



Report to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

Re-opening of Schools – Autumn Half Term Update

Covid-19 Partial Closures and Pupil Attendance

Partial Closure

On the final day of the first-half term (16th October) 41 city schools were reporting Covid-19 related partial closure (groups of pupils, class bubbles or whole year groups) affecting 57 pupil groups.

4469 pupils were self-isolating as a result (9.5% of city pupils)

By the 19th October a further 7 schools had reported the need for pupils to self-isolate during the half term holiday period which meant that 48 of the city's 104 state funded schools were managing positive Covid-19 cases.

In total 56 different schools reported the need to institute partial closure (groups of pupils, class bubbles or whole year groups) during the first half term of full re-opening.

Attendance

All schools have been requested by the DfE to complete a daily attendance portal. The LA has full access to this portal in order to have an oversight of city attendance. Unfortunately compliance with the request has been mixed and despite repeated requests to the DfE to ensure all schools and academies do complete remains incomplete. However, on the 16th October from those schools that did complete a return attendance in the city stood at:

Secondary 63.5% (10/18 reporting)
Primary 75.8% (53/75 reporting)
All Through 76.8% (1/1 reporting)
Maintained Nursery 90.9% (1/1 reporting)

Special schools 70.5% (3/5 reporting)
AP Free Schools/PRU's 79.7% (1/2 reporting)

EHCP Pupils (of responding schools) 65.8%
Pupils open to Social Care (of responding schools) 68.6%

Pre-Covid19 attendance would be typically around 94% secondary 96% primary.

Concerns raised by school leaders in managing the return

A number of concerns have been flagged by school leaders in managing in the current context. The headline concerns are:

- Concerns about having enough staff to keep schools functioning– absences due to (normal) illness, Covid related illness and self-isolation, and family responsibilities. Impact on school budgets at the cost of supply staff.
- Fatigue and well-being of staff – particularly noted in terms of the impact on school leaders. Who are having to manage operational, strategic and human resource issues at a pace and scrutiny (particularly parental) that is exceptionally challenging
- Lack of clarity on assessment/examination expectations and arrangements. Whilst the need to ensure that pupils are academically prepared to manage assessment and exams this has been balanced by the need to develop a “recovery” curriculum, that supports pupils managing with the impact of Covid-19 on their education and well-being. The lack of clarity from government in relation to arrangements does not help schools support pupils fully.
- Delay/lack of full resourcing required to secure sufficient digital access to hardware and connectivity. Whilst legislation has been introduced to ensure that schools have a suitable blended learning offer, full access for all pupils to digital platforms remains a concern.
- Impact of increasing levels of food poverty on learning

Responses and support made available

- Through sponsorship secured from Vodaphone all children attending Nottingham Schools Trust schools will be offered unlimited mobile data packages if they do not have access to reliable internet connectivity at home, should they be required to learn at home for any period of time.
- Expert support from Microsoft working with Greenwood Academies Trust has been shared with LA and academy schools on the use of virtual learning platforms
- The Well-being return to school programme has been rapidly implemented within Nottingham. Led by the Educational Psychology Team and Mental Health in Schools service in partnership with Challenge Nottingham resources and training for wellbeing are being rolled out across all city schools. <https://challengenottingham.co.uk/time-for-wellbeing>
- Following the unsuccessful opposition motion for the provision of free school meal support during the half-term and Christmas holiday periods, the City Council made available a local voucher offer for eligible parents in the second week of the October half term. Planning to ensure a response for the Christmas period is underway and will be communicated to parents and schools as soon as possible.
- All issues continue to be addressed directly with the Department for Education through a weekly Directors teleconference.

Report Author:

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