

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD

23 June 2020

Commenced: 3.30 pm

Terminated: 4:30 pm

Present: Councillors Feeley (Chair), Boyle, Cooper, Patrick and M Smith
Paul Jacques

In Attendance:

Sandra Stewart	Director of Governance and Pensions
Richard Hancock	Director of Children's Services
Tim Bowman	Assistant Director, Education
Catherine Moseley	Head of Access Services
Jane Sowerby	Lead Primary School Performance and Standards Officer
Julie Waterhouse	Access Manager
Jacqueline Nurney	Early Education Funding and School Organisation Manager

Apologies for Absence: Andrea Radcliffe and Elizabeth Turner

1 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and read a statement of thanks from, Elizabeth Turner, headteacher at Millbrook Primary & Nursery School for the guidance and support offered by the Education Service to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sentiments were echoed by other Members of the Board who wished to extend their thanks to the Education Service and headteachers for their resilience during the crisis. The clear and regular communication between schools and parents was also praised.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted by Members of the Board.

3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Education Attainment Improvement Board held on 14 January 2020 were approved as a correct record.

4 PLANNING FOR SCHOOL REOPENING

The Assistant Director, Education, submitted a report containing analysis of the impact of school closures within the Borough and the plan for a wider re-opening of schools following a Government enacted closure in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government had announced on 10 May 2020 that schools should begin to reopen from 1 June 2020 for pupils in reception, Year One and Year Six. However, wider reopening within the Borough was delayed until 22 June due to concerns regarding the coronavirus infection rate in the North West region.

The Head of Access Services explained that the vast majority of schools in Tameside had remained open to support vulnerable pupils and the children of key worker parents during the crisis. School attendance within the Borough had averaged two to three per cent during most of

the closure period which was broadly in line with national attendance figures collated by the Department for Education (DfE). Since the Easter break in mid-April, the number of children attending school had steadily increased and attendance had been slightly above the national average. The Assistant Director, Education advised Members that on the first day of wider reopening on 22 June around 11% or 3,500 pupils had attended school across Tameside.

Following an announcement from the Secretary of State for Education that schools should reopen more widely to pupils from early June, a Scenario Planning Group comprised of school leaders and senior council officers had been convened. The Group had focussed on a number of key themes that included advice, support and guidance for staff; logistics planning; protocols, guidance and processes to support vulnerable children; and an assessment of the quality of the current and future educational offer. In addition, schools had also received the following support from the outset of the crisis:

- Regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from the Council's Human Resources (HR) team;
- Daily phone calls through Link Officers drawn from a range of teams within Education and Early Help;
- A new early help pathway and website;
- Parent packs to support reading at home and phonics;
- Review of risk assessments for school buildings and vulnerable children;
- Updated safeguarding protocols; and
- Intervention from Pupil Support Services staff on request.

Members praised the safe and sensible approach adopted by the Council in relation to the wider reopening of schools.

RESOLVED

That the Board note the report received by the Council's COVID-19 Executive Board and the executive decision made by the Executive Member and Chair of the Education Attainment Improvement Board.

5 REASONABLE ENDEAVOURS

Consideration was given to a report received by the Council's COVID-19 Executive Board and the executive decision made by the Executive Member for Lifelong Learning, Equalities, Culture and Heritage and Chair of the Education Attainment Improvement Board. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that the Council used its '*reasonable endeavours*' to secure special education provision specified in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children with special education needs (SEN). Whilst for some children the provision specified in their plan would continue to be delivered, for others the provision would need to be temporarily different from that set out in their ECH Plan.

The Assistant Director, Education explained that the Council had to establish a process to ensure that the provisions set out in ECHPs continued to be delivered during the coronavirus lockdown and throughout the phased reopening of schools. This was to be in accordance with the Council's statutory duties and the provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020 and related Government notices and guidance. The Council had considered the following options to ensure that the provisions laid out in EHCPs could be delivered:

- No process put in place;
- Every Plan (1600+) be formally reassessed and a new plan issued; or
- Work with the children, parents or carers and educational settings to establish whether the child's needs could be best met at home, and be safer there than attending an educational setting.

Members were informed that the Council had opted for a school-led process to determine what provision and in which setting this was to be delivered for each child with an EHC Plan and whether this was reasonable. In addition to robust consultation with key partners, it was considered crucial that parents/carers and where possible children and young people be involved with the decision-making process and fully concurred with what was agreed. The Council did not have sufficient capacity to reassess all plans and the administrative burden of such an undertaking would impact on the support for children. A wholesale reassessment exercise was also unlikely to be welcomed by parents. It was stressed that the chosen option would allow each young person's plan to be individually considered without the need for a full reassessment. The Assistant Director, Education anticipated the completion of a provision template for each child with an EHCP over the next six weeks.

RESOLVED

That the Board note the report received by the Council's COVID-19 Executive Board and the executive decision made by the Executive Member and Chair of the Education Attainment Improvement Board.

6 DIGITAL DEVICES

Consideration was given to a report received by the Council's COVID-19 Executive Board and the executive decision made by the Executive Member for Lifelong Learning, Equalities, Culture and Heritage and Chair of the Education Attainment Improvement Board. The Department for Education (DfE), in response to the COVID-19 related closure of schools, launched a scheme to provide digital devices (laptops and tablets) for disadvantaged families, children and young people who did not currently have access to them through another source. The Council therefore had responsibility to decide how eligible children would be identified; how devices would be delivered to eligible children; who would own the devices; and how children would be safeguarded whilst using the devices.

The Assistant Director, Education explained that the Council had been allocated 144 devices for pupils in maintained schools in Year 10, 964 devices for pupils with a social worker and 184 4G wireless routers by the Department for Education. A total of four options were considered and it was advised that the ownership and related liabilities for the devices would rest with schools once the devices had been distributed. This was considered the most appropriate option given that each school would have different IT solutions and software. In addition, schools were deemed to be best placed to ensure appropriate IT safeguards and online safety were put in place given that they had existing expertise in this area.

Members were informed that the devices were now being distributed to the identified children and young people with officers confident that they would be available by the stated deadline. Whilst Members expressed concern that the devices had arrived too late from Government, given that more children were returning to the classroom following school closures, they were nonetheless welcomed as a way of addressing digital disadvantage and progressing children's learning.

RESOLVED

That the Board note the report received by the Council's COVID-19 Executive Board and the executive decision made by the Executive Member and Chair of the Education Attainment Improvement Board.

7 ANNUAL CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY REPORT

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Director, Education, outlining the outcomes of the childcare sufficiency annual report 2019. The report included an analysis of the supply and demand for childcare within the Borough and any changes from the previous year, e.g. whether

any new provision had been established or childcare closures. These changes would indicate any change in the stability of the childcare market in Tameside. The report set out how the childcare market was assessed and where there was a need for additional places and detailed any actions recommended or taken for this to be achieved.

The overall position within Tameside was stable but this was likely to change during 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A discussion ensued regarding the sustainability of the sector in light of the current public health crisis. It was explained that providers continued to receive funding from the Council and some employers had taken advantage of the Government's job retention scheme. The real challenges for the sector were likely to be apparent later this year and into 2021.

RESOVLED

That the content of the report be noted and approved for publication on the Council's website.

8 URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items for consideration at this meeting.

CHAIR