

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

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

**Subject:** Update on COVID19 and the impact on the opening of schools and colleges

**Report of:** Director of Education

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### **Summary**

This report is one of a series of scrutiny reports on the impact and consequence management of COVID 19 on children and their families. This report provides an update on the return of children and young people to education following the summer break and the arrangements in place in schools and colleges to report and manage COVID19. The report has a particular focus on the work over the summer to ensure that young people in year 11 had a destination for September and ongoing work to reduce the numbers of young people in the City not in education employment or training (NEET).

### **Recommendations**

Committee is asked to discuss the report, provide comment on the analysis provided within the report.

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**Wards Affected:** All

<b>Environmental Impact Assessment</b> - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
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<b>Our Manchester Strategy outcomes</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS</b>
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities.	Effective Children and Education Services are critical to ensuring our children are afforded opportunities and supported to connect and contribute to the city's sustainability and growth.
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city's economic success.	Ensuring children and young people are supported and afforded the opportunity to access and achieve in the City; empowered and supported by the delivery of a strong and cohesive system that works for all children.

A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities.	Improving education and social care services that are connected to the wider partnership build the resilience of children and families needed to achieve their potential and be integrated into their communities.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work.	Improving outcomes for the children and families across the City, helps build and develop whole communities and increases the liability of the City
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth.	Successful services support successful families who are able to deliver continuing growth in the City

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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.

Since July 2020 the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee has received a report in respect of Covid19, its impact and the Directorate response.

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Since 6<sup>th</sup> September, our schools and settings are once again fully open for all of their children and young people and for school age children attendance is mandatory. Overall, both staff and children and young people have been reporting how pleased they are to be back in school or college operating without the restrictions which were in place previously such as face masks and social distancing. School and college leaders are reporting that children and young people have settled in well, are eager to learn and are enjoying being able mix with other groups. Some schools have decided to keep in place a few of the measures which benefitted the children over the last year. These include for example one way systems around the school and staggered dining.

1.2 Schools and colleges have continued to receive regular communications from the Local Authority to support with planning and implementing changes to guidance and more recently regarding the vaccinations programme. This includes:

- Revised health and safety documents which included an outbreak management plan proforma;
- Revised Manchester test and trace (MTAT) guidance which outlines how to manage a positive case in the setting and advice on outbreak management;
- Redesigned online positive case reporting form to be used for schools to report into MTAT and allow monitoring of potential outbreaks and facilitate support /collect local data for infection in schools. The form is now easier to navigate and complete and allows for weekly reporting if preferred;
- Summarised support document for settings outlining changes to restrictions and the support schools will continue to receive from local health and education teams, and what the responsibilities are for settings in line with the contingency framework, online reporting and keeping classes open etc;
- A range of communication materials which can be shared with parents/carers and children/young people.

## **2.0 Main changes**

2.1 There are three key changes in schools from the autumn term:

1. Keeping pupils in a year group or classroom bubbles to reduce mixing is no longer required.
2. Close contacts will be identified via NHS Test and Trace, rather than the school (although they may seek information from the school).
3. Face coverings are no longer mandatory for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas. However, face coverings are still expected and recommended for young people aged 11 and over (unless exempt) on public transport.

Every school, college and childcare setting has completed an extensive risk assessment and put in place infection control measures to reduce the risk to everyone. These measures include good hygiene and ventilation. They also have outbreak management plans describing what they would do if children or staff test positive for coronavirus, or how they would operate if they were

advised to reintroduce any additional measures to help stop the spread of the virus. The Manchester Public Health and Manchester Test and Trace teams will continue to support schools to manage situations where there is an outbreak of positive cases.

## **2.2 Changes to self-isolation rules**

Under the new national arrangements, anyone who has been identified as a close contact of a positive case of Covid-19, will no longer have to self-isolate. This change applies to children who are not displaying symptoms and adults who have been fully vaccinated (14 days after their second jab) and are also not displaying any symptoms. Instead, they will be advised to take a PCR test as soon as possible and anyone who tests positive will still need to self-isolate regardless of their vaccination status or age.

It continues to be important that any children and adults displaying symptoms however mild do not attend school.

## **2.3 Asymptomatic Testing**

Secondary schools and colleges were required to carry out two lateral flow device tests for every pupil in year 7 and above, 3 to 5 days apart, on their return in the autumn term. Secondary aged pupils and college students are then requested to continue to test at home twice a week.

Communications continue to be shared with schools and parents/carers to encourage regular testing at home and the reporting of results.

## **2.4 Vaccinations**

Vaccinations have been offered for all young people post 16 since mid August. These have been promoted through Colleges and 6<sup>th</sup> forms when young people have been enrolling for their courses. More than 56% of 16 and 17-year olds have now received a first dose of the vaccine.

In September, the UK's Chief Medical Officers announced that all 12-15 year olds will be offered a first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (commonly known just as the Pfizer vaccine) as the next phase of the national COVID-19 vaccination programme. In Manchester, this cohort is approximately 33,000 children who will all be offered a vaccine.

As part of this programme, vaccinations will be delivered where possible at the school by Manchester Local Care Organisation (MLCO) via their NHS School Health Immunisation Service. This is the NHS team who deliver a range of other vaccinations in the city's schools as part of their regular work. They will be supported by the school nursing service.

## **3.0 Positive cases**

The table below shows the number of positive cases throughout June/July and the number of cases reported by schools and settings in the first 2 weeks of this term.

The last few weeks of July saw cases peak at 484 positive children with 10,552 new children in a week being asked to self-isolate as an identified contact. These numbers began to reduce in the last week or so before summer holidays. As the Autumn term begins, the number of reported cases is rising each week. However, currently the number of positive cases is lower than many other local authorities nationally and across Greater Manchester. Furthermore, with the change in restrictions around isolation, figures for isolating contacts have substantially reduced.

During this 4-week period there have been outbreak control meetings in 4 schools. Overall observations are that our headteachers are making good decisions and managing cases well in the settings.

<b>SUMMER TERM 2</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Positive Children</b>	<b>Positive Adults</b>	<b>Isolating Children</b>	<b>Isolating Adults</b>
11/6/2021	175	146	29	1394	105
18/6/21	257	214	43	5722	306
25/6/21	363	297	66	7817	468
2/7/2021	560	484	76	10,552	656
9/7/2021	424	367	57	5627	420
16/7/21	413	339	74	7028	504
23/7/21	213	166	47	4417	315
<b>TOTALS ST2</b>	<b>2405</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>42557</b>	<b>2774</b>
<b>AUTUMN TERM 1</b>					
10/9/2021	124	89	35	-	63
17/9/21	205	156	49	-	108
24/9/21	257	194	63	-	142
1/10/21	353	278	75	-	105

#### 4.0 School Attendance

4.1 From November 2020 to the end of the 2020/21 academic year, schools in Manchester were asked to directly notify Manchester Test & Trace (MTAT) of any reported cases in their children or staff population. The completion of this online notification form fed into a comprehensive package of contact tracing, outbreak management and clinical-level support. Levels of engagement with this system were high, with 92% of primary schools and 91% of secondary schools in the city reporting cases via the online form.

The MTAT team are currently analysing the data reported by schools for this period and can present their full findings to a future committee meeting. In summary early analysis suggests that

- Manchester schools notified MTAT of a total of 3,226 reported COVID-19 **cases** in children during the academic year. By assuming they all isolated for

ten days and did not attend school for a minimum of five days, this accounts to 16,130 days, or 96,780 missed hours of face-to-face learning time.

- Manchester schools notified MTAT of a total of 61,604 children who were identified as **contacts** of a reported case in their setting and were therefore required to self-isolate. By assuming they all isolated for ten days and did not attend school for a minimum of five days, this accounts to 308,020 days, or 1,848,120 missed hours of face-to-face learning time.

In total 1,944,900 face to face school hours or 324,150 days were lost in Manchester schools during the last academic year, due to pupils reported as a COVID-19 case or isolating due to being identified as a close contact (in the school setting). These figures assume:

- School day is six hours for all
- They isolated for five days from school (this is a pragmatic assumption, considering that some may have started their ten-day isolation period on a Saturday).

4.2 Early indications for this academic year, are that school attendance has been positive. Reports from the first 2 weeks of term show that attendance is at 95% which is almost at pre pandemic levels. This is 95.5% for primary; 94.90 for secondary and 89.06% special. The attendance team are continuing to work with schools to offer advice and support on attendance issues and particularly supporting with children who have not yet returned to school.

## 5.0 Post 16 and NEET during pandemic

5.1 The table below shows the NEET and Unknown data for the last four years. Despite the impact of covid on the lives of young people we have not seen a spike in NEET and unknown. This is the same picture both across GM and nationally. Although the data presents a static picture it is worth noting the increase in the size of the cohort of 16 / 17 year olds that we have a statutory duty to track.

5.2

Citywide Cohort (Academic Age 16-17)	July 2017		July 2018		July 2019		July 2020		July 2021	
	Actual	%								
<b>Cohort Total</b>	10936		10724		10888		11411		12036	
<b>In Learning</b>	9956	91.1%	9663	90.2%	9954	91.5%	10362	90.8%	10961	91.1%
<b>NEET</b>	354	3.2%	473	4.4%	396	3.6%	502	4.4%	484	4.0%
<b>Not Known</b>	482	4.4%	322	3.0%	328	3.0%	407	3.6%	408	3.4%
<b>Combined NEET &amp; Not Known</b>	836	7.6%	795	7.4%	724	6.7%	909	8.0%	892	7.4%

### **5.3 Risk of NEET (RONI)**

In March 2019, secondary schools were asked to verify their lists of Year 11 students who were either medium or high risk of becoming NEET using the Risk of NEET Indicator Tool (RONI). From a total cohort of 5,551 Year 11s, 550 (10%) were verified as being medium-risk and 450 (8.5%) verified as being high-risk of becoming NEET. As a result, we saw a 84% of our high-risk cohort enrolled into a post-16 destination in September 2020 which was a significant increase when compared to the previous year.

We repeated the same process last academic year (2020/21). The numbers of RONI students identified increased to 20% of the year 11 cohort, 605 (10.4%) were identified as medium risk and 560 (9.6%) were verified as high-risk. This increase may have been associated with schools' concerns about the impact of covid on their year 11 students.

During the summer term, schools were asked to ensure that all RONI students had a post-16 destination, transition plans were in place for the high-risk students, relevant information was shared with post 16 providers and referrals made to Career Connect.

In May 2021, the numbers of students with a secure Post 16 destination rose from 43% (reported the previous year) to 65%. There was also a significant increase in the numbers of school referrals to Career Connect of high-risk RONI students. These two pieces of evidence indicate the effort and concern schools displayed to do their very best in supporting their RONI students to make a successful transition to post 16.

### **5.4 Transition**

During the first lockdown period we worked closely with schools and the post-16 sector to establish what a good transition offer looks like for all students. This informed the Year 11 Transition Guide and Toolkit that was sent to schools at the start of the last academic year with a focus on the needs of the 2021 school leavers who had already experienced a significant loss of education, including careers and visits to post 16 providers due to Covid. The transition guide and tool kit included a detailed road map of what school staff needed to do in each half term, a directory of wider services that could support them and information referral forms.

MCC Education Teams supporting vulnerable cohorts including SEND, Virtual School, Attendance, Elective Home Education team and Young Carers worked closely with the school workforce to promote and encourage the adoption of a whole school approach to transition. This included working closely with other teams across Children Services, including Early Help Teams, Children's Social Care, Youth Justice, Care Leavers Service, Youth Strategy Team to raise awareness of which young people they are working with are at risk of becoming NEET, options available for them, support with tracking and also reducing the number of young people whose destination is 'unknown'.

The Manchester College Transition Team also worked closely with high schools, including the Secondary PRU and Endeavour special schools to support learners with applications, taster/welcome activities, results day and enrolment.

Some additional funding was also secured to pilot Transition Mentors in 5 secondary schools with high numbers of RONI students. The mentors were pastoral support staff who had already established a relationship with the identified cohort. Their role was to work throughout the summer break and this autumn term to provide transitional support to students and their families. The evaluation of this pilot is underway, and the early signs are very promising. If successful, this will be shared with all high schools to encourage them to invest in this role.

## **5.5 Bridging Provision**

The data tells us that although we increased the numbers of RONI young people transitioning to a post-16 destination of their choice there are still significant challenges around retention and progression of our high-risk students. This is particularly an issue for students attending our Secondary PRU and specialist SEMH schools and this was highlighted during covid due to the amount of time missed from education and preparation for transition.

The Manchester College, MSPRU (Manchester secondary PRU), specialist SEMH school and the Virtual School had a series of meetings to explore what they can do this year to design and deliver provision that will bridge years 11 – 12 for some of our most vulnerable learners. This resulted in strengthening partnership working to support students through transition and procuring more bespoke provision for those students with EHC plans.

Funding was also made available for the second year running for AP (alternative provision providers) to deliver extra support to those students who had disengaged or those who would benefit from additional support to help and motivate them to re-engage and plan for their future, providers used this in a variety of ways, including summer activities, mentoring and support to transition.

## **6.0 NEET to EET (Employment & Training)**

### **6.1 National Initiatives and additional funding**

The Work and Skills Team are working with members of the Education Team, colleges and training providers to make sure that NEET young people are made aware and supported to access the youth employment initiatives that have emerged since the start of the pandemic. These include Kickstart, traineeships and apprenticeships. However, most of our NEET cohort are not eligible to apply for a Kickstart placement as they are not in receipt of Universal Credit and many are not ready for an apprenticeship.

Several proposals have now been submitted to the DWP for the creation of Youth Hubs in different parts of the City, by different groups of partners led by the Youth Zones, the Forum Trust in Wythenshawe and the Princes Trust. NEET

young people 16–24 will be signposted to these hubs which will be jointly staffed by local organisations and newly appointed DWP Youth Coaches.

## **6.2 Career Connect**

MCC commissions Career Connect to deliver the NEET prevention and NEET re-engagement service. Approximately half of the team are co-located with services that have high numbers of high-risk RONI students and or NEET young people including the MSPRU, Specialist SEMH Schools, the Virtual school and Care Leavers Service and the Youth Justice Team. The other half are divided into the three areas across the City working closely with The Manchester College and the Early Help Hubs. Since the start of the pandemic the teams have had to adopt a flexible approach, providing mainly online support and social media to track young people. They have worked hard to remain contact with their caseloads, have strengthened their partnerships with other agencies and built capacity in others to work more effectively with NEET young people. They have also learnt a great deal about how to work with parents and carers when young people refuse to engage online or by phone.

Every attempt has been made to ensure we inform and direct the two GM NEET contracts - ESF NEET delivered by the Growth Company and the Future Workforce delivered by the Princes Trust to meet the priorities of the City, respond to unmet need and to compliment the Career Connect Contract. This work is ongoing.

## **6.3 Pre-employment Opportunities and Progression**

Before the start of the pandemic the Work and Skills Team had commissioned GMCVO to remodel the website they had developed through the Hidden Talent Programme, providing intensive support to long term NEET young people. The website provided a one-stop shop for all opportunities that NEET young people could be matched to. They re-modelled the 'M-EET Your Match' website and it now lists all the pre-employment opportunities currently available across Manchester and in neighbouring local authorities. The website went live in December 2020 and currently has 63 opportunities listed. The information worker who manages the site works with the provider and Career Connect before the opportunity comes to an end to check that all young people are progressing into an EET destination.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have established a network of partner organisations who are delivering NEET interventions/programmes to Manchester young people. We have over 35 organisations on the mailing list and a regular attendance of 20 – 25 partners at every meeting. The focus of the network is to look at ways to reduce the NEET churn and to improve the progression routes into employment. With the help of Work and Skills and Ed Salmon we are helping them to strengthen their links with employers so that more young people get the exposure and training they need to become job ready and to secure a job opportunity.

We are also encouraging our NEET partners to work with the Skills for Life initiative to create opportunities for young people to build and develop skills that will help prepare them for their futures.

#### **6.4 Post 16 providers**

The main providers from the Post 16 Sector met regularly throughout the pandemic to share experiences and ideas. They worked tirelessly to deliver a high-quality remote learning offer to their students, provide support for their vulnerable students and follow government guidance on testing and more recently support the roll out of vaccinations.

They put together a joint communication on the Post 16 offer that went to all Year 11s on results day. There is clear evidence that the pandemic has strengthened partnership working across the sector and a commitment to continue to work together.

#### **7.0 Conclusion**

- 7.1 Once again it has been a very busy start to the new school year with a significant amount of new guidance and changes to implement in our schools and settings including the roll out of vaccines to 12 to 15 year olds.

Early signs are that the majority of staff and children and young people welcome the return to usual arrangements and when there are infections in schools or settings this is being well managed. Schools and settings are continuing to be supported by Education officers and Manchester test and trace team and are reporting positive cases to the team so that these can be monitored and outbreak meetings arranged when appropriate.

- 7.2 There has been extensive work over the summer term and summer break to ensure that young people in year 11 were supported to make a good transition to a post 16 destination. This has included targeted work with those young people identified as being at risk of NEET. To date, it does seem that our NEET figures for young people have not been adversely impacted by the pandemic. There are a number of projects in place to ensure that this continues to be that case and that our most vulnerable young people are supported to reach a positive destination.