

EDUCATION & SKILLS DIRECTORATE

Scrutiny Committee

Report of: Assistant Director Inclusion, SEND and Wellbeing

Date: 7th September 2020

Birmingham COVID-19 Response – Highlight Report

Background:

Section one – responding to the covid lockdown

1.1 What we did to respond to the lock down

- In March 2020, at the onset of the Covid lockdown, a 'Joint Response Group' was established with health, education, social care and the parent carer forum which then met weekly.
- A template was produced for all settings to use to record risk assessments, which addressed the key risks identified in the government documentation. Clear guidance was provided in relation to the triage categories – green, where there was no risk and contact with families was made every 10 working days; amber if there were some risks in line with the early help threshold and where there was an Early Help professional involved but no action was needed, with contact with the family expected every 5 working days to provide ongoing monitoring and red if the risks were in line with statutory thresholds, further actions would be necessary and contact was to be made with the family every 2 working days. (see attached)
- The identification of red-rated pupils with an EHCP was made using the threshold categories from Birmingham's threshold framework which considers; child development needs, the family and environment – including factors in the home and community.
- As of July 2020, there were 512 red rated pupils with EHCPs across all settings (341 in special schools, 96 in mainstream settings, 75 in independent schools, 0 in early years). During the spring and summer, the SEND LA workers held weekly meetings with senior leaders in all settings to discuss the red rated pupils and update the risk assessment (see process below). The SEND LA links recorded key points and there was an established, tiered process of escalation. Feedback confirmed that schools were monitoring and addressing risk with parents/carers.
- Support processes were established for each sector as follows:
- Private, Voluntary and Independent Settings – the LA SEND link officer took a key role and made weekly contact with settings with children with an EHCP to give guidance in relation to individual risk assessments and ensure they were updated, to ensure they had the guidance and support needed to fulfil their duties for children and young people with an EHCP and to provide advice and guidance in relation to concerns raised. They also provided challenge when settings were not fulfilling requirements and they promoted collaboration and innovation to meet the needs of children and young people with an EHCP which could be implemented at home. Where a setting had closed, they took lead professional responsibility.
- Mainstream, Special and Independent Schools – the LA SEND Link Officer provided a weekly point of contact for schools with children with EHCPs, to ensure

they had the guidance and the support needed to fulfil their duties for children and young people with an EHCP and to provide advice and guidance in relation to concerns raised, as well as promoting collaboration and innovation to meet the needs of children with an EHCP. They also provided challenge when settings were not fulfilling requirements and where necessary escalated issues and opportunities to the Local Authority. The LA SEND Link Officer also followed up on generic communications sent by the LA to ensure clarity. As schools opened more widely the LA SEND Link Officer led conversations around; the update and review process for risk assessments, ongoing planning for pupil return if the pupil was not back in school yet, how schools were carrying out and recording risk assessments with parents/carers, individual parent capacity to support at home and what wider support was available, ongoing planning for support in the home if pupil remained at home, pupil views about return to school (recorded) and any social worker views, if involved.

- Initially there were a number of settings who were not engaging with the local authority. This was focused on and the levels of engagement became very good. All 27 special school schools engaged in a meaningful way on a weekly basis. Of the 411 mainstream settings, 32 do not have pupils with an EHCP and 372 engaged well in weekly meetings with link officers. Link officers reported overall improvements in the quality of information shared and the engagement of settings.
- A tiered response was taken to the 6 schools who did not engage in weekly meetings through escalation to the SEND leadership team and where lack of engagement persisted this was shared with the Birmingham Education Partnership to seek effective solutions.
- The Pupil and School Support Service and the Communication and Autism Team provided remote support to schools including online meetings, providing advice and strategies for vulnerable young people around both learning difficulties and autism. The leadership team were in regular contact with special schools and resources bases as the designated point of contact for queries and concerns.
- Systematic monitoring of the support provided to settings was undertaken. The table below reflects the high level of engagement:

Outreach Support for Settings

Team/ Area	Key Headlines
Advisory Teacher Team meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 170 safeguarding conversations about individual pupils since the start of the pandemic • Over 2,000 separate contacts with schools offering strategic support around SEND provision during COVID 19
SENCo Consultation Sessions with Occupational Therapy Team and Speech and Language Therapy Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations offering support to schools about individual pupils during covid-19 • Over 90 SENCo consultations sessions have been completed virtually. • 97% of respondents found the session met their needs
Advisory Teacher Team and Educational Psychology Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 383 meetings with mainstream schools every week since Easter to discuss EHCP pupils, risk assessments and provision. • 27 meetings with Special schools every week to discuss EHCP pupils and risk assessment.
Early Years Inclusion Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 200 calls per week providing direct support to families for children on home teaching caseload and to those out of settings during COVID.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 3000 separate contacts with EY settings offering advice and support during the COVID period • Individual risk assessments completed with parents and settings for children with EHCPs • Provision of bespoke resources to parents and settings
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- A suite of support and guidance documents regarding arrangements for children and young people with an EHCP in light of the Coronavirus and DfE Guidance was produced for Early Years settings, mainstream schools, special schools and independent schools. These were originally produced in March and subsequently updated and refreshed in May relating to the wider opening of schools from June 1st. These documents clarified expectations, the associated processes and support available. They covered the following:
 - Private, Voluntary and Independent Early Years Settings – Context, Risk Assessments, support from the LA link officers, follow up action.
 - Mainstream Schools – Context, Checklist of how to make a judgement on the categories of risk, Triage categories, Follow up action, Mainstream School Support Team function for children and young people with an EHCP.
 - Special Schools – Context, Risk assessments, DfE guidance for updating Risk Assessments, Support from the LA SEND Link officers, follow up action (see attached)
- A rigorous and robust approach in relation to schools causing concern was undertaken whereby schools were identified on a weekly basis, actions agreed with named lead personnel to follow through.
- Individual risk assessments were produced for all pupils with EHCPs, and these were reviewed by the link worker for each school. The quality was judged to be good with feedback provided to the settings. This was welcomed.
- The Birmingham “You’ve been missed” campaign was developed to support children and young people and carers and professionals throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Educational Psychology Service offered wellbeing support to individual staff and/or groups of staff in schools. Workshops on PERMA that promote wellbeing across groups of staff have been particularly valued. Other useful resources were recommended including Teacher Resilience during the Covid-19 lockdown, Looking after Each Other and Ourselves and Supporting Resilience and Wellbeing during uncertain times.
- The Forward Thinking Birmingham STICK team provided consultation opportunities for staff which also facilitated schools making referrals to the team.
- The educational psychology service provided support and advice to 12 schools that were particularly affected by the death of a member of the school community during lockdown.
- The Virtual School used data captured from the spring term PEPs and conversations with young people to make referrals to the Health Mentors to work with them over the summer term. The initial priority was for young people aged 14-18 years to support through to destinations or concerns related to examinations and coursework for Key Stages 4 and 5. Over time increasing numbers of children in care returned to school following discussion with their social worker, parent/carer and schools. The team supported Designated teachers with PEP meetings during the summer term using the new PEP page for Covid-19 and attended 30 virtually during the spring term and all summer term virtual PEP meetings and transition PEP meetings took place in the summer term.. The team worked with social care and schools to consider IT access and used this data to inform the request to the DfEIT portal when it opened.
- The Virtual School worked with social workers to ensure all foster carers could access their child’s PEP during the summer term so that the virtual PEP meetings

could take place at home. The team also responded to queries and provided ongoing support for social care colleagues, schools and carers.

- The Virtual School promoted and booked young people up with third sector providers summer activity programmes with social distancing measures in place. They also shared virtual work experience opportunities and employment opportunities for their Year 10-18 pupils and developed a careers box for the website.
- The Home to School Transport team actively responded to the daily changes in requirements as families chose to keep their children at home or SEND them to school resulting from the changing DfE guidance. The use of minibuses by the transport team accommodated the guidance in relation to distancing regulations. Over time the number of pupils requiring transport to school increased (see table below) which required an approach that was responsive, creative and proactive. In accordance with DfE advice face masks were provided for every guide on Home to School transport.
- Travel Assist also worked in partnership with NEAT, who provide many vehicles for school transport services, to use some of their minibuses that were not required to deliver food parcels to the most vulnerable families in the community.

Home to School Transport

Date	April	May	June	July (to date)	Total to Date
Attendance Summary					
Number of pupils transported – average weekly	71	130	408	493	276 (average)
Number of schools transport was provided for – average weekly	21	38	85	68	53 (average)
Total Number of Journeys (routes operational)	1556	2737	7309	3665	15,267

1.2 Weekly reporting (with summary data reports March – July)

- A Specialised Services weekly briefing was established for the cabinet member, director, partnerships, schools and the parent carer forum outlining support and provision in relation to home to school transport, parent link team, educational psychology service, mainstream advisory team, early setting advisory team, and virtual school, as well as weekly updates in relation to the statutory education and health care assessments. (See attached)
- Weekly reports were produced containing detailed reporting on the position regarding pupils with EHCPs in special schools, mainstream, independent schools and Early Years settings. Reports were discussed weekly as a leadership team and where there were any concerns these were shared with the Birmingham Education Partnership to follow up. (See attached)
- Fortnightly meetings took place with the cabinet member, chair of scrutiny, PCF, health colleagues, social care and SEND to share information and raise areas that were causing concern and for actions to be agreed.

1.3 EHCP attendance report (April – July)

- Attendance in schools of pupils with an EHCP was monitored and shared on a weekly basis in the Specialised Services weekly TEAMS EHCP report. Considering Year 11 leavers the number of pupils in school increased over the period April to July. In special schools it increased from 9% at the beginning of June to 22% at the end of term, in independent schools from 13% to 17%, mainstream schools 9.2% to 20.9% and Early Years settings from 31% to 46%. The attendance has risen for red rated pupils with an EHCP from 51% to 67% in special schools, 18% to 21% in independent schools and 29% to 40% in mainstream schools. See table below for summary data.

[illegible]

1.4 EHCP monitoring of return to school (September – October)

- Monitoring of return to school for children with an EHCP will continue into the Autumn term using the processes that have been established and proved successful.

1.5 Supporting families and co-production

- Settings engaged with parents/carers of pupils with EHCP through the period with ongoing support provided for those not in school. Schools engaged with parents on a weekly basis with the feedback from families being very positive.
- In a survey undertaken by the LA with parents/carers of 491 returns, 60% said they had had frequent contact with their school.
- For those pupils without a school placement the Home Bridging Team contacted CYP and families as a minimum on a fortnightly basis. The team also liaised closely with the tutoring service who continued to provide online tutoring support.
- The use of technology through Teams, WhatsApp, Skype and Zoom has facilitated more effective contact with children and young people and their families.
- Local focus groups were rolled out to help understand how families were coping with Covid-19. These groups helped inform the planning, co-ordination, delivery of support and provision for families across communities during the Covid-19 period and beyond.
- Families were asked to complete questionnaires and contribute to the focus groups. They also formed part of a research project conducted by the University of Sussex to improve the understanding of the experiences of local families with young children in the early years and primary school age to identify those most in need of support and during this time of change and crisis. Recommendations arising from this piece of work included: City-wide consultation with parents of children with SEND, education professionals, and SEND organisations to determine the key areas of need for SEN children and their families following the prolonged period of school absence; development of SEND guidance for schools and support services in the event of further school closures; additional service provision and long term education guidance.
- The Educational Psychology Service provided 30-minute consultations through a telephone helpline for parents and carers across the city on issues that were affecting their emotional wellbeing, anxiety, family relationships, daily structure and looking after themselves. Parents were offered an initial telephone conversation with a psychologist and a potential follow up session.
- Implementation of the LA family support strategy led to over 1600 online meetings in June with pupils and families that had raised concerns. This impacted positively on engagement and likely reduced the escalation of any risks or concerns (to red rating on some instances).
- The Parent Link Service continued to grow as a key point of contact for parents and carers who feel they need to talk to someone about their child's SEND needs. Parent Link Contact Line which was staffed by the Advisory Teams and Educational psychology received 60 requests for support (where there was no social work involvement). Additionally, an advice line for parents/carers of pre-school children with identified or emerging SEND became operational.
- The Early Years Inclusion Support team directly supported families with babies and pre-school children who had complex SEND by regular calls home.
- The Pupil Support service and the Communication and Autism Team ran online networks for parents/carers of children and young people with autism which received very positive feedback. For children with sensory needs the team provided a range of support and advice to families through e-mail, phone, Whats App, Skype and virtual tutorials. A large bank of resources were created and shared with parents/carers, along with bespoke resources for individual children.

- The Advisory Teams dealt with 97 safeguarding concerns raised by settings and parents (where there was no social work involvement already).
- The Communication and Autism Team's training packages were made available and 276 were downloaded by families.
- The Parent/Carer Forum undertook a survey which helped to inform discussions around risk with children, families, and professionals.
- Support was provided to parents to access the resilience fund for IT equipment. For example, 64 requests for funding for equipment were successful.
- The appointment of a communication officer has overseen the implementation of a wide range of communication to families and schools during the spring and summer, including the launch of the new services as set out in the communication strategy.
- Effective and systematic monitoring of engagement with parents and carers took place. The tables below confirm the level of support provided:

Helpline for Families

Ed. Type \ Date	March	April	May	June	July (to date - 10/07/20)	Total to Date
Parent Link Main helpline	104	72	41	203	13	433
EPS Helpline	27	111	113	91	22	364
Totals	131	183	154	294	35	797

Outreach Support for Parents and Families

Type \ Date	April	May	June	July (to date - 10/07/20)	Total to Date
SENDParent Contacts via Helpline	155	253	278	119	805
SENDParents accessing CAT Teams Support Networks	Data not collected	28	207	102	337
Sensory Contact with Families	1165	1757	2570	Awaiting data	5492
Sensory Technology Support	Data not collected	383	271	Awaiting data	654
Early Years Contact with Families	Data not collected	669	887	213	1769
Totals	1320	3090	4213	434	9057

1.6 Supporting the wellbeing of children and young people during lock down

- An Education, Mental Health and Wellbeing Team was established with the educational psychology team and BEP taking a lead on providing oversight and coherence to the mental wellbeing across all schools in the city, linking closely with the health-led bereavement support available to schools. This included; developing a rapid and co-ordinated approach and effective systems in each local school; putting in support for front line staff, including headteachers and the school workforce, as well as children and young people to help people cope and prevent escalation of difficulties; implementing interventions that could be delivered under pandemic conditions to reduce poor mental health and boost wellbeing.
- To support schools the Education, Mental Health and Wellbeing team worked directly with headteachers, wellbeing leads and the wellbeing practitioner in each school, Thrive trained staff and wider statutory and community partners.
- As part of the integrated wrap around support around wellbeing and mental health the Education, Mental Health and Wellbeing team, together with NewStart and Forward-Thinking Birmingham worked to; support schools in their universal approaches, support the professional development of school staff in dealing with the pandemic, support the development of school based tailored wellbeing interventions. The support ensured that schools were able to access robust local and national guidance to support all aspects of school life and is being linked to the development of an integrated local pathways and the provision of consultation opportunities for both school staff and parents.
- The BEP's New Start team offered training and resources that responded to school's current and emerging needs.
- Trauma Informed/Attachment Aware Schools Training has continued but will now include specific training in relation to the trauma experienced as a result of Covid-19. Schools that have already had this training are to be offered a webinar "Being trauma informed and promoting community resilience" which looks at understanding and making sense of the collective trauma experienced, promoting individual and collective resilience, recovery and healing following the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The bereavement pathway was established by health with a single point of contact through Cruse Bereavement Care.
- The BEP is working closely with the governor support team to develop guidance and support to ensure that governors have a basic understanding of mental health and are equipped with the questions and explorations that governing boards can take to schools.
- Five headteachers participated in a leadership mental fortitude programme facilitated by Chrysalis Mindset coaching. The focus was on emotional resilience, wellbeing, emotional intelligence and core values. It was very well perceived by participants.
- An Education Wellbeing Briefing for Schools was produced and circulated to schools in July highlighting the work undertaken and the support available.
- A webinar took place in June with Professor Banerjee and Professor McLaughlin to help set the national context of how Covid-19 was affecting wellbeing within Birmingham's school communities and to help the preparation of children returning to school, particularly their wellbeing.
- A series of webinars took place with Suzanne Zeedyk in relation to the concerns and anxieties being experienced. The feedback will inform an online event in the autumn.
- The Kooth team was established in April which is free, safe and anonymous service to support young people's emotional health and wellbeing in Birmingham. This gives young people aged 11-25 the opportunity to access online counselling from qualified councillors, as well as being able to drop in for instant text chats or book a session in advance. During this period areas of focus were young people's worries about exams being cancelled and the impact of Covid-19 on their loved ones.
- A range of other mental health support services have been available to children and young people and signposted to them. These include the Birmingham and Solihull Bereavement Support Service; Pause, providing self-help strategies for managing

difficult situations and feelings, a non-judgemental listening and highlighting what else might be available for them; Evolve a social impact company offering a virtual mentoring service in partnership with Birmingham Virtual School focusing on general wellbeing support and transition back into school or college after Covid-19.

1.7 Voice of the children and young people

- The Birmingham SEND Youth Forum have been instrumental in gathering the views of young people through this period. Four of the sessions focused on reactions to Covid/return to school/mental health of young people during the Covid pandemic. They also invited Professor Collen McLaughlin from the University of Cambridge to one of their meetings. The aim of the meeting was to discuss young people's feelings and mental wellbeing during lockdown and to discuss what schools can do to support young people emotionally and socially to strengthen good mental health. They gave their views to NHS staff and other stakeholders and a new blog has been created about their work.
- A series of workshops were run to listen to the issues most affecting the lives of Birmingham's children and young people and what was important to them at this time.
- The Virtual School worked with social workers to ensure that children and young people could access their PEPs so that if they were at home due to school closure or social distancing their voice could be heard in their virtual PEP meetings.

Section two – planning for the return to school

2.1 Engagement with schools

- Communication has taken place with schools to confirm the expectation of a full return for pupils in September and schools have planned accordingly. As time moved on the engagement with schools and settings from the Advisory and Support teams increasingly focused on supporting and guiding children's transition back into school in September.
- Support and guidance documents regarding full return to school of children and young people with an EHCP have been produced and disseminated for headteachers of mainstream, special and independent school headteachers. These covered individual risk assessments and the role of the LA SEND Link Officer.
- Schools are using a range of strategies to support reopening including – class/year group bubbles, staggering start and end times, separating playtimes, no whole school assemblies, interventions taking place within class bubbles, etc.
- Throughout the Covid 19 period, the Local Authority has provided each school (Mainstream, Special, Independent) and family with a LA SEND link officer and these will continue to support the full opening of schools for children with special educational needs and disability and that children get the right support at the right time. They will continue to provide weekly contact for schools until all pupils with an EHCP in school have returned to full time education.
- In schools where pupils with EHCPs have not returned to full-time education, the LA SEND links will lead conversations around the following points; have the children, who are not in school full-time, been risk assessed and is the RA regularly reviewed and updated, is there ongoing planning for full pupil return, have parents/carers been consulted and has this discussion been recorded, what is the parent/carer capacity to support the pupil at home and what wider support is available, is there ongoing planning for support in home if a pupil remains at home for part of the week, have the CYP views been elicited about the return to school and been recorded and if a social worker is involved have their views been sought?
- Locality information sheets have been created for each of the 16 consortia groups across the city. The information forms the basis of what is on offer in each locality for children and young people with Send.

- An Autumn Term SEND briefing has been produced and disseminated to all schools.
- Individual multi-agency school planning meetings will take place in the autumn term (the planning documentation to be completed by schools in advance was disseminated in the briefing above). The purpose of these meetings is for schools to have dedicated time with the SEND Locality team to discuss children and young people in the setting and identify ways to collectively support their needs. In the autumn these will focus on pupils transitioning in 2021 and on the school's programme for reviewing EHCPs. This will ensure that the correct professional can attend especially if there is likely to be a change in placement or provision.
- Area SENCOs have engaged with all Early Years settings to discuss their plans for September opening and will contact all families of children with EHCPs in the first week to establish who is attending.
- Early Years Inclusion Support will be working closely with families and receiving settings where a child is due to take up their first ever education placement.
- Two rounds of SENCO online briefings were undertaken with updates from health and SEND with a focus on being ready for all pupils returning to school in September. Feedback from the 200+ schools that attended confirmed how useful SENCOs found these sessions. These will continue in the autumn term.
- Representatives from the Home to School transport service joined the weekly special school meetings in July to plan special school transport arrangements for September. Follow up meetings have taken place in the last week of the school holidays between the SEND Links and the home to school transport service.
- The Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) and specialised services developed information sharing documents for schools to use for children moving from early years settings into school and from primary to secondary schools. This collates key information about the children including safeguarding concerns. This will support schools planning for those children from the outset, particularly as many of the usual transition processes have not been able to take place.
- The BEP have produced a document "Preparing for the wider opening of early years and childcare settings" to share best practice for transition back into school for children in the current Covid 19 situation.
- The SEND Advisory services have developed resources for parents and schools outlining guidance and best practice for transition back into school.
- Pupil and School Support have developed transition documents that provided detail about the needs of children with Send, the agencies involved and the provision that the child has been in receipt of. These have been sent to all schools.
- The Communication and Autism Team have developed a "Covid-19 Return to Setting Transition Offer" that includes videos, training materials for staff at all phases of education and "return to school essentials" for schools and parents to use.
- The Birmingham Educational Psychology service has developed a range of documents to support settings with children returning to school after the extended closure and providing parents with advice to help their children return to school or transition to a new school. This is addition to the advice and support available to support staff resilience, pupil well-being and materials around bereavement.
- The Physical Difficulties Support Service has developed a "Considerations" document that supports schools to plan for children with complex physical difficulties whilst social distancing measures are in place. This has been shared with all schools.
- The Birmingham Virtual School, Birmingham Children's Trust and Evolve (a social impact company) are providing additional areas of support for children in care returning to school including a 3 day Yr6-Yr7 virtual transition programme focused on building personal confidence with additional 1:1 mentoring support.
- The EPS service has produced several resources to assist the transition back into school including "Parent Guide: Practical tools, tips and resources for returning to

school,” “I’m going back to school story,” and “Supporting the return to school: Encouraging flexible thinking for children with Autism Spectrum Condition.”

- Support has been provided the Advisory Team and Educational Psychology around individual pupils’ transitions to settings.
- SEND Inclusion Support Services will be visiting schools again in September, providing support to pupils with special education needs and disability and offering advice/strategies to school staff. This will include professional development as well meetings with parents/carers.
- Dates have been set for individual planning meetings with all mainstream schools and SEND locality teams during the month of September 2020 with a focus on children’s transition for 2021.
- The Virtual School met with the Trust to review guidance on attendance classifications on Eclipse for possible scenarios for schools in the Autumn term.

2.2 Planned programme for supporting the wellbeing of children during the autumn return to school

- A citywide graduated approach to addressing pupil’s wellbeing needs is being developed. Wellbeing leads will be appointed from senior leadership teams as well as a practitioner within each school. Work will take place within locality school teams to assist with building their capacity to be more effective in their roles.
- The Educational Psychology Service and Birmingham Education Partnership are to meet individually with schools in September to review their approaches in supporting the wellbeing of staff and children and to understand what is working and not working and how more close team working can be fostered.
- Local networks will be established where issues can be shared and problem solved and localised training and support provided including the development of a local toolbox of individual support as well as a range of professional development.
- The Virtual School has developed its Trauma Informed Attachment Aware work across Birmingham schools as part of the developing joint services emotional health and wellbeing offer for schools. They are planning to host a community trauma webinar for all schools, with schools being able to share existing established good practice and create a platform to launch Birmingham’s Emotional Regulation framework for schools to review their school behaviour policies. They are also working with the Educational Psychology Service to develop the offer around attachment and trauma across Birmingham to feed into the emotional and wellbeing strategy group and coordinated offer for schools.

2.3 Planned support and programme for children reluctant to return

- It is recognised that some children with SEND might find return to school challenging, after a long period at home. A number of strategies will be used to support a successful return including visits to school, social stories and if needed, a phased return. For some children and young people, they will begin the autumn term with a package of blended learning, for example part-time learning in school and part-time learning at home, with online tuition and resources.
- The local authority has introduced a new Home Bridging Team to support children and young people who are anxious and phobic. The skilled workforce has been working closely with children and young people and their families around their anxieties in returning to education and have formed good relationships with schools to support their transition back to school. During the summer term out of the 83 children who have been home tutored, the team have supported 64 in gaining a place back at school. The team will be working within localities to establish a local offer of support across the city and all key stages.

2.4 Support for families and co-production

- Schools have worked closely with parents/carers to involve them in planning for their child's return to school.
- If children and young people are at home for part of the school week, SEND Inclusion
- Services will continue to offer 'virtual' support via video calls/ What's App/ phone calls and text.
- As schools reopen the Parent Link Officers will be aiming to get back out into schools and settings to meet parents and carers in person, facilitate network meetings through online events and where possible, face to face in line with government guidelines. The Parent Link Service is available for any queries or concerns parents/carers have about their child returning to school.
- A range of online support services will continue to be available for families of children and young people with special educational needs.
- A Returning to school – Update for families of children and young people with SEND briefing sheet has been produced and disseminated.
- The Communications and Autism Team is offering parents/carers back to school workshops and resources to them prepare their child for return to school.
- The Educational Psychology team have developed tips, advice and resources for parents/carers to help with conversations about return to school.
- The Sensory Support Services, Physical Difficulties Support Service, Pupil and School Support team and Early Years Inclusion Support are continuing to provide telephone advice and support.
- Children's Occupational Therapy, Children's physiotherapy and Children's Speech and Language Therapy are providing telephone advice and support for families via advice lines.

2.5 Voice of the children and young people

- Professor McLaughlin is to continue to support and shape the conversations with children and young people and advising on how the LA can work with schools to ensure the voice of young people are at the heart of the work being undertaken.
- The Birmingham SEND Youth Forum will continue to elicit the views and reflections of CYP about their return to school and any concerns and issues they have.

Section three – reflections on impact to services and challenges moving forward

3.1 Maintaining statutory services (EHCP assessments and reviews/prep WSOA)

- The special educational needs administration team has continued to undertake assessments to ensure the LA maintained its statutory duty as well as the processing of annual reviews, including the recovery programme to amend tracked changes. This has a significant impact as the team have overcome the backlog of over 6000 EHCPs that had not been updated for several years and in EHCP assessments, catching up on 500 EHCPs. Timeliness in July was 91% the highest it has been for a significant period and this has increased to 92% in August.
- In addition, the special educational needs administration team have undertaken focused work to resolve appeals and tribunals and those children who are currently awaiting a specialist placement or are in receipt of home tuition. Mediations have fallen significantly during recent months with no take up of the service as resolution has been achieved through the introduction of the newly established link professional. Significant work is taking place to reduce that rate of appeals and tribunals.

- Early help locality team of professionals have been put in place to work with schools and families across six regions of the city, including the appointment of speech and language and occupational therapists.
- Link professionals have been allocated for all new referrals for an EHCP assessment or additional enhanced funding (Top Up) request.
- SEN administrators have been teamed to a link professional to ensure relationships with schools and families are paramount in the process and improve timeliness of decisions.
- Specialised services team managers have been appointed to take the lead role in the planning, allocation, and monitoring of specialist placements through the newly formed decision making and monitoring groups.
- Allocated link professionals for children and young people with an EHCP is being put in place and a planned programme to ensure reviews are undertaken in a timely manner and the appropriate provision is in place is now being co-ordinated.
- Decision making and monitoring groups have been implemented for independent placements, special school placements, resource base placements, and enhanced funding placements, to ensure appropriate and quality provision.
- A Link Service has been established as the first point of contact for families and schools, improving relationships with schools and families.
- Weekly and monthly reports have been provided to understand performance and to address areas for improvement.
- Criteria for accessing Top Up and resource base revision has been revised so it is fit for purpose and the criteria for special school provision is in the process of being revised.
- A new tiered quality assurance framework for EHCPs has been introduced, ensuring that all new EHCPs adhere to the Birmingham quality mark.
- The team have been actively working with identified key professionals and examining the ways in which co-production and joined up communication can become automatic.
- Training has taken place where the teams have been working on clarity of roles and responsibilities to explore how approaches can be further streamlined in order to further improve and sustain the improvements in timeliness.
- Specific work has been undertaken on the issuing of draft and final EHCPs with improved consultations and communications with schools.
- The liaison team, responsible for recording, investigating, and contacting schools and parents following complaints are continuing to support many families to improve outcomes for children. There has been much positive feedback received in this area.
- The special educational needs advisory teams have also been involved in virtual reviews of all children and young people in independent provision.
- Face to face assessments for an EHC plan will happen in schools again from the autumn term.

3.2 What has gone well

- School led collaboration with local area partners (social care, education and health) has been a strength throughout the development of risk assessments.
- The whole school risk assessment document was developed collaboratively across all special schools.
- A very high percentage of schools and early years PVI settings actively engaged with the weekly meetings with their SEND Link Officers and there was a clear escalation process for those not engaging or causing concern.
- The work with the independent schools has been a strength. Focussed discussions and a dip sample of 26 of 75 risk assessments have evidenced that overall schools have robust and realistic plans in place.

- Significant improvement in meeting statutory timescales and the reduction in complaints and mediations.

3.3 What are the challenges ahead

- Staffing capacity – staff are shielding, reside with someone at risk category or are from BAME communities. This alongside social distancing measures has impacted in the number of staff within school.
- Parental anxiety/nervousness due to health and wellbeing risks.
- BAME community risk.
- Shielding – staff, children, parents and or wider family.
- Transport capacity.
- Special school nursing teams based in school have not yet returned to full capacity.

Appendices:

- Risk Assessment Template
- Example of Support and Guidance Documents for Schools
- Specialised Services weekly TEAMS reporting
- Schools EHCP weekly reporting