

Report to: EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD

Date: 12 January 2021

Reporting Officer: Councillor Leanne Feeley – Executive Member for Lifelong Learning, Equalities, Culture and Heritage
Tim Bowman – Assistant Director, Education

Subject: **SCHOOLS UPDATE AND RECOVERY PLANNING**

Report Summary: The report provides updates from schools since the last report in October, covering progress in the autumn term. It includes information about attendance in schools and the summer’s GCSE outcomes, which are not comparable with previous years or from region to region. The report also provides an update on the exam and assessment series in summer 2021.

Recommendations: It is recommended that the Board note the content of the report.

Corporate Plan: The proposals contained in this report support most aspects of the corporate plan by ensuring that schools are able to open to pupils in September 2020 and continue to provide for children throughout the academic year.

Policy Implications: The report sets out the position in line with Council policies and the statutory framework.

Financial Implications: Schools are reporting they are facing financial difficulties as a result of additional costs of operating during the pandemic. DfE have provided the additional funding for schools to address some of these funding available to date to fund these costs as follows;-
(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)

Grant	Value
Covid Catch-up Grant	£2,924,400
Exception Costs Claims <i>A 2nd claim window closes xx 2020</i>	£436,724
Winter Food Fund	£894,615

The funding provided is very prescriptive and the funds can only be applied for with for specific costs outlined in section 3. There are other costs that schools are incurring that cannot be claimed from any of the pots identified above. An information collection exercise is underway in Tameside alongside a collection exercise in other GM authorities for sharing with DfE.

Legal Implications: This report is intended to update Board with particular emphasis on the impact that the Covid pandemic has had on pupils and the education system. In particular, the Board will note the comments in relation to the funding position for schools and may wish to consider the risk management proposals, especially in light of the
(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

Covid-related challenges that schools are still likely to be facing in 2021.

Risk Management:

The whole school risk assessments completed by schools alongside all guidance from the Department for Education should have been used to enable each school to assess the level of risk and how it can be mitigated in order to ensure schools can open and operate safely

Access to Information:

NON-CONFIDENTIAL

This report does not contain information, which warrants its consideration in the absence of the Press or members of the public.

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Tim Bowman Assistant Director, Education



Telephone: 0161 342 2050



e-mail: tim.bowman@tameside.gov.uk

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In the paper presented to October Committee, the context for schools was described in detail. At that point schools had only recently opened to all pupils after being closed to all but the most vulnerable and key worker children since March 2020.
- 1.2 Schools have now been open and operating for a term under COVID-19 restrictions, including a second lockdown, and within a region under strict Tier 3 restrictions for much of the term. Living with COVID-19 has been a huge strain on schools and communities, especially on senior leaders in schools who have had little proper break since February 2020
- 1.3 Disruption to education for all children has continued throughout the term with high numbers of children isolating across the Borough, some more than once. The impact assessments beginning to be seen nationally are indicating that those most affected are disadvantaged children.
- 1.4 There have been announcements from the government about the national exam and assessment programmes in the summer 2021 and whilst there have been some concessions, testing and assessments will go ahead which is broadly welcomed by the sector.
- 1.5 Headteachers and school leaders in Tameside have continued to work tirelessly. Staffing has, at times, been hugely challenging but the vast majority of schools remained fully or partially open with only a small number of total closures due to COVID-related staffing difficulties.
- 1.6 Support for schools and colleges continues to be available to all schools, whatever type they may be and whatever phase or sector they are in, and we continue to maintain a borough-wide approach to identifying collective processes which support safe and sensible local decision-making.

2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DURING THE AUTUMN

2.1 Impact of COVID-19 on Schools

The impact on schools has been enormous. Whilst the remainder of the country has caught up with the region during the latter part of the term, the negative impact in the North West remains disproportionate and remains at a staggering 4% differential, albeit down from 10%. The senior capacity in schools has been severely impacted as a result of pressures on staff attendance and exhaustion.

2.2 In the Autumn term, as of 2 December 2020:

- 579 students confirmed COVID since the start of the academic year
- 364 staff confirmed COVID since the start of the academic year
- Approximately 2,793 students and 131 staff have isolated in the past two weeks, with there being approximately 17,839 instances of isolation amongst students and 932 instances of isolation amongst staff in educational settings in Tameside.
- 91% of primary schools have been affected (69 of 76)
- 100% of secondary schools have been affected (all 16).

2.3 Digital Devices

During the autumn, the Government have provided additional laptops for schools for use by disadvantaged children who are isolating due to COVID-19. Schools and academies apply for these devices directly from the Department for Education (DfE) suppliers which is activated by the DfE's daily attendance return completed by schools.

2.4 **Planning and Communication**

The successful School Liaison role (daily calls to headteachers for two-way communication and support) has continued throughout the autumn with weekly calls. It continues to be a very valuable communication channel by providing the opportunity for direct dialogue with school leaders.

2.5 Headteachers have continued to meet fortnightly with their Governing Board COVID Committees to discuss COVID-safe decisions following the Council's advice during the first lock down to support safe and sensible decision-making.

2.6 The Scenario Planning Group has continued to meet weekly with representatives from schools, colleges, trade union/professional associations and local authority teams and the at least weekly email from the Assistant Director, Education continues but has moved from Fridays to Mondays to support headteacher wellbeing. All information for schools and colleges is uploaded onto the schools and colleges intranet which was launched during lockdown.

2.7 **Free School Meals**

To support the Leader's desire that no child should go hungry, the Council Teams worked hard over the October half-term to ensure that supermarket vouchers for children on Free School Meals reached those families that most needed the support. Over 5,000 vouchers were issued.

2.8 In December, the Government announced the Winter COVID Grant and a large part of this has been used to provide each child on free school meals with a £40 supermarket voucher. The scheme reached all children on free school meals in schools (9,554), all children in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium (436) and all vulnerable two-year-olds eligible for two-year-old funding (1,085).

2.9 Additional vouchers were purchased for families in need who did not meet the criteria and these were distributed by Early Help. The support and hard work of schools in this programme meant that many more families received the vouchers than at half-term. The same approach will be taken over the February half-term with each eligible child receiving a £15 voucher.

3 **COVID RECOVERY UPDATE**

3.1 **COVID Catch-up Premium**

Government funding was calculated on a per pupil basis, providing each mainstream school with a total of £80 for each pupil in reception through to Year 11, and special schools were provided with £240 for each pupil. This funding was not ring-fenced. However the COVID costs for schools has been significant and includes additional supply costs, cleaning, staffing, and loss of income.

3.2 Schools have been able to sign up for the National Tutoring Programme to provide additional, targeted support for disadvantaged children which will start from January and as part of this offer, 18 schools are eligible for funding for early language intervention training.

3.3 There is considerable concern about the financial pressures on schools caused by the pandemic, there has been ongoing discussion at a GM level regarding these additional financial pressures on schools. Data is being gathered from all schools on the additional costs incurred so the financial impact can be demonstrated for Tameside and across GM.

3.4 **COVID Exceptional Costs Funding**

During the summer term the Government launched a claims process whereby schools could claim back specific costs in relation to

- Increased premise costs due to school opening during Easter and/summer half term holidays
- Support for FSM eligible children not attending schools and costs not covered by national voucher scheme
- Additional cleaning required during confirmed or suspected COVID 19 cases

3.5 A **second claims window** has now opened. The additional area that can now be claimed in this are summer holiday free school meals costs that were incurred outside of the Summer Food Fund are now claimable.

3.6 **COVID Workforce Fund**

The DfE recently announced schools facing pressures around staffing and funding will be able to claim via a new short term Covid Workforce Fund. Full details on the claims process is expected to be published shortly and the following criteria will apply:

- The claim will cover the costs of high levels of staff absences over a minimum threshold, to help ensure schools and colleges can remain open.
- The period of claim covers 1 November to Christmas holidays
- Schools will first need to use any existing financial reserves and surplus balances will need to be down to a level at 4% of the annual income.
- Mainstream schools must be experiencing a short-term teacher absence rate at or above 20%, and/or a lower long-term teacher absence rate at or above 10% - costs can only be claimed when incurred above this rate
- special schools and AP's must be experiencing a short-term teacher absence rate at or above 15%, and/or a lower long-term teacher absence rate at or above 10%, to be eligible - costs can only be claimed when incurred above this rate.

3.7 **Covid Exam Support Costs**

The DfE have recently launched an exam support service. Schools and colleges can use the service to make claims to cover costs, including:

- any net loss for exam fees charged by awarding organisations
- venues for alternative sites (externally booked)
- any net loss for invigilation (externally sourced)

The deadline for submitting a claim is 6 April 2021.

3.8 **Early Language Development Making it REAL**

Eight schools have completed a full cycle of the Making it REAL intervention with Nursery and Reception children. A further eight schools and eight PVIs will join the programme in January 2021.

3.9 Feedback from parents and children on the project so far shows that all families are engaging with the project and are very appreciative of the support from school. Tracking data shows that children are making progress through the strands of literacy:

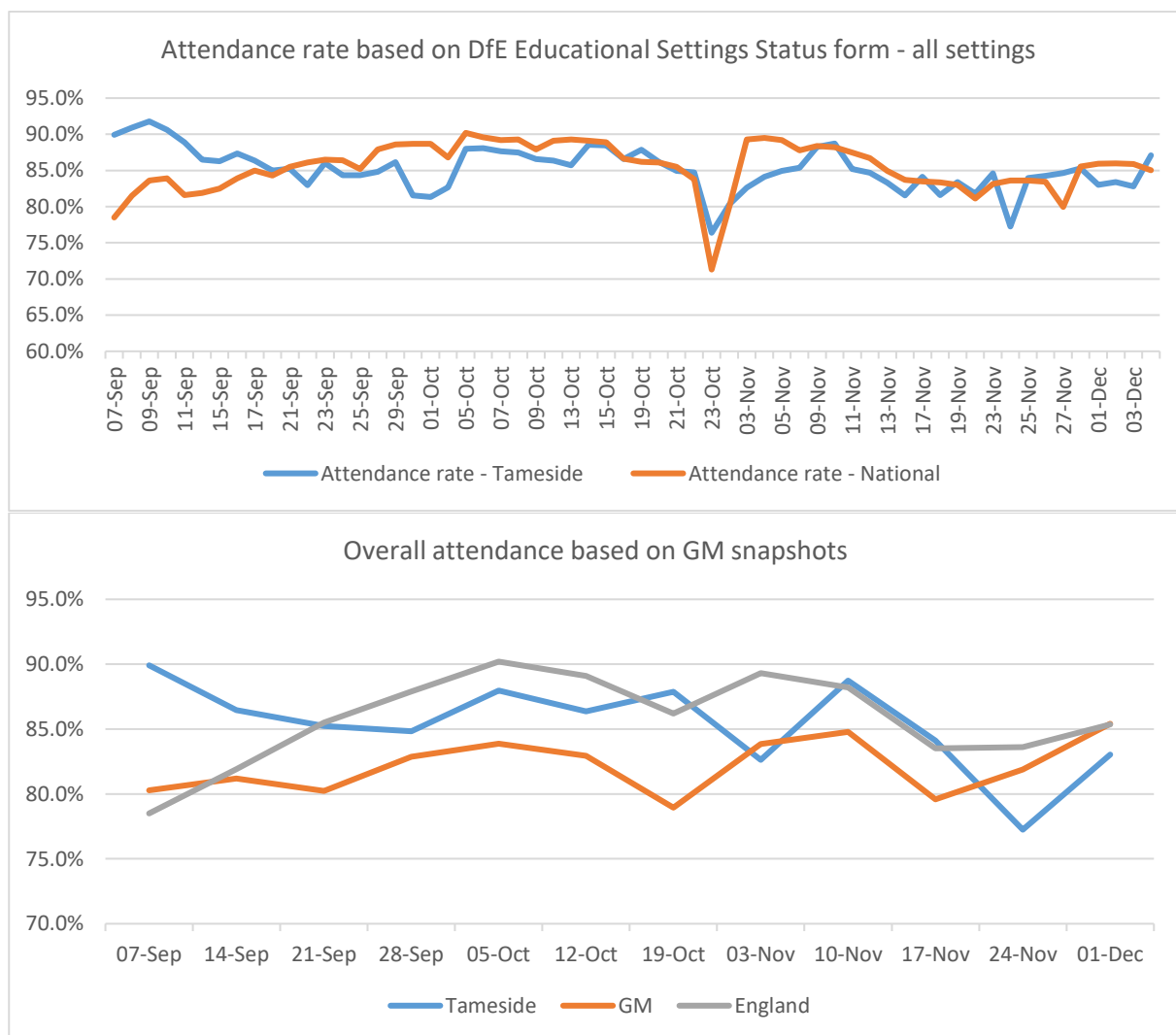
- Language – Most children started the projects using two or three words when talking. Teachers found there was a clear jump in the September data stating most children were now using simple sentences and linking ideas using 'and'
- Songs and Rhymes – Most children moved from showing very little interest in joining in songs to showing enjoyment and beginning to sing independently.
- Books - Most children moved from showing little interest in books to showing sustained interest and eagerly listening to stories.
- Environmental Print – This strand showed the biggest jump with children moving from showing no interest to print around them to actively engaging and commenting on environmental print.

3.10 GMCA Year 1 Recovery Curriculum

Building on the success of the GMCA Year 1 Recovery Curriculum research seminars detailed in the previous meeting, a new series of seminars is being offered led by the GMCA Speech and Language Lead, Michelle Morris. This is expected to further support schools and practitioners with easily accessible CPD to help them address the gaps in early language as a result of missing much of the Reception year.

4 ATTENDANCE

4.1 Attendance of pupils in Tameside has been consistently around the daily national average since the start of the academic year. Attendance typically has ranged from between 85% to 92% depending on the number of pupils affected by COVID-19 meaning they cannot attend school (not included as being present in school on DfE Educational Setting Status daily return). In addition, attendance has been consistently around or above the Greater Manchester average from the attendance snapshots that have been taken.



4.2 Attendance of pupils with an EHCP has consistently been around 78%+ and has only been significantly impacted when a special school is forced to close due to COVID-19 related reasons. Attendance of pupils with a social worker has been consistently around 78%.

4.3 Permanent Exclusions

Permanent exclusions are currently below the number in 2019 for the same time period. As of the 08 December 2020, 14 pupils had been permanently excluded so far this academic year (all secondary school pupils) compared to 28 in the same time period in 2019.

4.4 Elective Home Education (EHE)

In September 2020 in Tameside, like most LAs nationally, we saw a spike in the number of new EHE pupils – 81 (of which 74 still remain EHE). Whilst September is typically the month where we see the most new EHE pupils, the increase in numbers this September compared to September 2018 (16) and September 2019 (13) is significant.

4.5 This increase is partly offset by the number of new EHE between April and August. Since 2016/17, the numbers of new EHC have been between 20 and 27 from April – August. In 2019/20 due to the COVID-19 pandemic there were only two. In addition, the number of new EHE pupils in October was 13, and the number for November was also 13. A total of 183 pupils in Tameside are currently registered as EHE.

4.6 This is an important issue and we will continue to keep a keen eye on these numbers. It is likely that numbers will begin to fall back to more usual levels later in the school year as COVID restrictions begin to ease. In the meantime, colleagues will continue to offer an initial meeting with schools and parents to try and resolve any issues there may be in advance of taking the final decision to electively home educate. We will also offer two visits a year to parents who do EHE to assist with and monitor the education offer and ensure any welfare issues are addressed. This model is held up as national good practice.

5 GCSE RESULTS 2020 AND NATIONAL UPDATES

5.1 In March 2020, the Secretary of State announced that the summer 2020 exam series in England would be cancelled to help fight the spread of COVID-19. The announcement also stated, 'The Government will not publish any school or college level educational performance data based on tests, assessments or exams for 2020'. As a result, no school-level information is available.

5.2 For this summer's GCSE awards, schools and colleges were asked to provide centre assessment grades for their pupils. The centre assessment grades are those that schools and colleges believed their pupils would have been most likely to achieve if they had sat the exams. These grades then went through a standardisation process developed by OFQUAL to produce a calculated grade. In August 2020, the decision was made to award pupils the better of either the centre assessment grade or the calculated grade (known as the final grade). Due to this, these results are not comparable with previous years or, arguably, between regions.

Basics – English and Maths

201920	Group	% E&M 9-5	% E&M 9-4
England	All pupils	49.9	71.2
Tameside	All pupils	47.1	69.4
Difference		-2.8	-1.8
England	Boys	45.9	67.6
Tameside	Boys	42.1	65.1
Difference		-3.8	-2.5
England	Girls	54.1	75
Tameside	Girls	51.9	73.5
Difference		-2.2	-1.5

5.3 Nationally, there is a mixed picture. While the attainment gap between rich and poor based on grades 9-4 in English and maths has shrunk slightly, it's grown in terms of things like overall GCSE attainment. This data is unreliable for the purpose of comparison, either with outcomes in 2019, or with national. There is significant regional variation due to the last-

minute approach taken in the summer. In some local authorities, the gap has shrunk by over nine percentage points, in others it's grown by five percentage points.

5.4 **Attainment 8**

The average Attainment 8 (A8) score for all pupils in Tameside was 48 compared to 50.2 nationally. When broken down by gender, the average A8 score for boys in Tameside was 45.2 compared to 47.4 for boys nationally, and the average A8 for girls in Tameside was 50.7 compared to 53.1 for girls nationally.

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Difference		-2.2
England	Boys	47.4
Tameside	Boys	45.2
Difference		-2.2
England	Girls	53.1
Tameside	Girls	50.7
Difference		-2.4

5.5 **Changes to Assessments in schools for 2020/21**

On 3 December 2020, the Government announced a package of exceptional measures for students sitting exams and other assessments in the 2020/21 academic year to make them as fair as possible and manage the disruption caused by COVID-19.

5.6 **Secondary School and college Assessments**

For secondary school and college pupils, the Government has said that, in recognition of the challenges faced by students this year, grades will be more generous, students will be given advance notice of some topic areas, and steps will be taken to ensure every student receives a grade, even if they miss a paper due to self-isolation or illness.

5.7 In addition to the previously announced three-week delay to exams, designed to give students extra teaching time, the new measures include:

- More generous grading than usual, in line with national outcomes from 2020, so students this year are not disadvantaged
- Students receiving advance notice of some topic areas covered in GCSE, AS and A levels to focus revision
- Exam aids - like formula sheets - provided in some exams giving students more confidence and reducing the amount of information they need to memorise
- Contingency exams to give students a second chance to sit a paper if the main exams or assessments are missed due to illness or self-isolation. In the extreme case where a student has a legitimate reason to miss all their papers, then a validated teacher informed assessment can be used, only once all chances to sit an exam have passed.

5.8 The Government also announced that it will set up a new expert group to look at differential learning and monitor the variation in the impact of the pandemic on students across the country. Students taking vocational and technical qualifications will also see adaptations to ensure parity between general and vocational qualifications. The Government will set out further detail on this process, and on adaptations to exams, in the New Year.

5.9 Test and exam results will not be included in performance tables this year, and instead will be replaced by attendance information, and student destinations and the subjects taken at key stage 4 and 5.

5.10 **Primary School Assessments**

For primary assessments, key stage 1 tests in English reading and mathematics, and the English grammar, punctuation and spelling tests at key stage 1 and 2 will be removed for one year. In addition, the requirement to make and report teacher assessment judgements for science at KS1 and KS2 has been removed.

- 5.11 For key stage 2 tests and for the phonics screening check, schools have been given more flexibility with the administration of these as the original timetable has been extended by a week, until 26 May and 25 June, respectively.
- 5.12 To further support schools, the statutory introduction of the multiplication tables check has been delayed, though schools may choose to take part on an optional basis.
- 5.13 The requirement for schools to submit applications for pupils who need additional time in KS2 tests or notifications that they used an aid (such as a scribe or word processor) has also been removed.
- 5.14 Taking all of the above into account means that the following assessments will go ahead in 2020/21:
- Early years foundation stage profile.
 - The phonics screening check for year 1 pupils (and year 2 pupils who have not met the expected standard previously)
 - KS2 English reading and mathematics tests
 - KS1 and KS2 teacher assessments (excluding science)

Primary performance data will not be published.

5.15 **OFSTED**

The Government has announced that full, graded OFSTED inspections will not resume until the summer term for maintained schools and academies. From January, OFSTED will resume monitoring inspections of schools judged 'inadequate' at their previous inspection and some schools graded as 'requires improvement'. These will not result in a grade. These inspections will focus on things such as curriculum, remote education and pupil attendance, particularly of vulnerable children.

- 5.16 OFSTED will also continue to have the power to inspect a school, further education or early years provider, if they have serious concerns, including about safeguarding and remote education.
- 5.17 During the autumn two schools, with 'Inadequate' judgements, received OFSTED monitoring visits, and two schools received virtual interim inspections.
- 5.18 Tameside remains at 89% pupils in good or outstanding primary schools, 67% of pupils in good or outstanding secondary schools and 70% of pupils in good or outstanding special schools.

6 **CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The impact and toll on schools, especially senior leaders, has been immeasurable. Headteachers have supported their staff, children and families and demonstrated strong leadership in their communities right up to and including Christmas Eve as the Government required them to lead contact tracing for children or staff up to that date.
- 6.2 Concerns remain about the impact on disadvantaged children and about the disproportionate disadvantage faced by students in the North West entering national exams and assessments in the summer.
- 6.3 The Council will continue to help schools in a variety of ways to ensure the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children are supported.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 As set out at the front of the report.