

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 10 February 2021

**Subject:** Update on schools and settings 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 and settings in the City. The report focuses on how schools and settings have responded to during the first month of the new term while learning has been delivered remotely to the majority of children and young people with only vulnerable children and children of critical workers being offered on site learning at their school. The paper summarises the most recent Government guidance and how this is being implemented. It provides an update on the numbers of children accessing onsite provision and the numbers of positive cases across our schools and settings. The report also provides some information collected during the Autumn term on what children and young people were telling us about the impact of COVID. The report outlines the support that continues to be provided to our schools and settings and also to our families through use of the winter COVID grant.

### **Recommendations**

The committee is asked to recognise the challenges faced by school and setting leaders at this time and discuss the measures being taken by schools and colleges to ensure children and young people are safe, able to learn at home and attending schools where this is appropriate. The committee are asked to comment on what children and young people have told us about the impact of COVID. The committee is also asked to comment on the support provided by the Local Authority for schools and settings.

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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>
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A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and
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<b>Manchester Strategy outcomes</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS</b>
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It is important we build a safe, healthy, happy and successful future for all of Manchester's children so
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distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	that they can benefit from and contribute to the 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 homegrown 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

Update on schools and their response to COVID19 - paper presented to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee January 2021

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 In Manchester, during the Autumn term the majority of schools 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 On 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021 the Government announced that with immediate effect schools would be closed to the majority of their pupils who would be required to learn from home and that schools should only offer onsite provision to vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Initially, there was no further guidance on this and schools had to make their own decisions on who to invite into school as well as implement their remote learning offer. However, subsequently there has continued to be regular Government guidance issued to school and setting leaders each week. We are also now aware that schools will not fully open to all of their pupils until 8<sup>th</sup> March at the earliest and that schools will be given two weeks notice about full reopening so that they have time to prepare for this. Currently we are unaware of what the plans are for full reopening and for example whether this will be staggered initially.
- 1.3 This report provides an update following on from previous reports on the impact of COVID on schools and settings for the first month of the spring term. The paper summarises the most recent Government guidance and how this is being implemented. It provides an update on the numbers of children accessing onsite provision and the numbers of positive cases across our schools and settings. The report also provides some information collected during the Autumn term on what children and young people were telling us about the impact of COVID. The report outlines the support that continues to be provided to our schools and settings and also to our families through use of the winter COVID grant.

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

- 2.1 As of the 16<sup>th</sup> 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. 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.
- 2.2 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. Schools have continued to report positive cases for all of their staff and children when they are made aware of these even though they do not have all children and staff on site – the numbers outlined below therefore do not only include children who are accessing provision on site but cover children and young people where positive cases continue to be reported by parents/carers to the school.

- 2.3 Since the introduction of the locally led system in November, we have been notified of a total of 1,366 cases. During the period between 18/12/20 and 29/01/21, a total of 462 cases were reported to Manchester Test and Trace and of these, 35% of all reported cases in school and early years settings were children, 34% were teaching staff and 27% non-teaching staff. An average of 30 children (from a school age population of almost 90,000) have been reported as COVID-19 positive by schools each week during this period. However, it is to be noted that the data provided for the last 6 week period, will be impacted by the Christmas break, fewer children returning to school in early January due to the current national restrictions in place and also the increase in lateral flow tests now being used by the majority of school staff which identifies asymptomatic cases.
- 2.4 Throughout January, the majority of reported cases continue to be in primary or secondary school settings. Reported cases in secondary schools have steadily declined over the reported period with a weekly average of 12 cases and this reflects that there are significantly fewer children in secondary school accessing on site provision. The highest number of cases each week consistently being seen in Key Stage 2.
- 2.5 During this six-week period an average of 600 children and 163 staff have been required to self-isolate per week. Positively, cases reported demonstrate that a high proportion of schools are making their own independent decisions on identifying contacts of reported cases and instructing to self isolate. There is also a reduction in the numbers of children and adults having to self isolate in response to a positive case in January due to lower numbers of children and staff in school and with some children and staff there are no other school contacts because they are at home anyway.
- 2.6 Information on positive cases in schools and early years settings since reporting arrangements changes

<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
<b>Following numbers are during 2 week Christmas break and partial closure of schools</b>					
25/12/2	74	48	26	1025	80

1/1/21	12	5	7	31	2
8/1/21	36	14	22	72	40
15/1/21	111	37	74	743	221
22/1/21	112	42	70	1075	468
29/1/21	115	32	83	638	162

\*excludes visitors

- 2.7 This data can be further broken down to understand the positive test results over the last 6 week period as follows

<b>Early Years</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Special</b>	<b>All Through</b>	<b>Sixth Form</b>
96	206	71	21	22	40

\*excludes settings not falling within above categories

- 2.8 The Population Health Team are 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, questions were added week beginning the 25/01/21 to help analyse data around lateral flow testing and asymptomatic cases in schools and early years settings.

### **3.0 Numbers of children on site**

- 3.1 Following the Prime Minister's announcement on the evening of 4<sup>th</sup> January that schools should close the following day to majority of their pupils in order to reduce community transmission of coronavirus, schools were initially asked to offer places to pupils who were considered vulnerable and children of critical workers using a pre-existing list of posts considered as critical by the government. No further guidance or indication was provided regarding numbers of pupils who could or should be on site to access their education. Consequently, the Local Authority provided some advice to schools to support them with their planning during the first few days. This advice requested that schools prioritised their vulnerable pupils for on site provision including those children with Education, health and care plans (EHCP), those known to social care and also children who did not cope well with the first lock down in March 2020. It also requested that schools prioritised children of Health and Care workers when considering children of critical workers. In addition to this, it was acknowledged that schools had to balance the number of on site places offered with the numbers of staff available to work on site (taking into account those who are clinically extremely vulnerable and those self isolating) and also the requirement to provide daily remote learning for children not on site and carry out welfare checks. Schools were also required to review their risk assessments.
- 3.2 Subsequent Guidance provided by the DFE also specified that special schools and alternative provision should offer on site provision to all children who want a place due to their vulnerability and that nursery setting, nursery schools and nursery classes should remain open for all children. This guidance also advised that schools should not limit the number of places they offer on site

and that all children of critical workers should be offered a place in school although it did ask that where possible critical workers should work from home and not send their children to school.

- 3.3 On Monday 11 January 2021, all Manchester schools were asked to complete a return to indicate the number of critical worker and vulnerable children invited to attend settings, capturing critical worker place requests, places offered, vulnerable places offered, including children with EHCPs. Settings were also asked to identify which other cohorts of vulnerable pupils were asked to attend school. The data below is based on returns from 170 settings, including sixth form colleges.
- 3.4 Of the cohorts offered places in school, all schools reported offering places for children of critical workers, which was the highest category. This was followed by Child in Need and Child Protection as next highest priority groups. It is reassuring to note that 30 schools have offered places to children vulnerable to exploitation online, 109 schools are supporting children with mental health needs. 134 of 170 schools have invited CYP who struggle with learning remotely to attend school.
- 3.5 Number of returns by district were as follows: North 50, Central 67, South 53. The school offer is similar in north and central, but higher in south. The offer in north averages at 27% of the total number of pupils on roll. The school offer in central averages at 25% and the school offer in south average is 33%. This is slightly higher, as it includes special schools who have more children attending and also has higher number of critical worker children attending. Overall, there has been an increase in school places offered and taken up since previous national lockdown, especially in schools in central Manchester.

Data by sector based on 170 returns  
Offer of places as a % of Number On Roll

Primary	34%
High School	14%
Sixth Form	3%
Special	72%
Alternative Provision	53%

- 3.6 Schools also complete a daily return on a portal for the DFE which provides us with an overview of numbers of children attending on site each day and how this compares with national and regional data. This data does show that the numbers of children on site have increased each week as schools invite more children to attend and also because more children are taking up places which have been offered. Schools are working hard to ensure that in particular vulnerable children do take up a place when it is offered and social workers, early help and other agencies are also supporting with this.
- 3.7 As a snapshot, on 26<sup>th</sup> January data from the portal showed that 16.2% of our 5 to 11 pupil cohort are on a school site (11,086 children) which is above the average for England. Of these, 6193 are children of critical workers. 39.3% of

children with an EHCP are also accessing on site provision (above regional and national), 47.7% of children with a social worker (above regional and national) and 14.5% of children on free school meals (above regional and national).

#### **4.0 Early Year settings**

4.1 The vast majority of our Early Years settings have remained open to all children in line with Government guidance – 125 settings are open across the City with 9 closed. Approximately 3260 children are continuing to attend settings each day. This is broadly in line with the number of children who were attending in the Autumn term – so although the numbers are lower than we would usually expect, they have not reduced during the lock down period.

4.2 There are 404 childminders continuing to operate with 709 children attending and 184 closed. Currently, 23 child minders providing for school age children during school hours.

#### **5.0 Lateral Flow testing**

5.1 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. 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. All secondary schools and colleges were sent a supply of LF tests and provided with a standard operating procedure and training to set up testing spaces. DFE guidance includes the following uses for lateral flow tests of staff and pupils:

- 1. Test as many secondary pupils and students on their return to secondary schools and FE colleges as possible. This means two LFDs tests three to five days apart.**
- 2. Carry out weekly testing of school and college staff.**

These measures will identify some, although not all, cases of Covid-19 who don't have symptoms - who will then self-isolate. This will reduce the risk of the virus spreading within schools.

Initially, there had been a third use of Lateral flow testing planned for use in schools and colleges:

- 3. Carry out daily testing for seven days of pupils and students and staff who are close contacts of a positive case.**

This use of lateral flow tests is proposed in order to allow pupils and staff who are close contacts of a positive case to come back into school, who would otherwise have been at home self-isolating. However, this third use of lateral flow tests has currently been paused by the DFE following advice from

Directors of Public Health who are concerned that using lateral flow tests in this way could increase the risk of transmitting Covid-19 infection in school, at a stage of the pandemic when rates of Covid-19 are high. This is because lateral flow tests don't identify all cases of Covid-19 – there are some 'false negative' results.

- 5.2 More recently, there has been a further change whereby children and staff who test from a LF test no longer need to have this test confirmed by a standard PCR test (where a test result is obtained/analysed in a Laboratory).
- 5.3 Secondary schools were offered some support to help them to set up their testing sites from the Council. This has included support with their risk assessments and also visits to the Council's LF testing centre at FC Utd to look at the layout and process. Schools and colleges are now providing an offer of testing for their staff and some are also offering this to the pupils who are on site. Feedback has generally been that testing is going well and schools wanted to start with staff to better understand the process and did not want to test children until they were confident in this. However, school leaders have expressed concern about how this process will be manageable for all of their pupils once schools fully reopen.
- 5.4 In addition, to testing in secondary schools and colleges, primary schools have in the last week been sent a supply of LF tests for their staff to administer at home. In the interim period primary school staff were able to access a LF test as one of the Council's LF sites across the city. This provision has now been made available to staff in early years settings.

## **6.0 Remote Learning**

- 6.1 The majority of children and young people in the city are currently at home accessing education remotely. Since September, provision of remote learning is statutory. Following the announcement of the current lock down the DFE also changed the requirement for remote learning and schools now need to provide an average of: 3 hours per day for pupils in key stage 1; 4 hours per day in key stage 2 and 5 hours per day in secondary and post 16. Schools also need to set assignments so that pupils have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects and:
  - 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 Remote learning does not have to be digital and in fact many of our schools have a more blended approach and in some schools the offer is entirely paper based. However, due to the increasing reliance on digital devices and access to wifi, there is an increasing focus on ensuring as many children as possible have access to a digital device and internet connection during this period of lockdown.

6.3 Schools have received the following laptops/equipment from the DfE.

In the Summer term:

- All schools received laptops to support all children subject to a child protection plan and laptops to support children classed as Child in Need in Years 3 and above.
- High schools received laptops to support disadvantaged Year 10 pupils (2019/20 cohort). This number varied according to their number of pupil premium students.
- High schools received a small number WiFi dongles from the DfE to support pupils. These dongles are still providing connectivity.

In the Autumn Term:

- Schools could draw down additional laptops to support pupils working from home when isolating after a positive Covid case in the school. Some schools are yet to claim these laptops.

January 2021:

- Schools can apply on behalf of families to increase the mobile data with their mobile provider through a DfE scheme. This information has been distributed to schools.
- Schools are now able to claim their full allocation of laptops from the DfE if they have not already accessed them.
- X box and Playstation games consoles can be used to access Google classroom and Microsoft teams and this has been promoted to schools.

6.4 The Local Authority also asked schools to complete a quick audit on access to devices and wifi. This has been completed by 82 schools and settings across the city. It was aimed at primary but some secondary and special schools have completed it too.

This audit has shown that there is still a significant shortfall in devices/access to wifi in some schools despite a significant number of laptops being allocated to schools through the DfE and schools using their own resources to also provide devices. The Local Authority is working with GMCA and businesses to look at whether more devices can be made available and matching offers of help to schools where there are specific gaps.

## **7.0 Safeguarding**

- 7.1 Since the partial closure of schools, the Safeguarding in Education team has continued to provide information, guidance and support across the education sector. Regular newsletters, updates and weekly online drop-in sessions have enabled school staff to be assured in carrying out their safeguarding duties. Designated safeguarding lead training has moved online too, in order that DSLs remain current in their training.
- 7.2 During the first national lockdown, schools were advised to create an appendix to their school safeguarding policy to reflect new arrangements. A model Manchester policy was created by the Safeguarding team and this has now been adapted to reflect the current arrangements during lockdown, including, for example, the different expectations for remote learning and the increased cohorts of 'vulnerable' children to be encouraged to attend their setting. Furthermore, a safeguarding prompts checklist has also been shared with all settings to support them in ensuring they have kept appropriate safeguarding arrangements in place at this time.
- 7.3 School clusters, were established in October 2020 in each ward of the city, building peer support for schools with termly networks and attendance from neighbourhoods, children's social care, attendance, safeguarding, early help, school nursing and others, as requested. In February the next cluster meetings will take place with a focus on the safe and together model. This is in response to the concerns of increased domestic abuse during lockdown and to support schools in their support for families following operation encompass notifications.
- 7.4 Support for parents has been provided in the form of webinars delivered by One Education's education psychology team advising how to help their children with remote learning. This has been promoted through the parent carer forum and has had a really good uptake.

## **8.0 Mental Health and Wellbeing**

- 8.1 The Wellbeing for Education DFE grant established in August 2020 has allowed us to commission Healthy Schools to deliver training and support to all of our schools and colleges across the city, including alternative provision and the independent sector, to support all our children and young people at this time. The initial phase of training is almost complete. Mental Health leads in almost every setting have now attended training to support children with anxiety, bereavement, stress and trauma support. The training includes a focus on staff and parent wellbeing and it has been fantastic to see our schools offer sessions for families already. The next phase of the training will continue to support settings with bespoke guidance for delivering their whole school support. Through the commission healthy schools has also provided materials for settings to use as they rollout the mental health whole school approach. In the last two weeks 252 professionals from schools across the city have continued with the training, even whilst managing the remote learning

offer. On 3 February 2021 there will be a headteacher wellbeing session delivered by healthy schools.

## **9.0 Free School Meals during term time**

9.1 Schools normally receive funding for Free School Meals (FSM) to provide children with a meal for the term time period and are required to make provision for children on benefits related free school meals when they are not in school due to COVID19. During the first few weeks of term, schools were provided with guidance from the DFE that set out expectations and standards for the provision of food to children not in school. The DFE also agreed to fund schools to support them with these arrangements. In addition, with effect from 18th January 2020 schools have been able to access a national voucher scheme.

## **10.0 COVID winter grant – hardship fund and free school meals**

10.1 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.

10.2 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.

10.3 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. Work is currently underway to order and distribute supermarket vouchers to schools for children to cover February half term week. Unlike over Christmas, many more schools have now set up their own systems for providing support for children on free school meals during term time and so more schools have opted to continue to use this system over half term and will be reimbursed for this by the Local Authority.

In addition, to provision for meals over the school holidays, the Local Authority has allocated funding from this grant to establish a hardship grant for families who are struggling over winter. This process allows a discretionary payment to be made for a child where there are concerns identified that a family is experiencing hardship. This scheme has now been shared with schools, settings and colleges.

## **11.0 Children and young people's views about COVID**

11.1 Using a variety of sources of information which captures our engagement with children and young people including personal education plans, review meetings etc as well as some direct engagement activities such as surveys and focus groups, we have collated some of the main things that children and young people are telling us about COVID. This information was captured before the current lockdown period and has come from different cohorts of children and young people including Young Carers, young people with special educational needs /disability, young people working with services such as Early Help, Alonzi House or Youth Justice, our children and young people and care leavers.

11.2 Children and young people have told us that they are worried about the following things:

### **Health and wellbeing**

- their mental health
- loss of confidence and worried about 'going back to normal'
- missing friends
- lonely and isolated
- missing routine
- missing hugs
- their physical health deteriorating as lack motivation to exercise
- health of their family members and those they care for
- worrying about parents' welfare and health
- whether they can still have contact with parents (where they do not live with them)

### **Future and aspirations**

- interruption to their education
- falling behind at school
- worry about not sitting exams and therefore grades will not reflect true ability
- transition to next destination
- opportunities available in the future
- uncertainty

### **Communication**

- blurring of home and school through remote learning
- often feel overloaded or bombarded with information
- confusing media and information – what to believe
- changing guidance is confusing

## **Finances**

- household income
- redundancy

11.3 There were also positive outcomes mentioned by children and young people. These were mentioned by a lot of children and particularly younger children and included:

- Enjoying online activities – a whole range of activities were referred to
- Enjoying online learning and having a laptop
- Stronger relationships with families and those caring for them at home
- Being in school especially being in a smaller group
- More time to relax and play at home

## **12.0 Conclusion**

12.1 There continue to be many unknowns for our children and young people and education leaders. Schools and settings are reporting higher levels of anxiety among children and staff during this period of lockdown. It is still not clear when schools or colleges will be allowed to reopen to all of their children and young people and how this will be organised. There continues to be uncertainty about what will replace examinations this summer for year 11s and year 13 and we are awaiting the outcomes of a recent consultation on this. Education leaders have also expressed concern about how tight the timescales will now be for whatever is put in place as an alternative to exams if young people are not returning to school until March. There are of course also huge concerns about the about the learning that our children and young people are missing while they are not in school, added to that which was lost last year in the summer term. This is in addition to the other benefits of being in school or college for children and young people.

12.2 The Local Authority has continued to provide support to our schools and settings with regular communication, information, virtual meetings and individual advice and support to school and setting leaders when required. We continue to hear the most positive stories as well about our children and young people and their response and resilience at this time and also how innovative and flexible our schools and settings are being in order to ensure our children and young people are safe, well and able to learn at home or at school.

## **13.0 Recommendations**

13.1 The committee is asked to recognise the challenges faced by school and setting leaders at this time and discuss the measures being taken by schools and colleges to ensure children and young people are safe, able to learn at home and attending schools where this is appropriate. The committee are asked to comment on what children and young people have told us about the impact of COVID. The committee is also asked to comment on the support provided by the Local Authority for schools and settings.