

Presentation to Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16 September 2020

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Aims for this session

1. To outline how Birmingham City Council provided support to schools during the three phases of Covid to date ie throughout
 - the initial closing of schools in March 2020 and organising support for children of key workers and vulnerable children
 - preparing for the phased reopening to some pupils on 1 June 2020
 - preparing for full reopening in September 2020
- 2 To outline future potential challenges that schools and educational settings may face as we move forward following the Covid first wave

A full record of communications with schools throughout the Covid period is available online at <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/blog/school-nb>

Initial Key Messages – phase 1 (March – May 2020)

- Schools and early years settings need to ensure provision for the children of key workers and vulnerable children
- If children are safe at home, then they should stay at home*
- Schools' risk assessments of vulnerable children (https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/15896/safeguarding_guidance_during_school_closure), completed in consultation with social care, determine which vulnerable children should be in school.
- **As the Covid period progressed, DfE guidance became clear that the number of vulnerable children in school needed to increase.**

Key Priorities – Weeks 1-2

- supporting disadvantaged children's entitlement to free school meals through the BCC scheme
- establishing safeguarding approaches with schools and settings
- developing BCC systems to monitor the attendance of pupils
- supporting headteachers to understand new arrangements and emerging government guidance

Key Priorities – Weeks 3-4

- assuring partners of sufficiency of school places during holidays
- establishing trouble-shooting to examine the circumstances of individual children causing concern
- implementing the DfE attendance tracker
- extending the BCC free school meals support to include children of pre-statutory school age and NRPF families
- focusing the school improvement contract on supporting schools in their provision of online learning

Key Priorities – Weeks 5-6

- forging links with social care re specific children at risk (Early Help and resilience funding through Birmingham Children's Partnership)
- schools going the extra mile to support vulnerable pupils
- implementing the DfE Y10 disadvantaged laptop scheme
- collaborating on bids to support IT connectivity for disadvantaged pupils in the primary phase
- bidding for emergency funding to support PVI settings so that sufficiency post-Covid is maintained
- beginning to plan for the return to school

Wider re-opening of schools and settings from 1st June 2020 – phase 2

- The government announced the return of some children to school from the week commencing 1 June.
- Schools in Birmingham extended their opening to include pupils in nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6 alongside priority groups (vulnerable children and the children of critical workers) from 1st June, or welcomed back year 10 and year 12 pupils for some face-to-face support from 15th June.
- Special schools and early years settings looked to increase pupil numbers over the forthcoming month.

Wider re-opening of schools from 1st June 2020

- The council was clear that the safety of our pupils, families and the school workforce is our priority. School leaders are best placed to make decisions on whether it is safe and appropriate to widen their provision by undertaking a comprehensive risk assessment.
- The BCC risk assessment checklist/tool was devised based on Government guidelines on COVID-19 and was provided to help schools to prepare and decide arrangements for an increased number of children attending/returning to school. It has been updated continuously since 14th May guidance and remains subject to change at short notice as updates are received from the Department for Education (DfE) or Birmingham City Council (BCC). The BCC risk assessment can be found here
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/download/3473/risk_assessment_for_schools
- With overall responsibility for 160 community or voluntary controlled schools BCC asked schools to submit their risk assessment to BCC for review. With responsibility for all pupils in Birmingham, we also asked for a declaration of conformity and action plan from all schools prior to their proposed opening date, including the 283 non-LA schools.
- The council provided emergency packs of PPE to all school for use when dealing with suspected cases of COVID as well as additional PPE for special schools.

Preparations for full reopening – phase 3

City position w/c 22nd June

- 100% of Birmingham primary schools were open on Tuesday 23rd June
- 96% of nursery schools (1 of 27 closed) were open
- 94% of secondaries (1 maintained school and 4 academies closed)
- 89% of special schools were open
- The attendance picture continued to improve with 26,000 children attending that week
- The BCC position was that all schools should be open in September and we supported this by ensuring that strong messages were issued across the education sector, stressing the importance of full re-opening and offering support with logistics planning.

BCC provided support to schools across the city by

1. Updating the BCC risk assessment for September return

The risk assessment was positively received by the majority of schools.

2. Running September return seminars

There was good attendance from school leaders on a range of topics including safeguarding, governance, risk assessments and remote learning.

3. Supporting key transition points

BEP worked with early years and schools, in particular, to support children beginning school or moving to secondary school.

4. Brokering access to summer provision

Schools experiencing high parental demand for extended childcare were supported to access provision with local childcare providers through an arrangement with Ofsted to fast-track registration.

The annual sufficiency duty around holiday childcare through playschemes and 'Fun in Brum' activities continued and was published on the BCC website.

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5. Supporting vulnerable children and their families

Local authority attendance officers worked with families over the summer, particularly those with children at key transition points (eg transfer to secondary school), to encourage regular attendance from September.

6. Issuing revised safeguarding guidance

Revised guidance was issued to enable schools and other providers to quickly adapt their provision to the COVID context.

7. Clarifying Test and Trace procedures

Clear procedures were issued to schools in collaboration with Public Health to support if there are any confirmed or suspected cases of COVID in their setting.

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/download/3527/public_health_flowchart_for_schools

8. Supporting school leaders with staffing concerns

Schools HR issued frequent advice throughout and worked on scenario based FAQs for schools around Covid-related staffing issues.

BCC further supported schools through

Clear messaging to schools and families around the city's expectations

- Letters from the Leader and Cabinet Members for Education, Skills and Culture and Children's Wellbeing will be sent w/c 13 July to clearly set out the city's expectations for the September return

Targeted communications

- Communications campaign aimed to reassure families about returning their children, particularly vulnerable pupils, to school in September.
- The campaign involved Public Health, headteachers, parents, elected members and other stakeholders and was disseminated through a range of channels.



Ongoing Test and Trace cases - update

Education and Skills officers are working closely with BCC Public Health and supporting schools in bi-weekly meetings.

- 18 pupils have had a positive COVID-19 test since 1st June
- 37 members of staff have had a positive COVID-19 test since 1st June
- Total city pupil cohort approx. 205,000.

Future considerations for schools

Schools and educational settings need to plan for the impact of Covid on:

- **Pupils' learning** – particularly for key groups of learners
- **Pupils' safety, wellbeing and attendance** – the likelihood is that safeguarding referrals will increase.
- **Assessment** - primary tests will go ahead as planned next year, including: phonics screening check, key stage 1 and key stage 2 SATs and year 4 times tables test although the statutory rollout of the reception baseline assessment has been delayed to 2021; there is uncertainty regarding exams in the secondary phase. Currently, government is proposing exams go ahead
- **Ofsted and inspections** – routine inspections won't resume until January 2021 but schools may be visited in the autumn term to discuss how they are supporting the return to education for pupils
- **Schools finances and sustainability of the Early Years sector**

Schools also need to be mindful of the potential for local lockdowns and the importance of ensuring that there is a robust online learning offer.