

REPORT TO: Education Committee

MEETING DATE: 22 March 2022

BY: Executive Director for Education and Children's Services

SUBJECT: Update on the 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 see Education Committee COVID-19 Update Report of November 2021 for further background information.
- 3.2 **School Session 2021/22**
- 3.3 In December 2021, as a result of the spread of the OMICRON variant of COVID-19, Scottish Government Guidance was updated to reflect a return

to enhanced mitigations which included a return to the use of grouping or bubbles, a minimising of visitors in schools and a minimising of movement of staff and children across settings.

- 3.4 Due to the early return of East Lothian schools on 5 January, before most other authorities returned, and the high numbers of positive COVID cases amongst staff and children, it was necessary for a number of schools to revert some classes and year groups to remote learning. This continued throughout January and February, easing when the necessity for close and household contacts to isolate for a full 10 days ended.
- 3.5 The latest version of Scottish Government *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID19 in schools* guidance came into effect on 28 February 2022. This guidance:
 - removed the requirement to wear face coverings in secondary school classrooms, while maintaining existing provisions in communal areas or when in close contact with others
 - removed the remaining restrictions on assemblies
 - allows transition visits to resume fully if appropriately risk assessed
- 3.6 While CMT took the decision that there should be no residential trips for the whole of Session 2021/22, further discussion and adherence to the latest version of the guidance now allows schools to begin to book such trips for the next academic session. This is in line with neighbouring local authorities.
- 3.7 Parents and Carers have continued to receive regular communication regarding changes to mitigations, and the risk of remote learning under exceptional circumstances.
- 3.8 Severe shortages of Facilities Management staff due to absence meant that there continued to be some disruption to provision of facilities services in other areas of the council so that schools could be prioritised for enhanced cleaning and delivery of the school lunch service.
- 3.9 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 school 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 nurseries during these challenging circumstances.

3.10 **Impact on children and young people**

3.11 Overall, East Lothian schools have reported that almost all learners are engaging well in their learning. The continued focus of schools on nurture and relationships supports this.

3.12 Using Scottish Government Funding received this session for 21 teachers and 10 support staff in a £1.042M investment for East Lothian, a number of interventions have been planned to support schools to continue to identify and tackle lost learning and support recovery.

- 5 full time Principal Teachers will work with the centrally based Pedagogy Team supporting attainment across nursery, primary and secondary.
- 9 full time Class Teachers will work across the Associated School Groups (ASGs) to support the raising attainment agenda. The allocation of these teachers is based on the needs of each ASG.
- 10 x 25 hour Classroom Assistants or ASN Auxiliaries have been allocated to those primary schools where no Support for Learning Teacher is permanently in place.

3.13 In addition, the funding supported the following recruitment of additional staff:

- 1 full time, permanent Class Teacher at Meadowpark
- 5 full time Class Teachers working with the Early Intervention Support Team

3.14 Comprehensive training will be delivered to the team, which will consequently work to upskill the workforce to meet the range of needs of our learners, particularly relating to the COVID-19 period.

This continues to be supplemented by the use of our Scottish Government funded temporary COVID-19 teachers and support staff.

3.15 Across East Lothian, a wider issue has arisen with regards to anti-social behaviour. This has been particularly prevalent in the Prestonpans, Musselburgh and Dunbar localities. It has been recognised that greater holistic use of resources is needed across Education, Children's Services and Communities, working in collaboration with Police Scotland and the third sector in order to tackle this robustly. This is linked to a small cohort of learners with challenging behaviour in our schools for whom alternative strategies are required.

3.16 This, linked with a wider range of needs arising from the implications of COVID-19 on families led to a series of Head Teacher Engagement Sessions to explore the current challenges and gaps in supports to meet the needs of our learners. A problem-solving conference has led to a series of actions

currently being implemented, linked to greater and more robust use of locality resources linked to our distinct communities and enhanced training for our staff to ensure they are equipped to meet the needs of our learners.

- 3.17 The SQA exam diet is still planned, beginning in April 2022. SQA has confirmed changes to course assessments for National Qualifications, to support learners to achieve the qualifications they deserve, which allow for lost learning and teaching caused by the pandemic by reducing the volume of assessment and easing teacher and learner workload, while maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualifications.

To ensure fairness and credibility are maintained in light of the ongoing impact of the pandemic, SQA has recently announced additional support measures for learners who are taking National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher courses in 2022. Revision support for learners will be provided during week beginning 7 March 2022, to help them prepare and focus their revision, in the run up to the exams.

- 3.18 To further support learners in an equitable manner, a further funding package of £4M has been announced of which east Lothian will receive £51,407 to provide Easter study support for targeted learners:

- senior phase learners undertaking NQ exams in 2022 from the most deprived backgrounds
- senior phase learners undertaking NQ exams in 2022 with additional support needs
- senior phase learners undertaking NQ exams in 2022 whose attendance and/or attainment has been most acutely affected by COVID-19

East Lothian secondary schools will work together to deliver a package of supports to allow them either to broaden their original offer or to encourage the above groups to be able to attend.

3.19 **Ventilation**

- 3.20 Scottish Government announced in August 2021 that local authorities had to monitor all learning & teaching spaces for CO2 levels for at least one full day prior to October 2021. East Lothian Council procured 700 Honeywell portable air quality/CO2 monitors and distributed these to all primary and secondary schools as well as Early Years partner providers in September 2021. £61,000 funding was received to procure monitor and take remedial action.

- 3.21 Heating and Ventilation guidance was provided together with manufacturer's guidance on the use of the monitors and templates for recording and returning monitoring results.

- 3.22 Following return of monitoring information, areas where readings exceeded 1200ppm during the recording period were reviewed and further monitoring requested.
- 3.23 The majority of primary schools were found to have good results evidencing that the use of natural ventilation was being effective in reducing CO2 levels below 800ppm. 11 primary schools indicated one or more spaces where readings had exceeded 1200ppm at some point in the day and these were selected to be visited to see if there were any additional measures that could be implemented to improve the situation with the following results:
- 3.24 The Scottish Government's updated reducing risks in schools guidance, published in December 2021, set out revised expectations in terms of frequency of CO2 monitoring (including that all spaces should be assessed at least once a week, and more frequently in the case of problematic areas).
- 3.25 A further 600 CO2 monitors have now been received and are being delivered to schools.
- 3.26 **Conclusion and Further Implications for session 2021/22**
- 3.27 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 has provided 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.

To further support learners taking SQA examinations in an equitable manner, a funding package of £4M has been announced of which East Lothian will receive £51,407 to support Easter Study.

- 6.2 Personnel – We have recruited 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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