

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 4 November 2020

Subject: Update on opening of schools for all children and young people

Report of: Director of Education

Summary

This report provides a further update on the full reopening of schools for all pupils in the Autumn term with a specific focus on school attendance.

Recommendations

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 whilst reducing the risk of infection within the school community. The committee is also asked to comment on the support provided by the Local Authority to encourage school attendance.

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 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):

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

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In Manchester, throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the majority of schools have remained open to vulnerable pupils and children of key workers and all schools and colleges have retained contact and an overview of their pupils/students. This has included a significant number remaining open for vulnerable children and key workers during the school holiday periods with many schools staying open during bank holidays as well. Following the easing of lockdown restrictions in June, Manchester schools safely increased the numbers of children who were able to access school and this offer by 13th July 2020 had increased to approximately 12 % of the school population. Following Government Guidance issued in July and subsequent Guidance in August, all schools were required to open to all children and young people in September 2020. In Manchester, all schools were allocated 2 additional training days to enable them to fully brief staff and prepare the learning environment and some schools then had a phased opening for their pupils. All schools were open to all of their statutory school age pupils by 14th September and overall attendance has increased to be between 78% and 83% despite rising infection rates.
- 1.2 Manchester has high numbers of disadvantaged children who have been particularly adversely impacted by the extended lockdown and continue to be impacted by the high infection rates in the North West leading to schools having to close bubbles or indeed year groups following positive cases.
- 1.3 From September, Manchester schools and Manchester Education Services have worked on improving the remote learning offer with schools attending webinars, sharing good practice and a Quality Assurance process focussed on the quality of the leadership, the curriculum and remote learning. The Government has now introduced legislation from 22nd October that all schools have a duty to provide immediate access to remote education when children cannot attend school due to COVID19. However, for a whole variety of reasons linked to disadvantage, including lack of digital access, lack of quiet spaces, food poverty, many children in the City will not be able access high quality learning, linked to national expectations when they are not in school, despite the best efforts of schools and families. There is also likely to be an impact on their physical and mental health. It is therefore important that we continue to support our schools and colleges to remain open for all children and young people, wherever possible.
- 1.4 All schools in Manchester have provided detailed risk assessments of the strong control measures that they have in place; for maintained schools these have been reviewed by our Health and Safety team and advice and support provided where these need to be strengthened. A sample of 10% of schools have now been visited by Manchester's Health and Safety team and in addition some schools have requested visits from the team to provide advice and support. The Health and Safety Executive have also been doing on site visits to schools in Manchester. Overall feedback from these visits has been positive about the measures being implemented in our schools to reduce the risk of infection. Learning from these visits is shared across schools and the

robust measures in place have led to proportionate response and has meant that when positive cases occur in schools the number of children and staff having to self isolate is mitigated.

- 1.5 In addition, where schools have had a significant number of positive cases across groupings, have needed to close for a short period of time or have experienced other complex issues, there have been Outbreak meetings. These have been held with school staff and other services including Public Health, Health and safety Team and senior Education officers to review the measures put in place at the school and consider any additional actions which need to be taken in order to increase safety and reduce the risk of infection.
- 1.6 By being in school, children and young people are in a managed and highly controlled environment for most of the week. School also provides an opportunity for education about containing the virus and control measures such as handwashing and good hygiene, maintaining physical distance, face covering for older children to be reinforced on a daily basis so that they become habitual.
- 1.7 However, most importantly by being in school, children have access to high quality lessons, the opportunity to learn and the opportunity to increase knowledge and skills.

2.0 Weekly School Attendance

- 2.1 Overall, headteachers are continuing to report that schools are very calm with children responding really positively to the changes and engaging well with their learning. Since schools have fully opened, attendance across the City has been over 80% each week. Please see table below:

Week Beginning	Overall Attendance
14th September	81%
21st September	80%
28th September	83%
5th October	84%
12th October	83.5%

These overall attendance figures include schools which have had to have partial closures due to positive covid-19 cases. However, as previously stated, these figures are taken from the DFE portal which is not a statutory requirement for schools to complete and therefore it is expected that these may change once validated attendance data is available.

- 2.2 Approximately, two thirds of schools at any one time in Manchester are fully open and do not have 'bubbles' at home self isolating due to COVID.

Attendance within these schools has been 88- 89% which compares favourably to a national figure of 89.6%. For example on the 7th October Manchester attendance for fully open schools was at 89% compared to 89.6% nationally.

- 2.3 The proportion of children with Education, health and care plans attending school is currently 76%, which is similar to the North West average of 76.1%. The proportion of children known to social care attending school each week averages 78 %, compared to 78.1% North West average. Currently comparison with national rates are not possible due to reporting changes.
- 2.4 The attendance team introduced an attendance helpline for professionals and parents/carers at the end of August; the team were available to answer any specific concerns or queries around attendance including being able to provide detailed information on each school's risk assessment. The attendance hotline has received positive feedback including from parents of children attending Special Schools and has received 230 calls to date. The main thematic reason for non- attendance is parental anxiety about Covid-19 and there has also been an increase in enquiries about elective home education. 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.
- 2.5 In addition, to support school attendance, the Local Authority has provided translated versions of FAQ for schools and front line services to distribute to families, a model attendance policy and provided all schools with Welcome Back banners for railings over the summer so it was clear to communities that school were open in September. All front line Council services were also briefed and asked to support the return of all children to schools in September and this continues to be a focus for staff working with families.

2.6 Impact of COVID19 on school attendance

Between 9th October and 15th October there were 58 new positive cases of COVID across school pupils and 64 new positive cases of staff in school. Overall 56 state funded schools reported positive cases - this is 30.4% of state funded schools in the City. However, this number has increased considerably in the last week.

- 2.7 These positive cases resulted in pupils and staff having to self isolate across the school system. Staff from the GM testing and tracing hub, Community infection team and Education are working with school leaders to minimise the impact on the school community and minimise the numbers of children who need to self isolate following a positive case in school. This for example has included reducing the size of bubbles, reducing opportunities for bubbles to mix at break times and the beginning and end of the school day and being able to provide detailed information such as seating plans for classrooms. This is resulting on a reduced number of adults and children being identified as a close contact of a positive case in many schools.

3.0 School Closures

Senior staff are working directly with school leaders to support them to keep schools open. This has included arranging support from neighbouring schools to provide school meals when kitchen staff have needed to self isolate and brokering leadership support for schools when school leaders have had to self isolate. However, during this term there have been times when schools have made the decision to close for a limited period of time because of staff shortages or to do a deep clean of the school. In total five Manchester schools have fully closed for a limited number of days during this period. In these cases, the Local Authority have worked with school leaders to minimise the closure time. This has included holding outbreak meetings where appropriate, securing leadership support for the school (in one case providing the leadership so the school could re open) and site visits from the Health and Safety team.

4.0 Virtual School

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. The breakdown of school attendance up to 16.10.20 across sectors is below:

School Type	Our Young People attending Manchester Schools	Our Young People attending Schools outside Manchester	Total attendance for all Our Young People
Primary	93.7%	93.8%	93.7%
Secondary	84%	88.6%	86%
All	88.8%	90.4%	89.5%
Special (extracted from data above)	78%	74.4%	78.9 %

5.0 Elective Home Education (EHE)

5.1 As previously reported, the numbers of families requesting to home educate their children has continued to increase and is 50% higher than previous years. Most parents/carers are citing anxiety about COVID19 as the reason for choosing to home educate. The total number of EHE new requests received since term started is 94. Since October 1st the overall number of children home educated is 473. Initial analysis suggests an increase in the proportion of families from black, asian and minority ethnic backgrounds choosing to

home educate and an increase in numbers of parents of children with special educational needs choosing to home educate, in particular where children have been diagnosed with Autism or have medical needs, including both physical and emotional. There is also an increase in numbers of families that are deemed to be providing a suitable education for their children following discussion with Local Authority officers. This could be that parents are more knowledgeable and confident following their experiences of having to educate their children during lockdown.

- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 Arrangements are in place through the Admissions Team to return children to school should elective home education be deemed as unsuitable.

6.0 Exclusions

- 6.1 As previously reported, schools are consistently reporting that behaviour in schools is good. For many children the arrangements in place to reduce the spread of infection which includes fewer classroom changes, staggered dining times and break times, use of separate entrances and exits in school etc have reduced times when pupils often feel anxious and/or are more likely to break school rules.
- 6.2 This continues to be reflected in the number of permanent exclusions which is much lower than usual for the Autumn term 1. To date there have been 8 permanent exclusions of Manchester children; 5 pupils from 4 Manchester Secondary schools and 3 pupils from schools outside of Manchester. There have been no permanent exclusions from primary schools. At this point in 2019 there had been 23 permanent exclusions from school; in 2018, there had been 18 permanent exclusions by the end of October and in 2017, there had been 37 permanent exclusions before work began on the Inclusion Strategy.

6.3 However, there has continued to be a high number of fixed term exclusions with 425 fixed term exclusions in September 2020 compared to 426 fixed term exclusions in September 2019. Reducing fixed term exclusions continues to be a priority.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 It is important that our schools continue to stay open for all pupils because of the long term impact of missing education, despite rising infection rates in the North West. The control measures in place in schools are working but this does mean that as part of their business as usual 'bubbles' of children will be sent home in response to a positive case when appropriate and that these children will access remote learning while at home. Very occasionally this has resulted in a full school closure, however these have been limited and schools encouraged to open as quickly as possible.

7.2 By being in school, children and young people are in a managed and highly controlled environment for most of the week. School also provides an opportunity for education about containing the virus and control measures such as handwashing and good hygiene, maintaining physical distance, face covering for older children to be reinforced on a daily basis so that they become habitual. This should impact on the implementation of these measures in households and the wider community.

8.0 Recommendations

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 reduce the risk of infection within the school community and support all children and young people to continue to access education while in or out of school. The committee is also asked to comment on the support provided by the Local Authority to ensure that schools and colleges have the information, guidance and tools to put these measures in place.