



Report to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

Re-opening of Schools and Impact of Closure

Background

The government announced that schools would close from the 23rd March 2020 but would still provide places for vulnerable children or children whose parents or guardians are key workers. The vast majority of schools in Nottingham City remained open for these children.

Prior to the formal closure, planning had already commenced to ensure that in Education we had the resources available to support schools in their response to the pandemic and, that in Children's Services all high priority children were explicitly identified within the vulnerable cohort. Those children who were considered to be most at risk were identified with good information shared with schools on current risks and clear plans to ensure children remained visible.

Work streams were put in place to risk assess, plan for and identify higher risk children with children in settled care and work to track and support education for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan. However the early priority was around children subject to child protection (CP) plans and children in need (CIN) within social work teams.

In total, 1887 Nottingham children and young people were identified within children's social care as being within the priority vulnerable pupil cohort. It became apparent fairly quickly that a number of vulnerable children lived in households where adults had health risks or where the children did. This reduced the number of children presenting at school initially. Throughout lockdown we worked closely with schools around the support for these young people.

Attendance by Groups on 17th July (last available data):

Headline Measure (as of latest data)	Cohort	Open / Attending	Open / Attending %
Total EHCP Children	1077	111	10.3%
Total Y10 Pupils	2905	123	4.2%
Total Social Care Children	1887	238	12.6%
Total Core Year Groups	17743	2857	16.1%
Total Nursery Pupils	3023	357	11.8%
Total Vulnerable Children	2200	398	18.1%
Total Pupils	46767	5046	10.8%
Total Y12 Pupils	792	53	6.7%
Schools	119	70	58.8%
Total Reception Pupils	3619	734	20.3%
Total Y6 Pupils	3770	765	20.3%
Total Y1 Pupils	3634	825	22.7%

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The Impact of Closure

Nottingham City Educational Psychology Service undertook a survey to seek the views of children and young people in the Covid-19 pandemic to:

- Understand the views and experiences of young people both in and out of school
- Inform the current provision of children and young people both in and out of school
- Inform future provision for children and young people returning school
- Inform the transition phases for children and young people returning school

They asked the children and young people of Nottingham City about their views and feelings about being at home or school during the pandemic; and what would help them to transition back into school.

Four surveys were sent out via Nottingham City Schools:

- To primary aged students that have been at home during the pandemic
- To primary aged students that have been in school during the pandemic
- To secondary aged students that have been at home during the pandemic
- To secondary aged students that have been in school during the pandemic

Total responses = 1006 Children and Young People, aged 5-18

Children and young people in Nottingham City were asked about their experiences in and out of school during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their answers showed some clear patterns, as well as variations. Key themes included: connectedness and relationships; emotional health; supported transitions back into schools; active learning, enrichment, and play; and academic worries.

The voice of children and young people summarised in the survey report:

- What our children have missed the most is their friends and teachers: they need to play and they need to connect!
- Children are generally eager to reconnect with peers and adults at school, however this brought about mixed emotions for many. Pupils may need support to rebuild old relationships and develop new ones.
- Our students missed the enrichment elements of the curriculum and asked for more of this when they go back to school!
- Some students have preferred to be at home because of the reduced pressure and demands: do we expect too much?
- Our students are worried about the pressure of GCSEs. They feel a reduced workload upon returning would help to ease them back into school.
- CYP are clearly anxious about safety when they come back to school. They want to know what the hygiene routines will be. CYP want to know that they will be protected from Covid-19.
- It is really important to our CYP that they are given clear information and know what is happening. They have many questions about coming back to school.

Key Messages presented in the report on the survey:

- Many pupils were worried about the 'potential impact on learning' of being at home. They felt a need to "catch up", have "extra lessons" and "get back to school quickly", fearing that they might "fail exams". This view has also been reflected in the media. We suggest this 'catch up' narrative has permeated the lives and beliefs of young people in a way that potentially puts a high level of pressure upon them, giving a

sense of missed opportunities and creates risks for their mental health and well-being.

- We suggest a need to shift away from this dominant narrative of 'catch up', which does not reflect the scale of the impact of the pandemic and which sits within a narrow construct of a National Curriculum. Instead, we advocate a narrative centered on a recovery curriculum, a focus on emotional health well-being, and the enjoyment of and motivation for life-long learning. We need to explore and celebrate what has been achieved during the pandemic and focus on the skills used or developed, as this is what is going to help our young people to grow and develop in the future.
- Many pupils are anxious about coming back to school and they are going to find it difficult. Social anxiety, low confidence, and fear of pressure and expectations will all contribute to emotionally based school avoidance. Schools will need to seek training from outside professionals in how to support pupils who feel unable to return to school. New ways of learning throughout the pandemic using various technologies may need to be considered and utilised.

Impact on learning

A clear concern has been the impact on learning and educational achievement as a consequence of the disruption in schooling. Schools and the Education team have taken action to ensure that all children who were remaining at home had access to online learning and 1200 laptops were distributed in the city. However, even with IT access in place, the opportunity for children to learn at home will have varied widely. Many families in Nottingham face levels of deprivation which mean that the home environment may be un conducive to formal study, parents may struggle to support learning and families will have been managing the varied impacts of Covid-19 including bereavement and illness.

It is difficult to predict, but we can anticipate that children will experience a significant loss in learning and that this is most likely to be greater for children who already experience significant disadvantage.

Support for Schools to Re-Open

The Education team continued to support schools over the summer. It was vital that we continued this support as schools started to transition to re-open. Even before lockdown there were many children who were anxious about attending school. For some children and young people this is so difficult that they may even refuse to go. Due to the long period of time children and young people have had no or limited access to school, we were conscious that there might be even more anxiety about returning.

Targeted CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service), Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) and the Educational Psychology Service in Nottingham City worked together to deliver campaigns of support to parents and children and young people to relieve some of the anxiety they may be experiencing around returning to school. The aim was to relieve some of the anxiety that young people may be experiencing around returning to school.

The #You'veBeenMissed campaign offered advice over the phone as well as podcasts and videos. During July and August the teams visited outdoor summer schools to promote the service which offers support and signposting to resources for further help.

Podcasts were released each week to address the theme of worries that children and young people shared with us ([CAMHS Nottingham City YouTube Channel](#)). There were also 'tips for parents' to support around the preparation of returning to school.

Children's Integrated Services (including Youth and Play) have provided a wealth of activities to support children around this work.

To address concerns about Covid-19 and the return to school, the Council's public health team is working with the Education team to support schools and to ensure clear advice is provided, consistent with national guidance.

The Children's Integrated Services and Education teams will also work with schools to support them in working with children to address any safeguarding issues which become apparent once children are seen and also to respond to any difficult behavior in order to avoid unnecessary exclusions.

In conclusion, the strong work between the Education team, Children's Integrated Services and our local schools has been key to supporting children during Covid-19 to date, and we will continue this partnership as we progress into the Autumn term.

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