

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 13 January 2021

**Subject:** Update on schools and their response to COVID-19

**Report of:** Director of Education

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### **Summary**

This report provides a further update on the impact of COVID on schools in the City and how this has been responded to during the Autumn term 2020. This includes an overview of remote learning which is provided by our schools when pupils are required to self isolate. The report provides an update on how the COVID winter grant was used to make provision over Christmas for children and young people eligible for free school meals and also summarises recent guidance for schools from the Government on summer term assessment, remote learning and testing. Finally, the report provides some information on plans to develop testing in schools during the spring term.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:-

1. recognise the challenges faced by school leaders at this time and discuss the measures being taken by schools and colleges to increase school attendance, provide remote learning for children not able to attend school due to COVID and respond to Government guidance during the Autumn term.
  2. comment on the support provided by the Local Authority for schools and note that over 40,000 children and young people were supported with food vouchers or other support over the Christmas break.
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**Wards Affected:** All

<b>Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city</b>
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Through the learning and education system children are informed and understand environmental issues and the negative impact of carbon; promoting safe and healthy lives.
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<b>Manchester Strategy outcomes</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS</b>
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and	It is important we build a safe, healthy, happy and successful future for all of Manchester's children so that they can benefit from and contribute to the

distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	sustainability of Manchester thriving, economically diverse and successful. Children and Education Services work with all schools and early years settings in Manchester to promote children's learning and engage with those children and their families who need help, support and protection. The aim is for children to be safe, healthy and make progress in terms of education, training, social development so that they are successful and contribute and benefit from living in Manchester.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Children and young people matter in Manchester. The work of the Children and Education Directorate is driven by a commitment to provide opportunities and achieve positive outcomes; building a safe, happy, healthy and successful future for all of the city's children and young people
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Increase the influence Manchester's children and young people have on decisions that impact on them by supporting and enabling their voice to be heard; promoting a fair and inclusive place to live and work.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	A safe and effective children and education system is important to promote the awareness and inclusion of children in the engagement of wider societal issues; which together with a successful education offer make Manchester a place parents choose to visit, live and work.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Continually improve outcomes for all children and 'reduce the gap' against the national attainment average

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

September opening of schools and colleges for all children and young people - paper presented to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 5th September 2020

Update on opening of schools and colleges for all children and young people - paper presented to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee October 2020

Special Educational needs and disability update and the response to COVID-19 – paper presented to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee October 2020

Update on opening of schools with a focus on school attendance – paper presented to Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee November 2020

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 In Manchester, during the Autumn term the majority of schools have remained open to all pupils within the context of high rates of COVID-19 infections across the City and Greater Manchester. All schools were open to all of their statutory school age pupils by 14th September and overall attendance during the first half of the Autumn term school attendance was 94% if absence related to isolation as a result of COVID-19 is discounted which is positive and much higher than initially anticipated.
- 1.2 The Autumn term has been incredibly challenging for all school leaders who have been dealing on a regular basis with positive cases including identifying close contacts who need to self isolate; managing with reduced numbers of staff in school as a result of this; developing and implementing remote learning; understanding the impact of lockdown on pupils' learning and wellbeing and trying to address these; reviewing and reordering the curriculum to address gaps and reduce movement around school; managing the additional financial costs to schools; as well as implementing and reviewing risk assessments to ensure that schools are COVID secure and safe environments.
- 1.3 In addition to this, there has been a plethora of Government guidance issued last term and during the Christmas holiday period. This included very late notification of the option to use an INSET day on the last day of the Autumn term to reduce the amount of time school staff would be required to contact trace over the Christmas holidays and the requirement for secondary schools to have a staggered return for pupils on the first week of the Spring term. This was subsequently extended to 2 weeks for the majority of secondary age pupils, with schools being notified about this on 30 December 2020. This means that the majority of secondary pupils do not return to school until the week beginning 18 January 2021 and should have a remote learning offer in place from 11 January 2021. However, pupils in examination groups (year 11 and year 13) will return on 11 January with a remote learning offer in place from 4 January and only vulnerable pupils and children of key workers are expected to attend school from the first week of term. At the time of writing this report primary schools, special schools and alternative provision were required to open at the beginning of term as planned for all children with the exception of primary schools in identified tier 4 local authorities in London and South East of England.
- 1.4 This report provides an update following on from previous reports on the impact of COVID on schools during the Autumn term, the implementation of a new 'in house' process to support school with contact tracing as well as providing a detailed overview of the remote learning offer in place across the City. It also provides an update on the use of the COVID winter grant to provide supermarket vouchers for financially disadvantaged children and young people over the Christmas break. The paper summarises the most recent Government guidance on the introduction of testing in schools and the next steps to implement this.

## **2.0 Numbers of positive cases of COVID19**

- 2.1 As of the 16 November 2020 the reporting of positive cases within Early years settings and schools, was brought 'in house'. Previously schools reported cases via several routes including Greater Manchester hub, Public Health England and the DfE helpline etc. This scattered approach to reporting resulted in inconsistent advice to schools with regards to contact tracing and the resulting data being held by various sources.
- 2.2 Settings and schools can now report positive cases via one online form to the local Manchester Test and Trace (MTAT) Team. The MTAT team, staffed by nurses, are also available by phone to give immediate and accessible advice to school leaders on complex clinical issues related to contact tracing. Before implementation of the 'in house' process, school leaders were provided with a detailed guidance document drafted by MTAT, Health colleagues, Education and Human Resources to accompany the process, and settings continue to have access to support through the Education team when needed.
- 2.3 Feedback from settings has been that this process has greatly enhanced the ability for schools to confidently contact trace in a timely manner and has provided Health colleagues and Education a centralised more accurate data set to report from and identify areas of concern.
- 2.4 During this five week period, a total of 904 cases were reported to Manchester Test and Trace and of these, 63% of all reported cases in school and early years settings were children. Positively, the number of cases of children has slightly declined since the end of November. 76% of all reported cases were experiencing the common symptoms of COVID: a persistent cough, a high temperature and/or a loss of taste or smell. However, 24% of cases (221) were asymptomatic.
- 2.5 The majority of reported cases have been in primary or secondary school settings. The number of cases in Primary schools has fluctuated week-on-week, but remains high at an average of 70 cases per week. Reported cases in secondary schools steadily declined over a four week period with the highest number of cases each week consistently being seen in Key Stage 3. The overall rate of positive cases is higher in the secondary age group when this is considered within the context of the overall school population as there are fewer pupil in secondary schools than primary schools.
- 2.6 A total of 17,198 children and 1,185 staff have been told to self isolate as a result of COVID-19 during this period. Data also shows that the numbers of children being required to self isolate in response to a positive case of a child or adult in school have significantly reduced as consequence of schools refining their approach to identifying close contacts, reducing bubble size and the times that bubbles mix. In most cases reported a high proportion of schools are making their own independent decisions on identifying contacts of reported cases and instructing to self-isolate.

2.7 Information on positive cases in schools and early years settings since 16/11/20

<b>WEEK ENDING</b>	<b>TOTAL POSITIVE CASES</b>	<b>POSITIVE CHILDREN</b>	<b>POSITIVE ADULTS</b>	<b>ISOLATING CHILDREN</b>	<b>ISOLATING ADULTS</b>
20/11/20	183	121	62	3715	196
27/11/20	209	132	77	3965	319
04/12/20	177	123	54	3049	258
11/12/20	175	110	65	3647	234
18/12/20	160	88	72	2817	178

2.8 This data can be further broken down to understand the positive test results over the 5 week period as follows (excluding visitors and supply staff)

<b>Early Years</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Special</b>	<b>All Through</b>	<b>Sixth Form</b>
32	355	335	51	53	59

2.9 The Population Health Team are now currently working on using the data reported by schools to identify themes/trends and cross reference with data held by other teams. As the online form that schools use to report cases can be amended as needed, it is envisioned that questions will be added that may assist with the reporting on mass testing to understand impact on schools, attendance, staffing etc.

### 3.0 School Attendance

3.1 Overall, headteachers continued to report through the Autumn term that schools are generally calm with children responding really positively to the changes and engaging well with their learning. For the first half of the Autumn term school attendance was 94% if the x code which is the mark given to pupils who have to self isolate is discounted. The breakdown of pupil absence across schools compared to half term 1 in 2019 is shown in the table below.

	<b>Absence (discounting x code) HT 1 2020</b>	<b>Absence HT1 2019</b>
<b>Primary</b>	5.10%	3.1%
<b>Secondary</b>	6.41%	4.52%
<b>Special</b>	16.24%	12.14%

3.2 Weekly attendance data since half term shows that attendance in schools has continued to be around 94%. The numbers are lower in special schools and in general for pupils with Education health and care plans (EHCPs). This mainly due to parent/carers concerns about sending children into school while infection rates in Manchester have been high. The table below shows absence rates for children with EHCP by school type compared to the same period in 2019.

<b>EHCP</b>	Absence HT 1 2020	Absence HT 1 2019
<b>Primary</b>	9.6%	7%
<b>Secondary</b>	12.4%	8.3%
<b>Special</b>	15.48%	9.76%

3.3 The attendance team has continued to provide support for schools and parents/carers regarding school attendance. This has included providing attendance advice sessions for schools in December and members of the attendance team have also attended school cluster meetings over the last half term alongside staff from other services. Schools, attendance officers in the Early Help hubs and the attendance team are all continuing to work to alleviate concerns and support children back to school. However, there continues to be parental anxiety about sending children to school due to Covid-19 there has been a significant increase in enquiries about elective home education as a response to this.

3.4 **Virtual School attendance** - There has been a positive school attendance picture since the start of the Autumn Term for Our Children and Young People in Reception to Year 11. Where Our Young People are absent for coronavirus related reasons the Virtual School is asking Designated Teachers to provide more information within the young person's electronic PEP about the reasons for their absence and about the remote learning offer that they are accessing whilst unable to physically attend school. Overall attendance has continued to improve each week. Primary school attendance is up to 95.7%, and secondary school is 92.1%. Special school attendance did drop a little but in the last 2 weeks of the term attendance has continued to be above 80%. The number of young people with attendance below 90% has decreased.

#### **4.0 Elective Home Education (EHE)**

4.1 As previously reported, the numbers of families requesting to home educate their children has continued to increase and is 114% higher than at the end of the Autumn term last year - the total of new notifications for this term is 146 compared to 68 in Autumn term 2019. The overall number of children home educated is now 545 (this includes new notifications and those that are deemed as offering suitable education). As a result of this, there has been some additional resource made available to the team to ensure that all new notifications are dealt with in line with our policy.

4.2 There have also been some new trends and variations compared to previous years. Reasons for Electing to Home Educate are as follows with the majority of cases related to Covid-19 and lockdown in some way:-

- Some parents have enjoyed extra time spent with their children over Lockdown and are now choosing EHE to continue to build on positives, such as closer relationships, ability to focus more on child's talents and interests, improved mental health & reduced anxiety.
- The above applies to some parents of children with EHCPs who perceive that their children, especially those diagnosed with Autism or Anxiety are calmer in the home environment

- Parents of children who had previously suffered from isolation or bullying in schools have also noticed their children appeared happier during Lockdown
- Some parents are choosing EHE due to their anxieties about Covid-9 and fear that children attending school may bring the infection into the family. The majority of these intend EHE to be short term.

4.3 There also appears to be an increase in the proportion of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic families choosing to home educate, especially from Asian backgrounds. It is noticeable that there has been an increase in the proportion of EHE deemed suitable. All parents, having gone through Lockdown, have a much better idea of what EHE entails than in previous years. There has also been an increase in free resources available eg the Oak Academy. There appears to be an increase in parents paying for online tuition eg Interhigh or tuition centres such as the Salafi (which offers up to 15 hours per week). The Manchester College part-time offer is of real benefit to Year 10s and Year 11s and there has been very positive feedback from both parents and young people about this offer. In previous years, the majority of students have gained qualifications in English and Maths and been supported to progress to Post-16.

4.4 We have asked our headteachers to work with parents to ensure that they fully understand that by electing to home educate, their child will be removed from a school roll and will therefore not access the school's remote learning offer. All new cases are then being contacted by officers from Education who also discuss with parents the reasons why they want to home educate and ensure that parents who are not sending their child to school because they are anxious about this, understand their options and the implications of home education. The team also provide information to parents on home education and establish whether the education provided by the parent is suitable for the child.

4.5 For parents who do want to home educate, Manchester has a strong policy on EHE which is in line with DFE guidance for Local Authorities and for parents. Education officers contact all families both on initial notification of the decision to home educate and at least on an annual basis to assess suitability. Information is requested from Social Care, Health and previous school, as well as from parents, as part of the assessment. Parents are also sent newsletters and invited to networking events.

4.6 Arrangements are in place through the Admissions Team to return children to school should elective home education be deemed as unsuitable.

## **5.0 Exclusions**

5.1 As previously reported, initially schools reported that behaviour in schools was good. Certainly the numbers of permanent exclusions during the first half of the Autumn term were significantly lower than previous years. However, during November there were a few exclusions from schools, with most due to persistent disruptive behaviour with schools stating that excluded pupils were



consistently breaking rules in place to reduce the risk of infection. Overall, in the Autumn term the numbers of permanent exclusions was 29. This includes 9 from schools outside the City. This is still an improved picture and an overall reduction of 15 when compared to Autumn term 2019. There have been no permanent exclusion of our children and young people or permanent exclusions from special schools.

## **6.0 Remote Learning**

6.1 Where a class, group or a small number of pupils need to self-isolate, or local restrictions require pupils to remain at home, it is a statutory requirement that schools have the capacity to offer immediate remote education. This requirement has been in place since September, when schools fully opened to all pupils. The DfE guidance surrounding contingency planning for remote education has been updated and clarified several times throughout the Autumn term, the most recent being 3 December 2020 where it was specified that schools are expected to:

- set assignments so that pupils have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects
- set work that is of equivalent length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school, and as a minimum:
  - primary: 3 hours a day, on average, across the school cohort
  - secondary: 4 hours a day, with more for pupils working towards formal qualifications this year
- provide frequent, clear explanations of new content, delivered by a teacher or through high-quality curriculum resources or videos
- have systems for checking, at least weekly, whether pupils are engaging with their work, and inform parents immediately where engagement is a concern
- gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum using questions and other suitable tasks, and provide feedback, at least weekly, using digitally facilitated or whole-class feedback where appropriate
- enable teachers to adjust the pace or difficulty of what is being taught in response to questions or assessments, including, where necessary, revising material or simplifying explanations to ensure pupils' understanding

6.2 Thanks to the dedication of Manchester's teachers and school leaders, remote education is being delivered in all our schools when it is needed. This provision is being continually improved in line with expectations and emerging best practice. Our engagement with school leaders, concerning their remote provision, always takes into account the circumstances of the school and its pupils, including staff and pupil absences related to coronavirus.

6.3 To support schools in developing their remote learning provision, one of the Senior Schools Quality Assurance Officers (SSQA) has led two primary and two secondary focussed webinars to facilitate the sharing of good practice amongst schools in the city and provide specific training. Approximately 15 high schools and 50 primary schools attended. The webinars included:

- Disseminating the DfE guidance for remote learning and exploring the national support available for this.
- Input from a representative from the EdTech Demonstrator (funded by the DfE) which addresses tech led solutions. Their offer of support was outlined, and a number of schools have since taken up this offer.
- Sharing best practice from targeted schools, which were identified through our quality assurance processes.
- Using scenarios to explore the pros and cons of a variety of remote learning strategies, that could be implemented if needed.
- Sharing first hand experiences of dealing with bubble/class/year group closures and implementing remote learning.
- Exploring virtual platforms used for live lessons.
- Strategies to provide feedback to pupils when self isolating.
- Training from eSafe in online learning and safeguarding.

6.4 In the new year, the next series of webinars will focus on:

- Remote learning and SEND
- Dealing with safeguarding concerns when pupils are isolating
- Parental engagement.

6.5 A number of cluster headteacher meetings have taken place throughout the Autumn term and a thread through these meetings has been discussions of how schools are seeking to meet the government requirement for remote learning. Headteachers have compared effective practice and shared resources and approaches that others have then explored.

6.6 Central to our school's Quality Assurance process is the universal offer of a Quality Assurance visit from skilled Quality Assurance Professionals (QAP). It is an expectation that schools work with a Local Authority approved QAP, or with an externally appointed colleague with the same level of expertise, in evaluating strengths and areas for development in schools. The reports produced as part of this process are shared with the Local Authority which ensures that we have a secure knowledge of our schools. In order for us to be assured that schools are adhering to the DfE requirements regarding remote education, three questions were central to the autumn term QA visit.

- 1) Should the need arise, what contingency plans are in place that allows access for all pupils, to high-quality remote education resources, that are linked to the school's curriculum expectations? (Regardless as to whether pupils have online access or not.)
- 2) How will remote learning allow for interaction, assessment and feedback?
- 3) Recognising that younger pupils and some pupils with SEND may not be able to access remote education without adult support, how are leaders working with families to deliver a broad and ambitious curriculum?

6.7 To date, 123 schools have had their QA visit and their link SSQA has analysed the reports submitted. 100% of all QA reports demonstrate a remote learning offer and an extended curriculum offer including for SEND. It is

evident that when QA visits took place very early in the term, the remote offer was of more variable quality and this offer has developed as the term has progressed. All QAPs provided support and challenge where improvements were needed.

6.8 A common challenge identified through the QA reports is the issue of access to appropriate IT not only laptops/computers but also reliable broadband connections. In many cases families are sharing one device between them, which might be a phone, and so children are not able to access the device for any length of time each day. Many children in the City also do not have access to a suitable space to do their work at home. For some schools they have found a more paper based approach is more suitable as a way of providing remote learning. Some schools loaned significant IT resources to pupils and additionally dongles have been provided to ensure more reliable broadband connections. The reports also show that a range of programs are used to support learning, e.g. purple mash, TT Rockstars.

6.9 As we would expect, the approaches seen in schools has been bespoke to their situation. In many cases this has been informed and refined by the strategy being put into place where positive Coronavirus cases have resulted in bubbles/groups of pupils being required to self-isolate. Some of the features that have been reported by QAPs are captured in the bullet points below.

- Several schools have included remote learning as part of CPD/appraisal cycle to support rapid upskilling required.
- Communicating with staff the non-negotiables of the remote learning offer to ensure consistency across the school.
- Specific 'blended learning leaders' have been appointed. They have consulted with Faculty Leaders on how to deliver blended learning to ensure leader buy in and ownership of strategic decisions
- Student and / or parent surveys have been carried out to assess needs and ensure the school has enough technology to meet these.
- Detailed planning responsive to context, particularly considering digital poverty.
- Faculties / departments have a trained Digital Champion who has cascaded training. Staff now more confident to record PowerPoints via Zoom or record lessons via MS Teams and share with pupils isolating.
- Use of a blend of online platforms (many using Google Classroom / MS teams) and 'hard copy' resources.
- Staff and pupils being trained in using the online platforms.
- Use of school website to share the remote learning offer.
- Support for parents with home learning.
- Resources used in the classroom being informed by resources used in remote learning so that pupils see a blended approach to learning.

6.10 Interaction, assessment and feedback to pupils when they are accessing a remote offer has included:

- A live registration to start the day and a live activity to finish the day;

- In many cases teachers had significant regular contact with the pupils in their class whilst taking part in remote learning;
- Use of self-marking programmes such as Hegarty Maths;
- Live lessons – simultaneous feedback;
- Using AVI (robots) to support learning;
- Teaching Assistants communicating feedback to pupils;
- Uploading work to online platform;
- Selectively accessing resources from the DfE sponsored on-line Oak Academy;
- Work packs being brought back to school and marked after quarantining them;
- Class dojo used to share messages with parents and dojo portfolio used to share work from EYFS;
- Marking work remotely via Teams or OneNote;
- Seasaw and Tapetstry have proved useful platforms for younger learners in primary school;
- High schools have been utilising the facility within a number of platforms for monitoring times students are actually engaged in learning and have used this then to target support for those who seem to be less engaged;
- High schools have successfully provided live lessons across the whole range of national curriculum subjects. This included a specific example of curriculum enrichment activities on Fridays.

#### 6.11 **Pupils with SEND:**

Many staff were in contact throughout lockdown with pupils who have special educational needs. Many SEND Coordinators (SENDCO) coordinated all of the work for pupils in school with special educational needs and contacted parents to discuss tasks and offer support as to how these might be completed. Different devices were provided to support the specific needs of pupils. In addition to this schools reported that:

- Pupils were assigned a keyworker who offers support.
- Teaching Assistants continued to support specific pupils via online platforms.
- Use of Oak National Academy SEND resources
- Practical activities and resource packs provided for pupils and parents to engage in.
- Training provided for parents re how to help their children learn through play / experiential learning.
- Special schools have strived to ensure some therapy sessions can still be provided on line e.g. working closely with Nordoff Robins Music Therapist.

### 7.0 **COVID winter grant**

7.1 On 8<sup>th</sup> November the government announced that they were making £170m available to Local Authorities as part of a COVID winter grant. The objective of this grant is to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children affected by the pandemic throughout winter period and where alternative assistance is not available. Local Authorities have the flexibility to

develop a local approach that best fits this objective. Items covered by this grant include food, energy, water, and other financial support. The grant covers the period from December to end of March 2021.

- 7.2 Manchester's grant allocation is £2.581m. At least 80% of a local authority's spend on the grant must be on families with children including pre-school and children up to and including age 19 (on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021) - £2,065m of Manchester's grant. Up to 20%, £0.516m can be used on residents without children and this includes young people who are care leavers and those with special educational needs.
- 7.3 Executive committee approved the decision to prioritise the provision of supermarket vouchers for children eligible for benefit related free school meals and other financially disadvantaged children and young people during the two week Christmas holiday and February half term. The preferred option was to purchase a range of supermarket vouchers to distribute to families through schools. Although it is acknowledged that there are many benefits to making a cash payment to families, previous experience has shown that this is resource intensive to set up and more expensive to administer. In addition, by purchasing the vouchers centrally, the Council were able to lever some additional social value from supermarkets with a strong reach across the City.
- 7.4 The Council went out to the main supermarkets in the City with an ask for approximately 34k food vouchers worth £15 per week to the value of £1.6m to cover Christmas holidays (2 weeks) and February half term (1 week). Three supermarkets responded and could deliver the vouchers in the required timescales; Aldi, Tesco and Morrisons. Schools and settings were asked to identify the children and young people and distribute the supermarket vouchers. In addition, they had the option of sourcing their own vouchers if they already had links with local supermarkets or shops. Internal Audit developed guidance to assist schools to develop an auditable process for storing and distributing the vouchers. Support for the safe distribution of vouchers to schools ready for them to distribute to families during the last week of term was agreed with Mitie as part of their social value contribution.
- 7.5 The following children were eligible for a voucher - all children eligible for benefit related FSM which based on October census was approximately 32.4k children and young people. Families eligible for free school meals is currently 37% of our school population and has increased by 2k since the outbreak of the pandemic. In addition, children who currently do not access FSM but met the following criteria were also eligible for assistance:
- Children of families that are classed as no recourse to public funds;
  - Young people in year 12/13 provision whose family meet the criteria for FSM or they accessed FSM when under 16;
  - Children in vulnerable families known to the school who are outside of the scope of FSM but where it is identified through an early help assessment that they require support during the school holidays;

- Children under 5 in early years whose family meet the criteria for FSM and may be vulnerable during the closure of provision (including EY settings), this includes:
  - Any two-year old's eligible for funded Early Years places
  - Nursery and reception (non-statutory) pupils in school that the school has identified as FSM
  - Any nursery age child in a setting that was previously a funded two-year-old
  - Any under two that has involvement with a statutory service e.g. known to social care.

7.6 Overall, for the Christmas period 7288 vouchers were provided to children in the Early years, 19,622 vouchers were distributed by schools from the Council scheme and a further 14,471 children received vouchers through schools who arranged their own scheme. Direct funding was also provided to post 16 colleges in the City for 1400 young people who previously accessed free school meals. This process will be repeated for the February half term holiday.

## **8.0 Testing in Schools**

8.1 Just before the end of term, the Government announced that from 4<sup>th</sup> January, they would be introducing testing in secondary schools and colleges. This includes using lateral flow testing to do daily testing of the close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases, in order to reduce the numbers of pupils and staff who are required to self isolate at home and weekly testing of all pupils and staff to reduce virus transmission by identifying asymptomatic cases. Secondary schools and colleges have been prioritised for this due to the higher rates in infection in this phase of Education. The plan is that primary schools will be included later in the half term.

8.2 Lateral flow tests are rapid turnaround tests that can process COVID-19 samples on site without the need for laboratory equipment in approximately 30 minutes. They can be undertaken by non-medically qualified individuals trained on how to administer the test and read results. A positive lateral flow test requires a confirmation test via a standard PCR test (where a test result is obtained/analysed in a Laboratory).

8.3 The Government propose to provide to support to schools for testing in the following ways:

- Provision of all test kits, PPE and training, as has been provided in other settings such as care homes and universities - the plan is that these will be sent out to all secondary schools on 4<sup>th</sup> January .
- Reimbursement of reasonable costs for the additional workforce and resources needed to deliver the testing of students on return in January in state funded secondary schools and colleges – this will be calculated through the use of a tool which will calculate additional funding required based on school pupil and staff numbers.
- Armed forces personnel will support directly through planning with schools and colleges where additional support is required.

- Guidance and training for schools including webinars, videos, detailed operating procedures and letter templates and access to a DFE helpline.
- A tool will be developed which will support schools to calculate some of the logistics of setting up a testing area and the numbers of staff required to administer testing as part of a dedicated testing team as specified by the DFE.

8.4 The intention is that pupils and staff would use the tests themselves under supervision to take a nasal and throat swab in a dedicated testing area in their school. At this stage it appears that the expectation is that non-teaching staff and volunteers will be responsible for analysing the lateral flow tests and provide administration for the process. Pupils and parents will need to provide consent for this. Further advice and guidance have been provided by the DFE including training materials, consent letters and an updating handbook on testing.

8.5 Prior to the Government's announcement, Education colleagues were working alongside Public Health colleagues to begin to plan for the roll out of testing in schools. This work is still ongoing whilst further clarifications about the process are sought and meetings with secondary headteachers are scheduled for the 5<sup>th</sup> of January to discuss this planning, the impacts and logistics of the proposals and any guidance provided in the interim.

8.6 While there is general support for the roll out of testing in schools, the fundamental concerns at this point are the resourcing and operational challenges of testing in schools at this scale including the space to do tests, storage of tests, finding time in the school day and finding additional staff to form the testing teams. Although there is additional funding available for schools it is not yet clear how this be calculated using the tool and what this is based on.

## **9.0 Conclusion**

9.1 It has been an extremely busy and challenging time for all our school leaders and school staff who have worked incredibly hard to ensure that our schools have remained open, COVID secure and safe with high numbers of children and young people attending each day. Throughout the Autumn term, there have continued to be positive cases of COVID-19 each week, although these did appear to reduce at the end of term. These positive cases have resulted in significant numbers of children and adults having to self isolate and the new arrangements for track and tracing have improved our ability to monitor and respond to this. Where pupils have been unable to attend, we are confident that there is a remote offer in place which children can access at home, although this is certainly not a substitute for the learning and other benefit of children of attending school and there continues to be concerns that because of this Manchester's children will be significantly disadvantaged in summer assessments and examinations (appendix 1).

9.2 The introduction of testing for schools in Spring is welcome if it will reduce the numbers of children who are required to self isolate and reduce the spread of

infection. However, this is a huge operational task for schools to undertake and it needs to be properly resourced and with sufficient time to plan. We will be working with our secondary schools in the first week of term to identify what is achievable and where they may need additional support from the Council in order to achieve testing at scale.

## **10.0 Recommendations**

- 10.1 The committee is asked to recognise the challenges faced by school leaders at this time and discuss the measures being taken by schools and colleges to increase school attendance, provide remote learning for children not able to attend school due to COVID and respond to Government guidance in particular in relation to mass testing of staff and pupils. The committee is also asked to comment on the support provided by the Local Authority for schools and note that over 40,000 children and young people were supported with food vouchers or other support over the Christmas break.