliminate contracts that currently serve more than one school;
- b. seating plans have been produced for all mainstream dedicated HTST contracts in order to maintain year group bubbles within the school and help assist NHS Track and Trace if required;

- c. guidance has been produced for parents/careers outlining the requirements regarding the recommendation of Face Coverings, hand washing before and after a journey and “Catch it, Kill it, Bin it”; and
- d. guidance has been issued to transport operators confirming the procedures, expected vehicle cleaning regimes and reporting procedures.

34. Additional Resources to increase capacity on the Public Transport Network are also in process including:

- a. The DfE have provided an additional £503K in funding to secure additional capacity on the local public transport network to offset the reduced capacity due to social distancing;
- b. changes in the regulations have allowed the ability to turn some service journeys into closed contracts for students only and to duplicate some journeys with additional vehicles that are student only; and
- c. an increase in the frequency of some commercial services in urban areas that serve multiple schools.

Wellbeing for Education Return

35. On 4 August, the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care wrote to local authorities about Wellbeing for Education Return: funding and resources to train and support education settings to respond to the wellbeing and mental health needs of pupils and students.

36. The Wellbeing for Education Return seeks to better equip schools and colleges to promote children and young people’s wellbeing, resilience, and recovery in response to Covid-19. As well as strengthening and building wellbeing and resilience, this aims to prevent the onset of mental health problems and ensure those with pre-existing or emerging difficulties access the right support. There are two elements to the project:

- a) a new national training package providing guidance and resources for education staff on responding to the impact of Covid-19 on the wellbeing of their students and pupils.
- b) funding to local authorities to help put local experts in place to work with partners to adapt this training, deliver it to nominated staff in education settings, and provide ongoing advice and support until March 2021.

37. The national training materials will be made available in early September. Training and support will also be offered to local experts helping them to understand the content and advising on how to adapt it where necessary to the local context, as well as on approaches to planning and packaging delivery for a school and college audience.

38. The total funding for this project is £8m, in the financial year 2020-21, and will be paid to local authorities in the form of a single non-ring-fenced grant in September 2020. Funding allocations for local authorities reflect the number of state-funded education settings in their local authority area, with a minimum allocation. Worcestershire County Council have been allocated £84,551.

39. This project is being delivered through WCF education psychology team and in liaison with CAMHS and will seek to build on training already provided to schools in July, target schools identified as needing to develop inclusion strategies and support the development of local supervision groups for schools.

Online Learning

40. On Friday 7 August 2020, the DfE updated guidance on what all schools will need to do during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak from the start of the autumn term (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>). There was a significant update to 'Remote education support' in 'Section 5: Contingency planning for outbreaks' which outlines how schools are to prepare and act in the event of a local lockdown requiring pupils to remain at home, or where a class, group or small number of pupils need to self-isolate.

41. Schools should consider how to continue to improve the quality of their existing offer and have a strong contingency plan in place for remote education provision by the end of September. This planning will be particularly important to support a scenario in which the logistical challenges of remote provision are greatest, for example where large numbers of pupils are required to remain at home.

42. In developing these contingency plans, schools are expected to:

- use a curriculum sequence that allows access to high-quality online and offline resources and teaching videos, and that is linked to the school's curriculum expectations
- give access to high quality remote education resources
- select the online tools that will be consistently used across the school in order to allow interaction, assessment and feedback, and make sure staff are trained in their use
- provide printed resources, such as textbooks and workbooks, for pupils who do not have suitable online access
- recognise that younger pupils and some pupils with SEND may not be able to access remote education without adult support, and so schools should work with families to deliver a broad and ambitious curriculum.

43. When teaching pupils remotely, schools should:

- set assignments so that pupils have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects
- teach a planned and well-sequenced curriculum so that knowledge and skills are built incrementally, with a good level of clarity about what is intended to be taught and practised in each subject
- provide frequent, clear explanations of new content, delivered by a teacher in the school or through high quality curriculum resources and/or videos
- gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum, using questions and other suitable tasks and set a clear expectation on how regularly teachers will check work
- enable teachers to adjust the pace or difficulty of what is being taught in response to questions or assessments, including, where necessary, revising material or simplifying explanations to ensure pupils' understanding

- plan a programme that is of equivalent length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school, ideally including daily contact with teachers.

44. Schools should consider these expectations in relation to the pupils' age, stage of development and/or special educational needs, for example where this would place significant demands on parents' help or support. We expect schools to avoid an over-reliance on long-term projects or internet research activities.

45. The government will also explore making a temporary continuity direction in the autumn term, to give additional clarity to schools, pupils and parents as to what remote education should be provided. The DfE will engage with the sector before a final decision is made on this.

46. WCF School Improvement team are working on the development of an advisory document for maintained schools regarding remote learning in light of the updated DfE guidance. This document will follow a similar style to the Recovery Curriculum support document developed by the team.

47. When maintained schools meet with their School Improvement Advisor, their planning and monitoring of Remote Learning will form part of the discussion with the school, and thus be part of the support for that school moving forward.

Purpose of the Meeting

48. The Panel is asked to:
- consider and comment on the updates provided by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills and the Director of Children's Services; and
 - determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 List of increased Home to School Transport services
- http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20045/school_and_college_travel

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children's Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agendas and Minutes of Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel on [16 June 2020](#) and [17 July 2020](#)

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)