

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 9 February 2022

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

**Report of:** Assistant 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 Christmas break and the arrangements in place in schools and colleges to report and manage COVID19. The report has a particular focus on the bespoke offer to increase uptake of the vaccine in children and young people aged 12 to 15 and address inequalities therefore reducing disruption to children's education and learning.

School attendance continues to be positive, despite the impact of the Omicron variant and is subject to regular monitoring and intervention.

## **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

Our 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.	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 their children and young people and for school age children attendance is mandatory.
- 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:
  - COVID Broadcasts to leaders reiterating messages around the support in place to support schools;
  - Revised Manchester Test and Trace (MTAT) online positive case reporting form to be used for schools to report into MTAT and allow monitoring of potential outbreaks/facilitate support /collect local data for infection in schools. This now incorporates reporting positive LFD tests in line with changes to government guidance;
  - Updated positive case management guidance from GM and MTAT including template letters for parents and carers;
  - A free direct phone line to MTAT for schools to report concerns about cases within their setting and receive advice around infection control/case numbers etc from clinically qualified staff;
  - A range of communication materials which can be shared with parents/carers and children/young people.

## **2.0 Main changes January 2022**

There were three key changes for schools from 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022:

1. Secondary pupils are no longer required to wear face coverings in classrooms.
2. Secondary pupils continue to be required to wear face coverings in communal areas in schools.

However, In Manchester, school leaders have been encouraged to consider the respective school circumstances and apply appropriate measures such as mask wearing in communal areas, promoting effective hygiene measures and improving ventilation and social distancing etc, where the context warrants it. In response to increased infection rates the Director of Public Health has recommended that schools, settings and colleges should continue to wear masks in communal settings in schools, which is the approach recommended in other Greater Manchester local authorities. We've had positive feedback on this position from many education leaders particularly in settings which are continuing to experience high rates of infection.

## **3.0 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.

As young people aged 12 to 15 years are now being advised to have a second dose of vaccine, we are working with colleagues in MLCO to deliver the roll out of a vaccination programme across schools which will enable young people to access a first vaccine if they have not had one, as well as providing a second dose for eligible pupils. The aim of the programme is to increase overall uptake of the vaccine in this cohort by developing a bespoke plan with each school which will specifically address the needs of their community. The relevant school leaders have now received information packs and comms to encourage engagement and take up, and direct contact is being made with leaders to begin to plan for delivery on site incorporating bespoke approaches where needed (see following presentation).

#### 4.0 Positive cases

The table below shows the number of positive cases in Manchester schools from November through to January 2022.

The last few weeks of December saw cases peak with 442 positive children. Numbers have increased on return in January with the spread of the Omicron variant. However, despite this, previous changes to isolation rules which also applied to those under 18 continue to keep the numbers of isolating contacts much lower. This has had a positive impact on children being able to receive face to face Education, for example in week ending 7 July 2021, 10,552 children were absent/isolating as a contact of a positive case.

Our NHS colleagues continue to support schools, where needed, to manage cases within their settings, and observations are that our headteachers are making good decisions and managing cases well. There has been no school closures since schools opened in January and very few instances of classes unable to attend school due to teacher absence.

<b>AUTUMN TERM 2</b>	<b>TOTAL CASES</b>	<b>CHILDREN</b>	<b>ADULTS</b>	<b>ISOLATING CONTACTS</b>
5/11/2021	339	288	51	101
12/11/2021	403	325	78	23
19/11/21	392	317	75	88
26/11/21	493	396	97	25
3/12/2021	376	292	84	34
10/12/2021	487	378	109	49
17/12/21	623	442	181	306

<b>SPRING TERM 1</b>	<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>CHILDREN</b>	<b>ADULTS</b>	<b>PRIMARY</b>	<b>SECONDARY</b>	<b>ISOLATING CONTACTS</b>
7/1/2022	717	479	238	389	219	62
14/1/22	1715	1247	468	1078	346	98
21/1/22	2228	1750	478	1557	274	163

## 5.0 School Attendance

Early indications for this academic year, are that school attendance has been positive. Reports from the Autumn Term (September to Christmas break) show that attendance was 94.15% which is almost at pre pandemic levels (full attendance information for Autumn Term can be seen below).

The attendance team are continuing to work with schools to offer advice and support to increase pupil attendance.

<b>Setting</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Primary	94.92%
Secondary	93.82%
Special	84.06%
All	94.15%

Schools returned from the Christmas break during the week commencing 3<sup>rd</sup> January, with secondary schools being allowed a staggered start to enable on-site testing of pupils. The table below shows school attendance for the first three weeks of term (3<sup>rd</sup> January – 24<sup>th</sup> January). The current number of pupils currently testing positive for Covid-19 is impacting on attendance, however, as isolation times and actual cases reduce, we expect this attendance to improve; this is currently subject to weekly monitoring by sector/setting.

<b>Setting</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Primary	92.27%
Secondary	91.24%
Special	79.46%
All	91.45%

## 6.0 Conclusion

It has been a difficult start to the new school term for the majority of our schools and settings because of high infection rates which has impacted on staff absence. Access to supply staff has been challenging because of the high demand. However, in spite of this our schools and settings have continued to stay open and we have seen only a very small number of classes which have not been able to attend school due to high staff absences and they have accessed remote education for a short amount of time. In each of these cases, school leaders have been asked to prioritise vulnerable children for onsite education. Schools and settings who are continuing to see high rates of infection have welcomed the recommendation and support from the Director of Public Health to continue with face masks in communal areas for adults and pupils in secondary schools.