

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee – 10 March 2021

Subject: Wider opening of schools and colleges

Report of: Director of Education

Summary

This report provides a further update on the impact of COVID on schools and settings in the City. Our schools and colleges are looking forward to welcoming back all of their children and young people and this report focuses on the wider reopening of school and colleges from 8th March 2021 which was announced by the Prime Minister on 21st February 2021. The report gives a brief outline of the Government guidance in relation to wider opening and support for education recovery; information on how this is being implemented by schools and colleges and the support provided by the Local Authority.

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 return to school and learn. The committee are asked to comment on the report and support being provided and to also encourage wherever possible school attendance and compliance with the COVID secure measures which schools and colleges have put in place including access to lateral flow testing for secondary school and college students.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

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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Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	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 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):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

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 was 94%, if absence related to isolation as a result of COVID-19 is discounted. This was very positive and much higher than initially anticipated.
- 1.2 On 4th January 2021 the Government announced with immediate effect that 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. During this half term period school attendance has averaged 13.76% each week albeit with significant variations across school phases and much higher in some areas of the city. This has increased in more recent weeks and was 17.6% last week with 44.3% of children with EHCPs and 54% known to social care attending school.
- 1.3 On 22nd February the Government announced that schools and colleges would start to reopen to all pupils with effect from 8th March. Detailed guidance to support schools and colleges with wider reopening was released the next day. Schools have had just under 2 weeks to implement this guidance and prepare for the return of all of their pupils. Primary schools will be open for all pupils from 8th March. Secondary schools and Colleges are able to do a staggered start to enable their students to access 3 lateral flow tests on a school or college site. However, all students should return from 15th March, even though they will not have had all 3 tests by then, as long as their first test was negative. After 3 lateral flow tests on site, secondary school and college students will be required to complete 2 lateral flow tests at home each week and these will be distributed through schools and colleges. Early years settings will continue to be open for all children as they have throughout the period of national restrictions.
- 1.4 Our schools and colleges are now looking forward to having all of their children and young people back on site to learn and meet with their teachers and peers. This paper summarises the most recent Government guidance to support this wider reopening of schools and colleges and how this is being implemented by schools and colleges to ensure that all children and young people can return to on site education. The report outlines the support that continues to be provided to our schools and colleges.

2.0 Government Guidance

- 2.1 Detailed government guidance on the wider reopening of schools was issued on 23rd February following the Prime Minister's announcement that schools and colleges would reopen from 8th March 2021. Once schools have reopened attendance will become mandatory; for primary schools this is from 8th March. Secondary schools and colleges have more flexibility and can stagger a return to allow for testing to take place on site. However, all secondary pupils are

expected to return to school the week beginning 15th March when attendance is mandatory. The guidance provided by the DFE is mostly similar to that which was provided when schools reopened in the Autumn term and sets out a system of controls that should be in place in schools and settings to reduce the risk of transmission.

2.2 There are some key changes to the guidance which are outlined below:

- **Use of face coverings**

2.3 The use of face coverings has been strengthened across all sectors and recommended in particular where a 2 metre social distance cannot be maintained. In primary schools and early years settings, this means that face covering are now recommended for adults in communal areas unless a social distancing can be maintained and may be used in worn by adults in classrooms too. However, they are not required for children in early years or primary phases. The main change in the new guidance is that face coverings are now recommended in classrooms and teaching spaces for both adults and students in secondary schools and colleges unless social distance can be maintained. This does not apply in circumstances where a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise eg in PE lesson and does not apply when students are outside.

2.4 Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings and it is also not mandatory; no pupil should be denied education because they are not wearing a face covering.

2.5 These measures will be in place until Easter when they will be reviewed.

- **Move to home testing for all staff and secondary/college students and testing kits available to parents/carers of school age children**

2.6 The changes are that staff in Early Years settings can now access twice weekly home testing and childminders can access community testing. Primary school staff are to continue with twice weekly testing at home. Secondary and college students are to access 3 lateral flow tests on the school or college site to ensure that they are able to properly administer the tests. Thereafter young people are to test themselves twice a week at home using tests which will be provided through their school or college. However, schools and college are to retain a scaled down testing centre on site for any students who cannot test at home.

2.7 Staff in secondary schools and colleges are to test twice weekly at home.

2.8 Most recently, the Government have announced that home testing kits will be made available to parents/carers of school age children which can be used at home. These kits will be available for parents/carers to collect initially at local PCR testing sites at dedicated times.

- **Clinically extremely vulnerable pupils and staff should continue to stay at home.**

2.9 Children and young people who continue to be unable to attend school because they are clinically extremely vulnerable should be provided with remote education.

- **Wrap around provision (before and after school clubs) can return.**

2.10 From 8th March, before and after school clubs can return where this provision is necessary to support parents/carers to work, attend education and access medical care and where this is part of the pupil's wider education. All providers must follow government guidance and have in place protective measures.

3.0 Education recovery

3.1 In addition to this guidance the government have also announced further elements of a recovery support package so that children and young people can access lost learning and development due to the pandemic. This includes expansion of one to one and small group tuition; support for disadvantaged children in the early years and summer provision. There will also be additional one off recovery premium for primary and secondary schools to use to support disadvantaged pupils. The average primary school will receive around £6,000 extra and an average secondary an extra £22,000.

3.2 The government has also appointed an Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins to look at a longer term education recovery strategy.

4.0 Local Implementation of guidance

- **Risk Assessments**

4.1 Schools and colleges have been sent an updated risk assessment template to reflect the changes in the updated guidance. All settings are required to review and update their existing risk assessments ready for wider reopening. Officers from the Local Authority Health and Safety team and Education have continued to be available to provide support and advice with this. The Local Authority have sampled 10% of risk assessments from maintained schools as part of our assurance arrangements.

- **Attendance**

4.2 Our schools and colleges are looking forward to having children and young people back on site. The aim is that we return as quickly as possible to the attendance levels we had in September and then focus on encouraging the remaining children to also return to school. To support this we have set up an attendance helpline and inbox for questions which can be accessed by parents/carers who are worried about children returning to school and also school staff and other professionals wanting advice. The team will also be able to access any additional support and advice for parents or children/young

people who are highly anxious about returning to school. The attendance team are continuing to provide attendance clinics for schools and will attend school cluster meetings in order to support the return of pupils.

- 4.3 All front line staff across Children and Education services have been asked to support families to support their children returning to school. Education officers are also working with the communications team to send out messages via social media to promote the wider opening of schools. All schools and colleges have received a letter from the Director of Public Health to distribute to parents/carers encouraging them to send their children to school. The letter also emphasises the need for everyone to comply with the controls that schools have in place, including participating in lateral flow testing.

- **Lateral Flow testing**

- 4.4 Many of our secondary schools and colleges have started to bring students in the week beginning 1st March to start lateral flow testing on site. This has been allowed by the DFE in order to ensure that all pupils have accessed testing before 15th March. Schools and colleges have developed separate risk assessments for this and for maintained secondary schools, these have been shared with the health and safety team. Schools have also been able to access support and advice if they have needed it, in order to set up their testing sites. This has included an offer of a visit to one of the Local Authority testing sites and a webinar with Public health and the testing team.

- **Health and wellbeing**

- 4.5 Schools and colleges have been sent communications reminding them of the offer of support with mental health and wellbeing. This is delivered through M Thrive and includes mental health practitioners in schools, educational psychology, training for school staff from the healthy school team and a directory of services and support available across the City.
- 4.6 All school who are members of the Manchester Schools Alliance (MSA) continue to have access to the Employee assistance scheme. Promoting the wellbeing of staff and school leaders is also an area of focus for the MSA and will also be raised again with governors at Local Authority briefings.

- **Communication**

- 4.7 The Local Authority has continued to provide regular bulletins and briefings for school, college and setting staff. All settings have a designated senior officer as a main point of contact, to communicate with if they have any concerns or issues, or need to access wider Council services or advice. As common issues, questions or themes arise, the responses are shared back with all of the education community through a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents. These are also discussed and shared with Trade Unions.

5.0 Longer term Education Recovery

- 5.1 The impact of a second period of time out of school due to national restrictions for the majority of our children and young people, in addition to a disrupted Autumn term for many children due to cases of infection in the City, will have had a significant impact on their education. The impact will not only be on missed elements of the taught curriculum but also on wellbeing and physical health and the development of other skills such team work, communication, making friends and managing friendships etc. It is also recognised nationally that the impact will likely to be greatest on those children who are disadvantaged and the City has higher than national levels of disadvantaged children so this impact will be significant across the majority of our schools.
- 5.2 It is therefore important that the City works with its education leaders across the sector and other partners to develop a long term plan to address the impact of the pandemic on our children and young people's education.
- 5.3 This plan will need to take a holistic approach to education; build on what we already know works in the City; allow school leaders the flexibility to innovate and develop solutions that will work for their communities and it should not just be about schools but also how other agencies, community assets and services are able to support this plan. Furthermore, schools and services need to be ready to respond quickly to any new and emerging consequences of missed education on children and young people that we have not yet anticipated.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 Our schools and colleges are ready to implement the guidance and welcome back their children and young people so that they once again interact and learn with their friends, peers, teachers and other school staff. Our parents/carers and school staff have done an incredible job of ensuring children and young people continue to learn at home during this period but it is important for children and young people to be able to return to school/college and access all of the wider benefits that this brings. It is also essential that all of our front line services and officers support schools and colleges by ensuring that children and young people are confident about returning to school or college and encourage them to contact the school/college or our attendance helpline if they do have any concerns. It is also important that families continue to comply with key controls in place to reduce the risk of infection, both within the community and at school or college, and consent to and support testing arrangements that are in place, which will also help to reduce infection rates.
- 6.2 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.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 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 return to school and learn. The committee are asked to comment on the report and

support being provided and to also encourage wherever possible school attendance and compliance with the COVID secure measures which school and colleges have put in place, including access to lateral flow testing for secondary school and college students.