

REPORT TO: Education Committee

MEETING DATE: 23 November 2021

BY: Executive Director for Education & Children's Services

SUBJECT: Update on the Ongoing Impact of COVID-19 on Schools and the Wider Education Service during Session 2021/2022

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide an update on the continued impact of COVID-19 on schools and the wider Education Service during session 2021/22.
- 1.2 To provide an update on lessons learned including areas which the service and schools plan to build on and areas where further support will be required as a result of any negative impacts of COVID-19.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:
 - i. Note the considerable work continuing to be undertaken by the Education Service and school staff in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in session 2021-2022.
 - ii. Note the lessons learned including positive developments that we plan to build on and areas where further support is required.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Please refer to the Education Committee COVID-19 Update Report of 8 June 2021 for comprehensive background information on steps that have been taken by both the Education Service and schools to implement Scottish Government guidance to ensure the safe operation of schools during the pandemic.

3.2 School Session 2021/22

- 3.2.1 The latest version of Scottish Government *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools* guidance was updated on the return to school after the summer break in August 2021. It set out that local authorities and schools should continue to apply the mitigations that were in place at the end of the previous term until at least the October holidays. This included the use of face coverings for secondary school pupils in classes, and for all staff in circulation spaces around schools, or where a 2 metre distance could not be maintained.
- 3.2.2 At the time of writing, just after the October break, the decision has been taken not to relax any mitigations further until COVID numbers have dropped more significantly and more children and young people have been vaccinated.
- 3.2.3 Information letters (previously called Warn and Inform letters) are now issued to low risk close contacts following a positive case of a pupil or staff member and those who receive these are encouraged to take a lateral flow test before returning to school. Administration of these letters continues to be undertaken by a seconded member of staff, with less involvement of school staff in the contact tracing process.
- 3.2.4 Other mitigations retained include one-way systems, staggered start and finish times, restrictions on assemblies and meetings of large groups and twice weekly asymptomatic testing for staff and secondary school pupils.
- 3.2.5 Non-essential visitors in schools continued to be restricted, meaning that any forthcoming parental consultations will take place virtually.
- 3.2.6 Given the ongoing uncertainties and risk associated with the spread of the virus amongst children and staff, CMT have taken the decision that there should be no residential trips for the remainder of Session 2021/22.
- 3.3 Overall, East Lothian schools have reported that almost all learners had a positive return to school in August 2021. The continued focus of schools on nurture and relationships continues to support this. For a small number of learners across schools, the impact of COVID school closures has had a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and their progress in learning. Schools have identified these learners quickly, and interventions are in place to provide additional support throughout this session to ensure that we get it right for all of our learners.
- 3.4 Interventions include direct teaching support and small group interventions to enhance learning where gaps have been identified. This is underpinned by the use of our Scottish Government-funded COVID teachers and support staff. We are also working with our partners to implement a further year of the East Lothian Tutoring Initiative which in year one supported around 200 young people from S4 to S6 across all six secondary schools.

- 3.5 Schools have continued to experience staffing shortages, mainly related to staff waiting for PCR results following contact tracing, with one school having to have some year groups move to remote learning for a very short period of time. Huge efforts have been made across schools to ensure there are teachers for every class and to maintain continuity of learning. Parents and Carers have continued to receive regular communication regarding changes to mitigations, and the risk of remote learning under exceptional circumstances.
- 3.6 Severe shortages of Facilities Management staff due to absence means that there has been some disruption to provision of facilities services in other areas of the Council to ensure that schools can be prioritised for enhanced cleaning and delivery of the school lunch service. Dining halls reopened on 6 September 2021 so that hot lunches can now be served and we can adhere to new Scottish Government nutritional guidelines. There has been very successful partnership working across Council services to maintain continuity of provision.
- 3.7 Scottish Government Ministers have made the decision that SQA exams should go ahead in 2022, if it is safe to do so. East Lothian schools are planning their approaches to supporting young people through their learning in their chosen national qualification courses, and the approaches that will be used to assess their own progress as we near the planned exam diet beginning in April 2022.

East Lothian schools are basing these plans on the scenarios set out on the website below and the potential associated contingencies that will be required in certain related circumstances to support young people through their studies this session.

Further information can be found on the SQA website: [SQA National Qualifications 21-22 Website](#).

- 3.8 The Education Recovery Group has been in place since April 2020 and continues to have rigorous oversight of the planning and implementation of any new Scottish Government guidance to ensure the safe operation of schools buildings and continued provision of education in the event of school building closure. The group will remain in place until such times as all mitigations are removed. Related recovery working groups remain in place to support specific areas of focus such as supporting the workforce, adapting the physical environment and advising on health and safety considerations for children with Additional Support Needs. A range of staff from across the Council and representatives of the Trade Unions continue to support the work of these groups and both consider the implications of any revised Scottish Government guidance as well as providing practical advice and support to staff in schools. Regular meetings with Trade Unions continue in order to ensure a collaborative approach is taken to supporting the delivery of education across our schools and early years' settings during these challenging circumstances.
- 3.9 Guidance issued in September 2021 required local authorities to ensure that all schools and day care of children services have access to CO2 monitoring,

whether via mobile or fixed devices to support the goal of all school and East Lothian Council buildings, including all learning, teaching and childcare spaces, being assessed for ventilation issues with a view to remedial action being taken where required. Scottish Government required that this assessment work was to be completed by the start of the October break. Education and Infrastructure colleagues collaborated at very short notice to procure monitors and deploy them along with advice and guidance to schools. Agreement was reached with teaching unions that teachers could carry out this monitoring in the assessment phase.

Scottish Government allocated £10M of funding for this piece of work, of which East Lothian Council was allocated £205,000. This was used to procure the monitors and will be used if required, to support remedial works.

Every teaching space in East Lothian schools, and every Early Learning and Childcare playroom including those of funded providers has now been assessed. A multiagency group will now meet to assess the results and decide on appropriate remedial actions if required. Results have been largely reassuring and positive.

3.10 Impact on children and young people

3.10.1 In order that we now robustly address 'lost learning' over the last school session, our Raising Attainment Strategy has been updated to have a recovery focus, with our aspiration being that by the end of this session, attainment returns to pre-pandemic levels.

In Literacy and Numeracy, we have in place universal and targeted approaches to improvement through high quality professional learning. A robust focus at Associated School Group level on the How Good is our School Quality Indicator 3.2 *Raising Attainment and Achievement* with related support and challenge conversations and a data-informed approach is further supporting schools.

Our Literacy and Numeracy strategies are being updated to ensure that recovery is a key focus.

Individual school Service Level Agreements created between Head Teachers and the Quality Improvement service reflect the improvements expected, the supports required and the results anticipated. This allows us to deploy support proportionately to further support recovery at school level.

3.10.2 While most children and young people have managed to return to in-school learning, there is still a small cohort whose anxiety has caused a barrier to their return. School staff, and staff from our Inclusion and Wellbeing Service continue to work proactively with them and their families to ensure they are supported and continue to learn.

3.10.3 A further £1.042M of Scottish Government funding has been allocated to support recovery, which will be used to support further targeted interventions to support lost learning and the Raising Attainment Strategy.

3.11 Conclusion and Further Implications for session 2021/22

- 3.11.1 Given the continued impact on children's wellbeing and learning, we will continue to prioritise support that ensures all children and young people are able to make appropriate progress. We will continue to make the best possible use of all available resources to support our staff working directly with learners.

It is likely that we will continue to see the impact of the pandemic for years to come on our learners. Schools and the wider education service will do everything we can to mitigate this impact, learn the lessons of what has worked and what we need to improve and ensure that we continue to improve outcomes for all.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 Equalities – the impact of COVID-19 has had and continues to have an impact on the wellbeing and learning of children, families and communities. Work continues to seek to mitigate this impact in all schools.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – The Scottish Government provided £214.833 million of additional Education funding for financial year 2020/21 and is providing a further £111.667 million of additional funding in 2021/22 for Scottish Councils. East Lothian's share of this funding was £3.689 million in 2020/21 and is £2.159 million, to date, in 2021/22. **Table 1** below sets out the funding for 2020/21 and **Table 2** sets out the funding for 2021/22.

In order to ensure effective management of financial resources to aid the education recovery in 2021/22, an education recovery finance workstream including senior members of the Education Management Team and the Finance Manager for Service Accounting has been established by the Education Recovery Group.

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Table 2 sets out a further tranche of funding which provided a further £6m of funding, giving East Lothian £1.169, equating to 21 teachers and 10 support staff.

Table 1 – 2021/22 Additional Education COVID Funding

Funding Purpose	Scottish Total £m	East Lothian Allocation £m
Recruitment of Additional Teachers	16.667	0.318
Recruitment of Additional Teachers (2nd Tranche)	10.000	0.190
Additional Teachers	25.000	0.482
Education Recovery Funding	60.000	1.169
TOTAL	111.667	2.159

Table 2 – 2021/22 Additional Education COVID Funding

Funding Purpose	Scottish Total £m	East Lothian Allocation £m
Recruitment of Additional Permanent Teachers and Additional Permanent Pupil Support Assistants	60	1.169

- 6.2 Personnel – Funding for additional staffing for schools has been allocated by Scottish Government to compensate for any loss of learning suffered during the COVID-19 lockdown. We have appointed 13.8fte teachers in primary and 6.8fte teachers in secondary from this funding, as well as 18fte primary and 10fte secondary support staff.

We are currently recruiting for the further 21 teachers and 10 support staff from the latest tranche of Scottish Government Funding.

- 6.3 Other – none.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None

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