

Appendix 2 – Response to Recommendations

Recommendations to the Director of Children and Families

The formal response of the Director of Children and Families to the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Inquiry into tackling the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on children and families is set out below.

Recovering from lost learning	Work with senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers to identify pupils' learning gaps and new starting points, and how they can best respond to that in their curriculum planning and delivery.
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Identifying pupils' learning gaps following Covid-19 school closures is one of the top priorities for schools. Teachers need to use assessment to ascertain what students have, or have not, learnt and make changes to curriculum design and subsequent teaching as a result.

Assessment is not simply taking a test. It is the day-by-day, routine and rigorous checking for understanding of everyone in a class and the skilful diagnosis by a teaching professional of what barriers to learning students are experiencing.

Schools are already working hard to address this issue, but to support teachers and leaders in this, we have organised a conference to take place on 1st March which will focus on assessment for learning and responsive teaching. There will be a keynote presentation from Dylan Wiliam, based in the USA, who is one of the most eminent educationalists in the field of educational assessment.

Finding out what pupils know and can remember inevitably leads to changes in curriculum planning. Curriculum design has been a significant focus of work in the Learning Improvement Service. All LA maintained primary schools have been offered a curriculum review and all LA maintained secondaries have been given 4 days of adviser support, two days of which are dedicated to curriculum review.

Our secondary traded package, the Leading Learning Partnership (LLP), has focused uniquely on supporting the delivery of an exceptional curriculum leading to high quality teaching and learning for all students. Approximately 30 schools are signed up to the LLP and access the 13 subject networks as part of it.

In 2022-23, the work on curriculum development will continue but with an emphasis on building on previous learning at transition points. This will include, for example, secondary subject leaders developing a greater understanding of the primary curriculum and the learning gaps induced by the pandemic for primary aged children.

Maximising the use of Pupil Wellbeing Surveys	Actively promote the uptake of the My Health My School Pupil Surveys in schools and ensure that the directorate is considering the outcomes of the survey and refining its offer to schools to respond to them.
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The current completion rate for the My Health, My School (MHMS) Survey is 6133 children and young people, 68 Schools completed the survey in Leeds. The service has worked with schools/ settings to develop a school resource pack which is intended to support schools to analyse, and report on, the results of the My Health,

My School survey and provide practical support, tools and resources to identify key areas for development and action through the promotion of pupil voice. The resources support Pupil Voice Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and pupils to clearly identify key areas of strengths and weakness from the survey and develop appropriate interventions and action plans to tackle, and improve on, key findings.

The Health & Wellbeing Service chair the My Health My School Survey Steering Group, which currently has representation from services across the directorate and includes NHS and 3rd sectors partners. This group supports the following:

- promotion of the survey
- the analysis of the data
- establishment of baseline measures
- outcome measures and the 'so what?' question about the practice, provision and policies in place to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Examples of how the directorate has used the data and is responding to what children and young people are telling us, are as follows:

- Education Safeguarding Team: the data has been used to inform Leeds Safeguarding Children's Partnership Risk and Vulnerability group action plan on preventative curriculum messages children in Leeds are receiving. The survey is also included in the ARM safeguarding audit for with schools.
- Public Health: Undertook analysis of the SEMH section of 'My Health, My School' survey of schools in the Inner South to contribute to the Health Needs Assessment for that area.
- Financial Inclusion Team: Data requested to evaluate problem gambling as an issue in young people, assessing how the survey results for gambling compares to other addictions and wider mental health issues. The data has been evaluated with colleagues in Public Health, with the aim of identifying gaps in service provision, developing new initiatives and strengthening policy development on gambling support services to children and young people. Findings and analysis were reported across Leeds City Council and External advice and support partners via the Problem Gambling Project Group and Child Gambling Steering Group.
- Lawnswood High School: Case Study was produced to demonstrate impact on reducing levels of perceived exam stress across key stage 4, with the following outcome "Students are now expressing reduced stress level or at least that they are now aware of how to identify symptoms and now know how to manage or deal with exam stress or anxiety. This was shown via student voice. Data from My Health, My School Survey states that we have had an impact of reducing exam stress by 10%. Student outcomes have increased which correlate to the reduction in stress levels".
- Health & Wellbeing Service: the survey data is used to inform the training programme for schools/settings.
- Current city-wide reviews: The Domestic, Violence and Abuse review has also been linked into the MHMS survey steering group to embed the perception data from children and young people and ensure that we are including their

experiences and perceptions into decision making. Also, the Child Friendly Leeds review of the 12 wishes is also using the survey data to inform the review.

Reading to learn

Work with schools to ensure that pupils receive good quality phonics teaching enabling them to become proficient readers, access the curriculum and read independently.

Many children's progress in early reading has been impacted by the lockdowns and disruption caused by the pandemic. [Researchers at the University of Leeds](#), tracking reception children from 10 schools in Leeds from the time of the first lockdown, found that 68% of the sample were not reading at the expected level for their age.

As a result, we have made early reading the first priority on The Refreshed 3As Plan. There are several key actions on the plan. Firstly, we have offered all Leeds primary schools a one day on-site reading deep dive review over the next two years. This is free to LA maintained schools and is a traded offer to academies. 84 deep dives have currently been booked. Consequently, the primary adviser team are on track to deliver the 100 reviews targeted by the end of the academic year.

We have developed a training offer for secondary settings to support staff working with pupils who struggle to read fluently. It is targeted particularly at pupils in KS3 who have age-appropriate decoding skills but who are experiencing difficulty acquiring full meaning and enjoyment from their reading. The offer was presented to secondary senior leaders on 9th February 2022, together with a session on disciplinary literacy, showcasing the work of a local school.

The 0-11 team has developed a series of courses and training opportunities to improve the teaching of phonics in primary schools across Leeds. These include Dedicated Phonics Teaching, as well as an 'on demand' offer for the same training but bespoke to the school. We also provide an offer for CPD on Phonics Leadership. In addition, our Year Group Training has a session on phonics for years 1, 2 and 3.

Furthermore, we have set up a literacy network that meets once a term and showcases good practice from around the city.

The SENIT team is offering all primary schools a 'Meeting the needs of children with SpLD and literacy difficulties' training session. 10 schools (*17 delegates*) accessed the training in November 2021. Unfortunately, the January training was cancelled due to Omicron as the session is delivered face to face, and e-Learning and Microsoft Teams delivery do not work well for this specific course. A further course will be held in March 2022 and it will be run again in the summer term. The target is for 40 schools to have accessed the training by July 2022, although staffing and Covid issues present barriers to achieving this number.

Guidance on how to read with your child is being put into a leaflet format to be distributed across the city, including in libraries, schools and early help hubs as well as being displayed on the Council website. We have held initial conversations with BookTrust about the possibility of creating a video clip on how to read to your child. We also intend to translate the leaflet into other languages.

SEND and vulnerable learners

Work with schools to identify and support pupils with special educational needs and those who are vulnerable due to their context.

The SEND and Inclusion Strategy is now being finalised. This follows extensive consultation with partners and stakeholders. The shared key values of Inclusion, Individualisation and Integrated practice were acknowledged. Six priorities for action to embed these values were identified: Early identification of need; workforce development; High quality plans to meet need; support for those in vulnerable contexts; continuum of provision; integrated working practices across services. A major driving force to address these priorities is the development of the Leeds SEND Practice Framework. The framework is being coproduced with SENCOs and will provide a “toolbox” to build capacity, skill, knowledge and good practice within schools to identify and meet need at the earliest stages. It will provide a graduated approach which will either reduce the need for statutory processes of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), (as needs will have been met) or support the identification of the need for a plan. It is proposed that a “transformation” team is set up within the Learning Inclusion Service to drive this agenda.

Reunion opportunities

Encourage schools to explore reunion opportunities for those pupils that had missed key events and celebrations due to the pandemic.

Young people due to take exams in summer 2020 who spoke to elected members have outlined the sense of loss they felt when school ended abruptly for them in March 2020. They were not able to take part in the wealth of events that schools normally facilitate at this time: leavers’ assemblies, proms, shirt signings and so on.

Addressing this remains problematic. Many of these young people have now moved on to other destinations and it is nearly two years since they left school. Whilst they regret the circumstances to the conclusion of their school journey, this is difficult for schools to resolve by putting on reunion events. Each school situation and circumstance is unique and so it would be problematic to suggest a universal approach to addressing this issue.

It is worth noting that schools made every effort at the time to address this, by holding virtual assemblies, creating year books and leavers’ sweatshirts. Discussions on this issue were held at bronze level meetings.

Unfortunately, school leaders and their staff remain under significant pressure due to the pandemic. There is still uncertainty whether they should organise leaving or reunion events and, in the case of the latter, they often do not have the capacity to do this. For this reason, it has not been appropriate to further explore reunion opportunities with school leaders for pupils who missed key leaving celebrations.

Responding to research findings surrounding the impact on Early Years.

Actively engage with Scrutiny as part of the directorate's review of the findings of ongoing national and local research projects on the impact on the early years' market and workforce with the aim of identifying appropriate actions to support the sector and local children.

The Covid and Childcare Study is exploring the impact of the pandemic on the early education and care system. It is funded by the Nuffield Foundation and is being undertaken by researchers from the Centre for Evidence and Implementation, University of East London, University College London, Frontier Economics, Coram Family and Childcare, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The study has involved a survey of English local authorities; qualitative research with parents, early education and care providers, local authority teams, employer bodies, and other stakeholders; and analysis of national childcare and employment data. A number of Leeds LA officers have contributed to the initial research and some continue to be involved in workshops looking at interpretation of the findings and the development of strategic recommendations.

The Covid and Childcare research report highlights the strain of financial viability across the childcare sector and the financial implications for the 28 Little Owls nurseries are significant. Whilst there has been a lower take up of full-time places, there does appear to be a turning of the curve in demand for places for babies which indicates more parents are returning to employment. Little Owls hold 20% of the market share in Leeds and support 70% of all the children with SEND. A robust marketing strategy has been developed to improve the market visibility in Leeds with an aim of working towards an average 95% occupancy against staffing in each of the 28 settings. As a result of the marketing strategies that have been implemented, the conversion rate for enquiries increased from 14% to 26% in 2021 and there has been an overall increase in fee payers by 39% in 2021/22 financial year.

Ofsted have resumed their day care inspections and 2 of the Little Owls settings have recently been inspected; both nurseries retained their Ofsted judgements which is a significant achievement given the pressures associated with the pandemic and knowing all 28 Little Owls settings are rated Good or Outstanding is a unique selling point within our marketing strategy.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the workforce; the recruitment and retention of staff within the childcare sector is a pressure both locally and nationally. The combination of Covid related as well as general absence along with a high vacancy factor has resulted in a fatigued workforce. A priority for the Little Owls provision is to promote the Leeds City Council Wellbeing offer across the workforce and this is incorporated within a wellbeing action plan which has been developed for the service. The Little Owls settings have a well-established apprenticeship programme in partnership with Leeds City College and we have gained approval to increase the childcare apprentice cohort positions from 24 to 55. A rolling recruitment process for qualified positions is also in place and the recruitment rate has increased by 25% in the last month; in addition, 4 employees have recently applied for internally advertised promotions and have been successful. This is welcomed by colleagues who see clear progression opportunities within the service. Further work is planned as we have secured a shop front (free of charge) within St John's shopping Centre where we will have a regular presence to recruit to our workforce. All of these things combined gives us reason to be more optimistic about the future.

The initial findings of the study have highlighted a range of ways that children have been affected by the pandemic and the changes in access to early years settings. The study identifies negative impacts upon children’s mental health and wellbeing, speech and language development, social development, behavioural issues and children’s physical development and motor skills. A significant concern raised by participants was that many children who were due to start school, were not ready for the next stage, as they had missed such a lot of their pre-school experience. The study identified that in many cases disadvantaged children had missed out on more learning opportunities that their peers, which may impact negatively upon the achievement gap.

The findings of the study reflect what we are also hearing in Leeds from our early years providers. We have maintained a regular dialogue with our early years providers throughout the pandemic and continue to engage through our early years bronze focus groups and all-provider Zoom meetings. This helps us to keep informed of the current issues and challenges impacting upon providers so that we can better support and advocate for them.

The NESTA Programme is an early years innovation initiative that the local authority will be involved in over the next few years. This will focus on a number of areas that have been highlighted in the study including developing the engagement of families in early years services and increasing take up, engagement and attendance of 2-year-old early education places.

As part of The Refreshed 3As Plan an early years transition programme is being developed that will be available free to all early years providers. This training programme will identify best practice for supporting children through transitions into settings and schools. It will include key elements identified in the study including the importance of a well-planned transition process, supporting children’s emotional wellbeing, relationships with parents and sharing key assessment information. A range of other training and support is also available to support settings around early language development, managing behaviour and children’s physical development.

Further stakeholder workshops for the Covid and Childcare Study will take place in February 2022. The Children’s Centre & Early Start Lead and the Early Years Learning Improvement Manager will both be involved in these workshops which will explore and discuss the key findings from policy, practice and research contexts, and also inform the interpretation and development of strategic recommendations.

Review of Early Help and Prevention.	Actively engage with Scrutiny as part of the ongoing review of early help and prevention resources and programmes.
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We recognise the key role Scrutiny Board plays regarding helping to shape and inform priorities to develop our Early Help offer to children, young people and their families. We therefore welcome this recommendation to actively engage with Scrutiny as part of the ongoing review of early help and prevention services.

At the previous Scrutiny Board the vital role of our Early Help Hubs was recognised. Since then, much work has taken place to explore how we can increase the total number of Hubs within the city and how we can transform them into Family Hubs in line with the DfE Family Hub Model Framework. It is our ambition to build on our current offer and bring together our existing multi-disciplinary Early Help Services,

Youth Services and the six core services outlined in the Best Start for Life Review report.

There have also been positive discussions between officers from Children & Families, City Development, Communities and Public Health to explore potential opportunities for increased co-location at other key delivery sites such as Community Hubs, Libraries and at our Children's Centres. An application has been submitted to the DfE Family Transformation Fund. If successful, this would provide additional resource to expediate our plans. However, if unsuccessful we are confident this can still be achieved over a longer period.

It has been noted that the number of Early Help registrations has reduced over the last year. To identify the reasons behind this, an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) workshop was facilitated in December 2021. The workshop was well attended by a diverse range of partners. Shared priorities and an action plan were developed as a result and a working group has been subsequently formed. The data and ideas formulated at the workshop are key to informing the next stage of the Early Help review and the proposed new delivery models for Family and Community Hubs. We are anticipating that initial proposals will be shared with the current Early Help workforce and their TU representatives in February 2022 and after that time we would welcome the opportunity to share these with Scrutiny Board.