

Children's Services
222 Upper Street, N1 1XR

Report of: Corporate Director of Children's Services

Meeting of: CS Scrutiny

Date: 29 November 2022

SUBJECT: Impact of COVID-19 and recommendations to reverse the effects 'on attainment, safeguarding, equalities, youth safety and justice' and prepare for future outbreaks

1. Synopsis

In March 2021, Executive received a report from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee which examined the Covid 19 Recovery Strategy. The scrutiny report proposed fifteen recommendations to offer the best support to pupils and its residents in Islington.

This report provides an update on action taken in response to the recommendations and must be considered in the light of the pandemic and the impact this has had on the community, but particularly in relation to schools.

2. Recommendations

To note the progress made against the recommendations from the Review

To note the further work proposed to consolidate and build on the improvements to date

3. Background

On 23 March 2020, the then Prime Minister addressed the nation: 'From this evening I must give the British people a very simple instruction - you must stay at home'. From this date, all non-essential staff were asked to work from home and schools were closed to all but the most vulnerable children. With the national lockdown in March 2020 came an immediate shift in focus for the Council and partners from some of our longer-term ambitions to instead ensuring we supported our children, young people and their families and carers through a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

During the disruption period, we saw an increase in requests for support for children and families across the partnership - in particular, regarding social, emotional, and mental health concerns for children and young people. Requests included not just those families previously known to services, but families who apparently tipped into acute need because of the stressors associated with the pandemic. This trend has continued post-pandemic.

Over the course of the last two years, organisations across the wider partnership have responded at pace to ensure as a system people were working together in response to these challenges. Partners have regularly met to review practice, consider future commissioning of services to meet need and further develop practice protocols between services. During the last year, there has been a particular focus on the systemic inequalities in Islington which have come even more to the fore post pandemic.

Between October 2020 and March 2021, the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee conducted a review of our local COVID-19 recovery strategy. The purpose of the review was to interview a wide range of witnesses about the impact of COVID-19, make recommendations to reverse the effects 'on attainment, safeguarding, equalities, youth safety and justice' and prepare for future outbreaks. The review was constrained by further periods of lockdown, illness and self-isolation. Nonetheless, members of the Committee were able to attend online interview session with groups of students; members of BAME Community Groups (community organisation and supplementary school leaders and parents); parents of children attending an early years children's centre; a member of the Children's Active Involvement Service (a group for care experienced and looked after young people) and a group of head teachers from all phases.

The Committee recognised that schools and settings had responded with pace considering rapidly changing guidance. Schools and settings had demonstrated a robust response to put in place many mitigating strategies to minimise the impact of moving to remote learning and how they might support their local communities throughout the various lockdowns experience by the country as a whole. A number of common threads in the evidence emerged and were echoed in officer reports and in research by academics and Ofsted. Over the three months of interviewing witnesses, two elements came to the fore - the corrosive impact of the virus on the disadvantaged and the near-universal experience of anxiety.

The Committee subsequently made fifteen recommendations collated from the evidence they had received. Since their report was published, the DfE to schools guidance has changed. Schools returned to full time face to face learning from the 8 March 2021. In September 2021, schools and settings were required to put in place arrangements for remote learning to ensure any pupils required to self-isolate as a contact and therefore unable to attend school could continue to access the national curriculum. This was a notable change from previous lockdowns, where schools and settings were not required to continue to provide access to the national curriculum to pupils unable to attend.

The November 2021 LA SEND Inspection took account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SEND arrangements in the area in reaching their judgements (November 2021). Inspectors confirmed that 'Despite the challenges that the area has faced through the pandemic, leaders have sustained their commitment. Leaders have remained true to their values and maintained the momentum of continuous improvement. Throughout this time, they ensured that the area's most vulnerable children, young people and families were continuously in 'sight.'

This report provides an update on progress against the fifteen recommendations.

4 Response to the Scrutiny Committee recommendations

Officers welcomed the fifteen recommendations from Committee members as a very helpful steer towards mitigating the impact of the pandemic on children and young people in Islington. It was particularly helpful to note the focus on mental health within the recommendations, reflecting a national surge in Social Emotional and Mental Health needs among young people.

Mental Health and Well-being

4.1 Recommendation 1: For children, young people and young adults for whom it continues to have responsibility; Islington Council Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) service, building on existing good practice, should audit and extend provision to meet the burgeoning need as identified, both during and after the pandemic.

Response:

Analysis has shown an unprecedented surge and upward trajectory in demand for Mental Health services at both a local and national level. The pandemic has further impacted on a pre-COVID trend of increase in referrals, resulting in operational challenges in responding to changing demand.

During the disruption, our focus was therefore to ensure that schools and settings were aware of:

- The importance of emotional wellbeing for their staff, children and young people, and having existing systems in place which could be built on (e.g., Compassionate Leadership)
- The negative impact that adverse and traumatic experiences and distressing life events can have on the social, emotional and mental health of children, young people, parents and colleagues (e.g., Islington Trauma Informed Practice (iTIPS))
- The importance of developing and re-establishing relationships to support children, young people's and staff's feelings of belonging and safety (e.g., the Recovery Curriculum)
- The importance of a positive school climate that enhances belonging and connectedness is a protective factor for children and young people's mental health (e.g., Belonging and Place)

As a wider response to this surge in demand, a more collaborative and preventative approach has also been adopted across wider council services, for example the development of locality hubs driven through the Fairer Together partnership, aiming to make services more accessible within communities to reduce isolation.

Improving the range of services to support children and young people, and to support their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs was one of three priorities under Children's Services Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2018-22. The SEND Strategy has now been refreshed, with a stronger focus on inclusion and belonging so that more children are supported to remain in mainstream school, where appropriate. More resources have also been allocated to school budgets to support at SEN support level.

Consequently, the range of services available for young people has developed and increased considerably over the last 3 years as follows:

- An expanded SEMH emotional wellbeing pathway, including Barnardo's (new contractual relationship); Emotional Wellbeing Workers (new roles); Social Prescription (Third Sector / Universal Services pilot); online counselling (Kooth – new service)
- Full integration of CAMHS and the emotional wellbeing pathway within the Children's Services Contact Team (CSCT) (live from September 2019).
- Mental Health in Schools Teams
- Review of Early Help Services and relaunch for September 2020 with a much sharper focus on pushing support 'in' to schools (rather than schools needing to refer 'out')
- A support and intervention protocol has been agreed with Early Help Services to prevent escalation of behaviours using a child and family approach (Think Family)
- SEN Behaviour Handbook has been relaunched which includes links to key resources and Islington's local offer

The new / reorganised Services and pathways have been promoted to schools through briefings, communications, and direct contact; schools are generally the highest referring agency.

Referral routes to school support services, including New River College Outreach, have been streamlined and simplified to make access less bureaucratic for schools and therefore provide quicker access. From September 2020, Schools have used a single referral route, with a multi-disciplinary team determining the most appropriate response, meaning there can be no 'wrong' referral.

New River College Outreach Service remains very well-used by our schools to advise at the first signs of concern. They also collaborated closely with other Council and health services to help develop a [Recovery Curriculum](#) to support all schools in welcoming back all children to school in September 2020 following the COVID-19 disruption. They remain a strong and much valued partner.

Our schools continue to consult our Educational Psychology Service at a later stage of concern however, primarily for statutory assessment work as part of the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process. We continue to encourage schools to make greater use of the early help advice that Educational Psychologists can offer on suitable interventions across a range of needs. The ‘traded’ model under which the service currently operates limits the extent to which this can be influenced (i.e., it is for the school that purchases the service to decide how to use it) although the service continues to promote a full offer.

While wait times for CAMHS therapies have increased during / post pandemic, not all children require CAMHS therapies to address their mental health needs, and Islington children can access a wide offer of mental health support at the point of referral, with immediate access or very short waiting times:

- A ‘CAMHS in Schools’ offer, unique to Islington, which means that every Islington school has a named link CAMHS practitioner working with them
- [School Wellbeing Service](#) (Islington’s Mental Health Support Teams - MHST) – Islington is a trailblazer site for MHSTs, with two hubs providing support to every Islington mainstream school through a multi-disciplinary model
- The [IMHARS](#) (Islington mental health and resilience in schools) programme supports schools to research their strengths and challenges in their whole school approach to supporting positive mental health and resilience and plan change
- Trauma-informed practice – this model is embedded across schools and services and informs whole school approaches as well as support to individuals
- Emotional Well-Being Workers – a role conceived and designed by local young people; Emotional Well-Being Workers can be accessed by young people through our Youth Hubs and the SEMH partnership
- Kooth on-line counselling service – this can be directly accessed by young people and is well used by them
- TCaPS intensive behaviour support programme to help families manage challenging behaviour in the home

To further support mental health issues, in August 2021, Islington was a recipient of the Public Health England (PHE) Better Mental Health Fund. This fund was allocated to the 40 most deprived local authorities in the country and formed part of the government’s Mental Health Recovery Action Plan 2021/22, focussing on the mental health impacts of COVID 19, and ensuring that these are rapidly addressed. Islington received a grant of £346,619 to be spent in year 2021/22. A programme of work was mobilised rapidly with a strong focus on support to children, young people and families. Local projects supported by this grant enhanced existing provision including:

- Training in Trauma Informed Practice (TIPS) to VCS organisations working with vulnerable children, young people & their families
- Building local networks of peer and clinical support to embed iTIPS practice among a wide range of VCS practitioners.
- Delivery of targeted youth service counselling with a focus on YP at risk of self-harm
- ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) training to teaching assistants in schools, supervision and support to embed learning
- Delivery of evidence-based Emotion Coaching workshops to groups of staff and groups of parents in schools
- Delivery of a parenting programme “Love and Limits” designed to improve parental confidence in managing their teenager’s challenging behaviour

4.2 Recommendation 2: Schools and early year’s providers should use council information and other resources to ensure that parents/carers with mental health or well-being issues are signposted to appropriate help from adult and community services.

Response:

Improved collaboration between education and health professionals, parents and children and young people has led to a range of new provision to address these concerns e.g., new roles of social prescribing and Emotional Wellbeing Workers, Kooth on-line counselling described above. Access to these services is promoted through schools, support services, the Council and Health websites, GP practices, Mother Tongue Supplementary School colleagues, on line webinars for parents/carers, the SEND Local Offer and Parent Support Groups.

This work is being built on as part of our [Schools Wellbeing Service](#) (Mental Health Support Teams 'Trailblazer' programme), and Education Mental Health Professionals (EMHPs) were recruited and began training in January 2020 with a roll out to all schools in September 2021. The Schools Wellbeing Service (SWS) also work with parents of children in primary schools whose children have an identified mental health need – which often also positively impacts the parent's mental health and wellbeing. Alongside this, SWS signposts to services for parents e.g. ICope or other community counselling, e.g. Growing Together (for under 5s).

The PHE Better Mental Health Fund funded translation to community languages of resources for parents created by the SWS. These resources helped to build mental health literacy and understanding of ways in which parents can support their children's mental health, improving access to learning

Analytics data shows that schools regularly use Wellbeing pages in order to support parents and carers with mental health issues.

4.3 Recommendation 3: Islington Council should develop the Young Islington proposals, in partnership with appropriate providers, to offer a counselling service for children and young people during all holiday periods for the foreseeable future.**Response:**

The Targeted Youth Service (TYS) counselling service has been restructured within the last 12 months to be more responsive to the needs of young people across the borough. The YYS counselling service provides free counselling for any child or young person aged 10yrs – 21yrs who lives, works or studies in Islington (or any young person aged up to 25 years with Special Educational Needs). The reorganised service offers increased capacity and responsiveness, including the ability to deal with and address comorbidity issues that can adversely impact on young people.

The **SEMH** pathway (see 4.1 above) is a key component of the council's approach to ensuring the emotional health and wellbeing of young people. The pathway uses a multi-disciplinary approach which supports young people through a range of wellbeing needs as part of the Young Islington approach. A key feature is accessibility and offering support services in community places and spaces where young people feel comfortable and in which they have a stake.

The role of the Emotional Wellbeing Worker (EWB), which young people can access via the new Young Islington universal youth work offer, was developed alongside young people who said that they valued the relationships that they have with their youth workers and that they wanted one trusted person to help them navigate their way through support, rather than having to repeat their story multiple times. The EWB worker seeks to engage with young people in youth hubs such as Lift, Platform and Rosebowl, and develops a relationship with that young person that intends to understand their lives, needs and ambitions.

The EWB service works alongside other services in the SEMH pathway and young people can access these options concurrently. Much of the counselling offer is delivered at Platform Youth

Hub due to the availability of quiet, private rooms suitable for counselling in a youth-orientated space.

The children and young people's social prescribing service was recommissioned as part of the Young Islington offer from January 2022. This prescribes very early help to young people at risk of developing mental health problems by supporting their access to youth services and opportunities in the borough. The service operates all year-round including school holidays.

- 4.4 Recommendation 4: The council should also enhance its specialist youth and youth employment services to support those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) or starting employment in such uncertain times. In addition to the current developments, including working with local further education colleges, it should engage with partners such as London Councils and Centre London Forward to ensure the local offer matches training and apprenticeships to growth sectors in the post-Covid economy. It should further look to helping vulnerable young adults beyond the age of 24 years.**

Response:

The Youth Employability and Skills (YES) programme was launched to provide a targeted package of employability and skills support to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) aged 18-25 at risk of long-term unemployment as a result of the pandemic and/or other entrenched challenges. With a focus on the most disadvantaged groups, namely care leavers, those with experience of the criminal justice system and NEET referrals from VCS partners, the programme offers outreach activity, employment coaching, careers guidance and IAG, skills tuition, world of work experiences, access to therapeutic support, access to employment, education and training opportunities and support to sustain these outcomes.

There has been a healthy level of interest to support the YES Programme across a wide variety of sectors, including growth areas with 63 employer partnerships developed to provide placements, training, and employment opportunities to beneficiaries.

Working with Central London Forward, the council has also secured funding to deliver the Connected Communities programme which has provided capacity for additional and targeted support for vulnerable young adults aged 18-24 and 25+.

Work is currently underway to develop a Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) tool to help schools identify and intervene at an earlier stage with those young people whose profile suggests they may be at greater risk of becoming NEET.

- 4.5 Recommendation 5: Building on the experience of developing and implementing the Recovery Curriculum, Islington Community of Schools should create a bank of resources to support the mental health and well-being of all children and young people returning to school, whether post-lockdown or following extensive individual absence.**

Response:

The [Islington Recovery Curriculum Recovery Curriculum](#) was co designed by New River College and the Council's School Improvement Team to support schools and pupils on the return to face to face education as a result of national lockdowns.

A bank of resources was created by officers across the Council including Cultural Enrichment, World of Work, Music Education, Early Years, School Improvement and Health and Well Being



Teams to support the mental health and well-being of children and families. These resources were created weekly and focussed on physical and outdoor activities to support children's return to

school following the first national lockdown. The resources can be found at <https://www.islingtoncs.org/home-learning>

Additional resources were created to support transition of Y6 to secondary school. These resources were available for families and schools in order to support those pupils in Y6 who had been most affected by the first national lockdown. These resources can be located [here](#). All resources were supported and underpinned by the Islington Recovery Curriculum

Resources were also created for families to access during the summer holidays in 2020. These resources supported children and young people engage with a range of activities that centred on mental health and wellbeing.

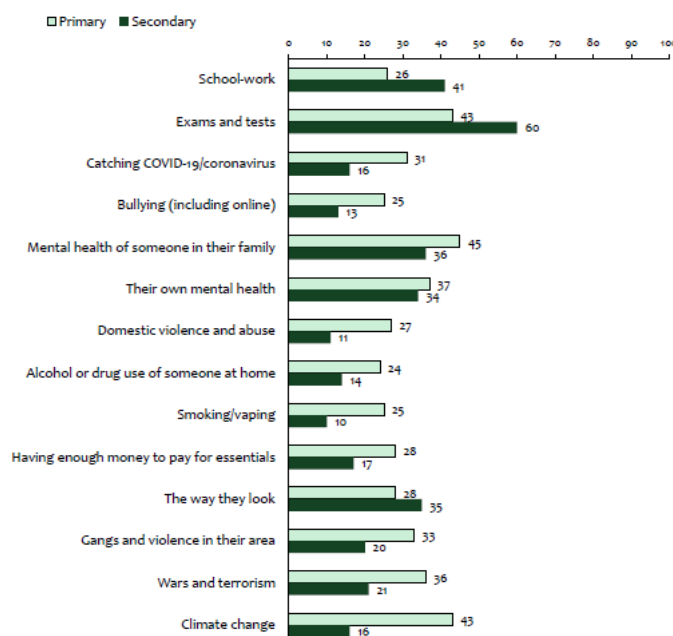
The mental health and wellbeing in schools' group, established early in the pandemic, has continued to support schools by developing, curating and sharing appropriate guidance and resources, as well as keeping schools up to date with service changes and offers. The group has also led on the delivery of the 2021/22 Wellbeing for Education Recovery grant from the DfE.

Resources and training were shared with schools via Schools Bulletin, posted on Islington CS and referenced to at Head Teacher, Governor meetings, as well as through CPD events for all Islington teachers.

These resources were particularly supportive during the first national lockdown, but guidance changed in January 2021 and schools were required to provide learning linked to the national curriculum.

In terms of impact, a survey by the Health and Well Being team was undertaken using a sample of Islington primary pupils aged 9 to 11 and secondary pupils aged 12 to 15 in autumn 2021 and spring 2022. The survey was commissioned by the Islington Public Health Team. A total of 2799 pupils took part, in 25 primary and 9 secondary school settings in Islington.

Mental Health and well-being was a key component of the survey. 90% of primary and 85% of secondary pupils responded that they worry about at least one of the issues listed 'quite a lot' or 'a lot'; 33% said they worry about more than 5 of them. In most cases, primary pupils report more worrying than secondary pupils do. Girls report more worrying than do boys. Worries 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' included:



Since 2017, there is an increase in pupils not sharing concerns, with 40% of boys and 47% of girls in primary school keeping worries to themselves compared to 26% of boys and 30% of girls in 2017. This is also reflected in secondary, where 60% of boys and 70% of girls said the same compared to 42% of boys and 51% of girls in 2017.

The Health and Well Being Team are now working with each individual school to develop an action plan to respond to the survey completed by pupils in their school. The full report will be shared with all Islington Head Teachers.

The Schools Well Being Service continues to provide support and are in schools – South and North Teams are currently in place and the Central Team will be established shortly.

All schools and settings are now required to have a dedicated Senior Mental Health led on the School Leadership Team. Islington Health and Well Being Team run an extensive training programme to support the implementation of this statutory requirement. The DfE will be undertaken a review of the Islington training offer later in the year as part of their Quality Assurance processes.

Cross council working with Fairer Together (Early Intervention and Prevention) and Learning and Culture continues at pace to review targeted services to support children, young people and their families so that the right support is in place following absence from school. The DfE has recently provided update guidance for local authorities and schools on attendance and these expectations require council services to work more closely together, including work with schools. An pilot Attendance Programme will commence shortly in the South of the borough. The impact of this will be reported through the Education Board.

4.6 Recommendation 6: The council should highlight its support services for teaching and support staff who may be suffering PTSD because of bereavement for colleagues and/or family.

Response:

At the start of the pandemic the Schools HR team, School Improvement team and Education Psychology Service reviewed the Schools Guidance on Bereavement and updated this to reflect the impact of the pandemic. The updated guidance was circulated to schools, together with useful booklets and guidance from specialist bereavement organisations and specific Covid-19 guidance. Feedback from those accessing this information was positive.

All schools had access to the Employment Assistance Programme offered by the Council. The programme provides free counselling and other support for school staff, and arrangements for additional bespoke support could also be made through the service.

The Educational Psychology Service in Islington also offer crisis response to any school experiencing a critical incident, including bereavement. Public Health also provided training in bereavement awareness delivered by Cruse bereavement Support.

In October 2020 we facilitated a workshop with Headteachers to consider the challenges of leadership in 2020 and how to move forward from a position of strength by recognising the potential to work in different ways. The workshop focussed on Compassionate Leadership as a potentially helpful model.

In January 2021, we were also able to make a local case for the prioritisation of vaccinations for special school staff, as our special schools remained fully open, social distancing measures were

difficult to put in place and most staff were involved in providing health and social care. By the end of January, 75% of special school staff had received their first job. Our special schools described

this as 'a game changer' in terms of providing additional reassurance to their communities and enabling them to keep fully operational.

Going forward all schools will be required to appoint/nominate a Senior Mental Health lead who is part of the senior leadership team in schools. Training to support this new role is being offered by the Islington Health and Well Being Team.

4.7 Recommendation 7: A range of witnesses identified the importance of parks and playgrounds in maintaining well-being during lockdown periods. The council should identify capital funding opportunities to invest in any children's play areas in parks or adventure playgrounds that still need upgrading. The parks team should develop a comprehensive map of all those areas, listing their distinctive features and facilities to raise awareness by schools and parents/carers to widen usage.

Response:

Throughout the pandemic, Islington kept under review the position on access to parks so that as soon as national Covid guidance and evidence of risk and conditions permitted safe access, communities were able to access open spaces to mitigate the risk of mental health issues exacerbated by isolation and to promote play and physical activity.

[The Parks Service](#) have a number of funded projects that are delivering play improvements for young people in the borough. The following improvements have been completed or are currently in progress:

The following projects have now been completed:

- Radnor Street Gardens
- King Square Gardens
- Replacement Water Play features at Whittington Park, Highbury Fields and Barnard Park

Further playgrounds are scheduled for improvement. The service is also working with the Islington Communications Team as part of the Parks for Health Programme to make significant improvements to how the facilities in our parks are communicated and how they can benefit children's and all residents' health and wellbeing. Through our collaboration with Bright Start and The Garden Classroom, more activities and programmes for young people are being hosted in our parks which bring young people into those spaces and encourages them to use them more personal lives.

The use of the PHE Better Mental Health Fund (see response to recommendation 1) in Islington has also had a focus on access to green space and collaborative working between Bright start, Bright Futures and our parks team. This included a programme of activity (including outdoor learning) for 0-5s, for 5-19s, as well as intergenerational events (including the activities detailed above). In addition, funds supported increased weekend access to adventure playgrounds for families in overcrowded households, and to schools during the school day. The Acorn club was also supported through this fund to provide 2 weekly holiday programmes for disadvantaged young people to connect with nature.

Learning and pedagogy:

4.8 Recommendation 8: In tandem with schools and supplementary schools, Islington Council should continue to source additional devices, dongles, SIM cards etc. from a range of donors and charitable organisations to safeguard provision across the board and ensure

that every child and young person is prepared for lockdown periods over the next year and beyond.

Response:

Between May 2020 and April 2021 over 7000 devices were distributed to Islington children, through working in partnership with charitable organisations and through the provision of devices by the Department for Education (DfE). Work was carried out during this period with schools and council services to establish how many devices were needed to ensure all children had access to a device. Internet connectivity increased during this period with the provision of SIM cards and Wi-Fi dongles from different providers.

Due to the changes implemented in the 2nd lockdown, schools are now well resourced with digital devices. When a school now needs to temporarily close due to health and safety issues, pupils are well supported to move directly to home learning.

The Islington Council manifesto statement made a commitment to “ensure every child has access to a laptop or tablet when they move into year 7”. The Learning and Culture team are working with council members to implement this. All secondary and special schools have been surveyed and provided numbers of digital devices they require. Survey results indicate that schools require a total of 623 devices. Funding has been secured from a charity and additional funding has been provided by the Learning and Culture Directorate and Pupil Services.

If an Islington resident pupil in Year 7 attends a secondary school in a neighbouring borough and they are eligible for Free School Meals, parents and carers will be able to make an online application similar to the Uniform Grant system that is currently available on the council website.

4.9 Recommendation 9: The council should support schools to gain further understanding of effective learning platforms through undertaking additional research and obtaining best practice models. Officers should also provide better guidance on GDPR aspects of remote learning.

Response:

School led network arrangements were in place during the pandemic to share good practice and put in place CPD opportunities to upskill staff. This was supported by the School Improvement service, e.g., through provision of a model remote model learning policy. In addition to this, The London Grid for Learning ICT Acceptable Use Agreement was updated to reflect the implications of remote learning.

Following the return of schools in March 2021, the DfE requested all schools review and update their remote learning provision. While not a statutory requirement, schools were encouraged to undertake this evaluation so that they were better prepared should the need arise again. Some of our primary schools participated in the Plan London Evidence-based research project working with School Improvement and EYFS teams, LGFL and the DfE Technology Demonstrator Team to produce a best practice policy and guidance for teaching and learning to support subject leaders in schools.

A School Teaching and Learning Policy and planning guidance was updated to include outcomes from <https://sites.google.com/leoacademytrust.co.uk/remoteteachinglegacy/home> and updated safeguarding guidance for staff and parents <https://www.lgfl.net/online-safety/default.aspx>

The survey undertaken by Health and Well Being team referred to above also gathered responses on internet safety. Results from the survey indicate:

- 92% of primary and 84% of secondary pupils have been told how to stay safe online in the past year (and 80% and 65% respectively follow this advice usually or always).
- About half of primary parents know what their children are doing online all the time; this was true of 17% of parents of secondary pupils.
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- 12% (7% in 2017) of primary and 16% (19% in 2017) of secondary pupils had been asked to meet with someone they'd first met online.
- 11% (5% in 2017) of primary pupils said that, in the last year, they have sent personal information or images to someone which they then wished they hadn't; 19% (11% in 2017) of secondary pupils said the same.
- 34% of primary and 33% of secondary pupils said they have viewed a message or picture in the last year that scared them or made them upset. When they received something nasty, 19% of primary pupils and 21% of secondary pupils deleted it without showing anyone.
- 12% of secondary pupils have been sent a violent photo, video or livestream; 6% have been sent links to extremist views or organisations.

Work in this area continues through the Islington Computing Service available to all schools. Islington's Primary Computing team has worked extensively with a group of London LAs to develop a [comprehensive set of resources](#) including online safety policies shared at London Grid for Learning (LGfL). These include templates for E-safety policy and Acceptable use Agreements for children, parents and staff.

The importance of online safety remains a priority. Pupils should be made aware that they need to always follow the Online Safety rules, both in and out of school.

Online safety has been incorporated into the Islington Computing Curriculum Map and can be supported by videos developed by some of the National organisations.

4.10 Recommendation 10: In order to encourage more primary age children to engage positively with remote learning, Islington Council should provide training for teachers on how to deliver live interactive lessons as part of its CPD programme. Supplementary school and community organisation teaching staff should also be able to access training.

Response:

Schools supported each other through informal network meetings to agree good practice for sessions with Primary aged children. Schools considered timetabling arrangements so that all pupils had the opportunity to access live interactive lessons. In many situations this proved challenging particularly for those families that were trying to support more than one child. Feedback from schools indicated that they prioritised daily face to face registration at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day as well as online assemblies. This enabled children and young people to see themselves as a community despite the lockdown restrictions that were in place.

During the summer term 2021, 10 schools (primary and secondary) met with School Improvement to review the impact of delivering live interactive lessons. All schools who responded highlighted that the response to moving to remote learning required significant CPD at pace to meet the needs of learners. When pupils were interviewed, they indicated that they preferred a diet of live and recorded sessions to support them during extended periods of lockdown. Many pupils felt that watching recorded sessions supported them better so that they could practice and understand more complex learning, to then apply the learning to independent tasks set by their teachers.

Schools continue to support each other. Decisions regarding the purpose and benefits of live or recorded learning rest with the individual schools as they respond to the needs of their local community. Schools have highlighted that the move to remote learning required significant CPD at pace to meet the needs of learners. Pupil surveys in schools indicate that they prefer a diet of live

and recorded sessions to support them. Many pupils felt that watching recorded sessions supported them better so that they could practice and understand more complex learning, in order to then apply the learning to independent tasks set by their teachers.

4.11 Recommendation 11: The council should provide support for parents/carers who find it difficult to help their children with online learning, especially those who have English as a

Second Language (ESOL) or have barriers to literacy. This support should cover IT training and basic English and maths.

Response:

Support for parents and carers with English as a second language is promoted on the [Islington Council website](#) signposting a range of support to learn English.

[Islington Adult Community Learning \(IACL\)](#) provides a range of resources to support parents and carers through the Covid-19 pandemic with an exciting skills and employment training offer that is free for Islington residents. This includes the following:



Digital Skills
10 courses available

Need to learn about emails or the internet? Our computer classes takes you on your first steps in a supportive and friendly environment.



English
2 courses available

Range of courses, starting from Entry level 1 right up to level 2 that will help you along your journey towards Functional Skills L2 English, further education and employment.



English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
2 courses available

Designed for those whose first language is not English. Classes are run in a variety of venues in Islington, starting in September, January and April, and offered at pre-entry to level 1.



Family Learning
5 courses available

We run a range of programmes supporting parents, carers and children to learn in fun and safe environments. Some of our courses are accredited but most are just for the joy of learning and to help families grow and enjoy their lives together. We run courses in children's centres, schools, parks and community venues all over Islington.



Maths
2 courses available

Range of Maths courses, starting from Entry level 3 right up to level 2, which will help you along your journey towards Functional Skills L2 Maths, further education and employment.

The ACL service enrolled 296 parents of children aged 0-18 over the Autumn term 21/22. This represents an increase of approximately 25%, or 64 learners, when compared to the same period last year. The lifting of social restrictions enabling Family Learning provision that traditionally attracts parents has been a major factor in this increase. In addition, as ways of working revert to more typical models, schools are more open to having family learning, with Family Language sessions taking place at Drayton Park and New North Academy are planned; ESOL classes at Hungerford and family learning reading at Ambler Children's Centre.

The number of learners who have enrolled on ESOL and English classes have also increased, with the number of learners at this point in the year above this time last year. The service delivers face-to-face initial assessments.

The Council's Adult Community Learning Service has been supporting the Afghan and Ukrainian refugee parents with language classes. In addition, a wider need was highlighted by staff from Hungerford School, which led to the service offering basic ESOL classes for parents there.

4.12 Recommendation 12: Where there continues to be a lack of devices for each individual pupil, or for vulnerable or SEND children and young people who find remote learning especially challenging, paper packs should continue to be provided by the council and schools. Consideration should also be given to those early years children unable to attend centres during lockdown.

Early Years settings and schools reported that they hand delivered books or other learning materials directly to families where they were aware that they wouldn't be able to access these remotely.

[During the first national lockdown](#), the School Improvement Service supported schools to provide [hard copies for learning](#). These hard copies focussed primarily on English and Maths from Reception to Year 6. Approximately 8,000 learning packs were distributed by the School Improvement Service during the first lockdown. This was then moved online but schools were able to print and share hard packs where required. This was further developed in creating the [Islington CS Home Learning Page](#). As a result, schools were then able to access a bank of resources that extended beyond [English and Maths](#) that they could download and print for their individual communities. Feedback from schools through network meetings was positive and it helped school leaders respond to the individual needs of families.

Through our SEND Parent/Carers Forum, we were able to identify families most at risk of being overwhelmed by the immediate practicalities of family management during lockdown (e.g., home schooling, basics such as shopping and obtaining medical supplies, digital access). Food parcel delivery was immediately set up for 24 identified families, and the delivery of specially adapted iPads for 18 families with no access to a device or the internet.

'Arsenal in the Community' also offered a loan of iPads from their Hub (temporarily closed due to COVID) so that we were able to get devices to a further 16 families attending out-of-borough provision unable to open. At the same time, we worked at pace to assess need across the borough, develop a digital access strategy and roll out equipment through our schools, including special schools. By November 2020, all children attending our special schools and PRU had a suitable personal device and access to the internet.

There were some 'silver linings' however:

'I have always used technology to communicate with people. It is difficult for me to use a phone so I prefer to FaceTime people. I like to do this a lot! I have done work experience before but I use a manual wheelchair mostly and it is difficult for me to get around independently. The pandemic has meant that everyone else has learned to use FaceTime. I can FaceTime them and we can be social. All my friends now use FaceTime and have new iPads also I can see them more often. The same with my teachers, TAs and other people that work with me. I like doing remote learning because I already have the technology skills. It is like I am the expert for once! And as for getting a job, the whole world has had a taste of home working, so maybe will be able to see how useful I can be in the workplace, even if my disability makes getting into place tricky.'

A quote from one of our post 19 SEND students

Funding

4.13 Recommendation 13: The Leader and council should continue to campaign vigorously for significantly more funding from the Government to:

- **Support schools and settings in providing Covid-related safe environments and targeted learning help to narrow the widening attainment gaps.**
- **With its partners in the north Central London Clinical Commissioning Group (NCLCCG), extend council services for mental health and well-being both for parents/carers and children and young people.**
- **Underpin sustainability for early years and Bright Start provision where working from home during lockdown and increased loss of employment threaten the viability of many settings and services.**
- **Target financial and in-kind support for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and families including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and White British ones.**

Response:

The Leader and council secured Central London Forward funding to deliver the COVID response Connected Communities programme. Officers have continued to support the Leader and the council to campaign for increased funding. This has included meeting regularly with the regional DfE advisers to escalate local issues.

Support to schools and settings to provide COVID related safe environments was provided by:

- Coordination with the BECC, officers were able to ensure that there was sufficient PPE available to schools and settings.
- Additional digital devices were readily available and co-ordinated by officers to support schools to provide targeted resources to the most vulnerable (see Recommendation 8)

- Officers supported schools to ensure that the national tutoring programmes were swiftly implemented and supported council to lobby the Department of Education for additional funding for the National Tutoring Programme which influenced the decision by the DfE to allow schools to employ tutors directly through the school rather than through teaching agencies and funding for the National Tutoring Programme increased.
- Coordinating a system wide response to the delivery of meal vouchers/food parcels to support families during the pandemic
- Coordinated the borough wide implementation of the Holiday and Food programme during the Easter, Summer and Winter holidays of 2021 and the continuation of this programme
- The implementation of the borough wide Safer Streets Campaign that supported schools and settings to be a safer/quieter place for dropping off and collecting pupils throughout the pandemic

Support to extend council services for mental health and well-being both for parents/carers and children and young people was provided by:

- An undertaking by NCL to put in place an immediate resource to reduce wait times for mental health assessments with a longer-term plan to reduce wait times to 18 weeks (NICE guidelines) by 2023. See recommendation 1.
- Additional funding was secured for a project focussing on young Black Men and Mental Health to be delivered through schools and the community

Support to underpin sustainability for early years and Bright Start provision where working from home during lockdown and increased loss of employment threaten the viability of many settings and services was provided by:

- Early years providers, including childminders, were supported to apply for the Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG), Covid funds distributed by the Council for loss of income. £1,063,300 was distributed as a main grant and top up grant to 114 providers in total (46 private, voluntary and independent nurseries and 68 childminders).
- Providers were also encouraged and signposted to attend sustainability and business workshops run by external sector specific organisations
- Officers reported concerns from Early Years providers directly to the DfE

Financial and in-kind support for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and families including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and White British ones was provided through:

- We are Islington – Islington response to food and welfare needs in the borough
- Bright Start Services providing food parcels and period products to families involved with family support and children social care services

- With support of council services, officers worked closely with Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools and other voluntary organisations to engage with families and young people
- An extensive Mother Tongue Supplementary School summer programme was made available during summer 2021
- Additional reading resources were provided to all Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools to support children and young people to have access to high quality texts during lockdown periods
- Through the coordination support provided by the Islington Library Resource Centre, all schools received additional reading boxes to support the most vulnerable families in primary schools
- Through the Richard Reeves Foundation additional support was provided to schools and pupils in primary schools to participate in the Year 5 catch up programme, written and prepared by School Improvement

Despite reduced funding from Central Government over the last 12 years, the Council has continued to protect vital youth services in the borough. The Leader and the Council have

campaigning for increased Government funding for Council services for many years, including passing a motion at Full Council in December 2021. We commit to continuing to campaign for better funding for local government, to support the council in making Islington a more equal place.

Communications:

- 4.14 Recommendation 14: The number of U-turns by the Government in relation to lockdown, examinations and provision of digital devices has undermined trust. The council, schools and governing bodies should endeavour to anticipate developments e.g. reduced capacity during holiday periods to support children and young people and their families and communicate these changes to their audiences as early and clearly as is possible in order to reduce anxiety.**

Response:

Islington Council, schools and settings have worked collaboratively and swiftly to communicate changes to guidance throughout the various lockdowns, examinations and the provision of digital devices. Weekly meetings with education leaders (including governors) across Islington, provided the opportunity to hear concerns and to facilitate a rapid response. This included such matters as food vouchers, digital devices, summer holiday programmes, supporting parents and various voluntary sector groups so that solutions to concerns and issues were resolved quickly.

Regular meetings with the Department of Education (DfE) were an opportunity for Officers to provide feedback on changing guidance and when necessary, escalate emerging issues.

Developments post-COVID:

- 4.15 Recommendation 15: The experience of life in a pandemic over the past year has highlighted the urgent need for a fundamental re-appraisal of the current education system. Islington Council and its schools should collaborate with academic institutions, local authorities and national organisations such as trades unions to develop alternative models for the future of our communities.**

Response:

The pandemic has helped to strengthen the relationships with schools, and this has helped shape our new approach. This has included the development and approval of an Education Plan and the priorities within it. These priorities will address the inequity of experience for vulnerable children and young people that has been exacerbated during the pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted

the need for collaboration and the strength of Local Authority Support. An Education Board is being established to drive the delivery of the Education Strategy through collaboration with all schools and settings.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial implications:

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

The projects to deliver play improvements for young people in the borough under recommendation 7 are part of the Council's funded capital programme across both the Greenspace and Leisure Service and the Council's Adventure Play Service. £4m of capital investment is planned for the parks estate over the next two years, £700k is being spent on Martin Luther King and Cornwallis Adventure Playgrounds by Summer 2022, with further investment planned in Hayward Adventure Playground. The adventure play facilities at Toffee Park will also benefit from the wider refurbishment of facilities at Toffee Park / Radnor Gardens. This scheme has an overall capital budget of £3m.

There has been significant spend during the pandemic to support children and families in relation to attainment, safeguarding, equalities, youth safety and justice. This includes, but is not limited to:

	2020/21 Spend £k	2021/22 Estimate £k	Total £k
Provision of home learning packs, laptops and reading support to for pupils while they were undertaking schooling from home.	156	54	210
Provision of free school meals during school holidays when the government did not provide support	166	0	166
Support to carers to meet the increased cost of caring for young people while they were at home	162	0	162
Additional costs in relation to safeguarding young people due to the pandemic	312	0	312
Underwriting net loss of income in Children's Centres and holiday childcare provision due to the pandemic	1,559	565	2,124
Additional support to maintain the universal youth offer by offsetting income pressures due to the pandemic	325	355	680
Additional support to Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools over the summer	15	0	15
Additional cleaning in BSF schools	83	84	167
Total	2,778	1,058	3,868

In addition the Council received:

The Covid Winter Grant of £1.182m for the period 1 December 2020 to 16 April 2021 which enabled local authorities to provide support households experiencing or at risk of experiencing poverty during the pandemic. This included the provision of free school meals during the school holidays. 80% of the grant was ring-fenced for households with children.

The Covid Local Support Grant of £1.032m for the period 17 April to 20 June 2021 to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.

These grants have now been superseded by the Household Support Fund of £2.218m to support households who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills meet other essential living costs or housing costs. This grant is for the period 6 October 22021 to 31 March 2022.

The Public Health England (PHE) Better Mental Health Fund is focussed on the mental health impacts of COVID 19, and ensuring that these are rapidly addressed. Islington received a grant of £347k to be spent in 2021/22.

Schools have received the following funding from the government to support them with covid recovery:

Grant	2020/21 £k	2021/22 £k	Total £k
Catch-up funding	1,058	755	1,813
National Tutoring Programme – Academic Mentors	24	83	107
School-led tutoring grant	0	765	765
Recovery premium	0	814	814
	1,081	2,417	3,498

Further funding for schools has been committed to by the DfE for future years – estimated allocations are below:

Grant – estimated allocations	2022/23 £k	2023/24 £k	2024/25 £k
School-led tutoring grant	1,249	642	146
Recovery premium	1,918	1,105	0
	3,167	1,747	146

6.2 Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report

6.3 Environmental Implications

The actions proposed in this report do not have any environmental implications beyond those associated with standard office usage and are unlikely to significantly change the existing impacts of the services.

6.4 Resident Impact Assessment

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

7 Reason for recommendations

This report details the response to recommendations from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Executive member for Children, Young People and Families Date

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