

Overview & Scrutiny Report



REPORT TO :	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	14th July 2020
SUBJECT:	Children & Young People – Resetting the Education Service in Bury.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report is the latest in a series written to inform members of the work being undertaken to reset the education service in Bury.
- 1.2. The processes of resetting the Education Service, and recovering the learning, skills and life opportunities for our children and young people, sit **within the wider Bury Recovery Programme** Whilst some children have flourished during the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown, others including our most vulnerable children (those Children who have an allocated social worker, those children who are looked after by the local authority, those children in receipt of free school meals or in receipt of and EHCP) will have lost valuable learning and unless we focus sharply on their needs, will have significantly constrained life chances.
- 1.3. The report focusses on vulnerable young people in Bury; and within their family context. It highlights key issues and concerns which have been identified and it proposes strategies to secure safe school return. It identifies plans to recover well-being and lost educational opportunities: and it sets a strategic longer term agenda for our ambition that education in Bury should become; One of the Best, regionally and nationally.

2. Background

- 2.1. This report provides a further update on the progress being made during the Covid-19 pandemic to reset the education service.
- 2.2. The report reviews the latest national guidance on pupil return to school and proposes a local response to resetting the education.
- 2.3. The report highlights key issues and concerns which have been identified and it proposes mitigation to secure safe practices, whilst the service is being recovered

over the coming weeks and months.

3. Bury Context

- 3.1. We know from the detailed work of the Council vulnerable young people are very likely to experience significant challenges associated with some, or all of: family poverty, poor health and well-being, poor housing, poor employment prospects, a higher risk of domestic violence and abusive behaviour.
- 3.2. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will have exacerbated these life constraints. There will be: more poverty, significantly higher levels of debt, homelessness, unemployment and ill health (both physical and emotional).
- 3.3. The challenge then is to reset a meaningful and appropriate education agenda within a supportive wider community context. In this way children are supported, and their families are also assisted.
- 3.4. There is unanimity across the service, with our service partners, and with the unions and associations that a resolute focus on the needs of our most vulnerable should be the priority as we reset the service.
- 3.5. It is recognised that this work should sit within the wider GM emergent strategy for education; where Bury will be an active partner. We also recognise the support being provided to us from the region from both RSC and HMI; and nationally through the Covid-19 Catch Up package, and the National Tutoring Programme.
- 3.6. A separate report will detail the summer school activities programme.

4. Phase One: Preparing for Children to return to School: current activity.

- 4.1. Whilst schools in Bury have remained open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children, a substantial programme of preparation has taken place to anticipate the phased arrival of additional pupils.
- 4.2. The Council has had careful regard to all national guidance, including that relating to the return of key groups of children to school. A Council decision to modify government advice on return dates and to provide an additional safety margin, was strongly supported by schools, and parents. There were a small number of complaints.
- 4.3. The additional time gained in Bury through a carefully calibrated return to school has proved valuable in equipping schools with robust risk assessment procedures, based on the Bury Risk Assessment Guidance, a template to support local risk assessment, and a checklist, with support from the Council.
- 4.4. There continue to be daily briefings to schools, daily management planning meetings; weekly school cluster meetings, weekly meetings with unions and associations, and of the Head Teacher Advisory Group. Representative parent groups have been consulted with as have the RSC, the Diocesan Authorities, and regional bodies including the GM group and specialist groups.

5. The Current Position

- 5.1. Following the Government's guidance for schools to begin to reopen to a greater number of pupils, in specific year Groups, Bury schools continue to plan to accommodate an increased number of children returning to school. This will inevitably mean a balance between the need to see an increase in the number of vulnerable children, including those with education, health and care plans, and potentially an increase in demand for places for the children of key workers, with the ability to then accommodate specific year groups.
- 5.2. Each school's individual risk assessment determines: the capacity that can be accommodated and how this will be organised to ensure safe social distances and enable social bubbles to be created to avoid mixing cohorts unnecessarily, and also the timing by which this could be achieved.
- 5.3. We have seen that our Primary schools are now accommodating an increased number of children: At the end of May 2020, there were typically about 700 young people in school on a daily basis, from a total 4-16 cohort of 29,000. This equated to 75% children of key workers and 25% vulnerable children. By the second week in June 2020, as some schools started to open to wider cohorts, we saw the daily number increasing to 1,200. The majority of schools had reopened by 15 June 2020, and during last week there were approximately 2,700 children in school each day. The largest cohort of young people attending schools continues to be the children of key workers at just over 1,000. The number of vulnerable children attending continues to increase and has averaged 450 per day. In Primary schools, our attendance figures are approximately 180 Reception pupils, 120 year 1 pupils, and 400 year 6 pupils. There are currently up to 400 year 10 pupils attending our Secondary Schools
- 5.4. The aggregate total of pupils attending Bury schools on Tues 23 June 2020 is 3584; this marks a further growth in the returns..
- 5.5. There is no single admissions model across all schools, as different schools are able to accommodate different numbers, and combinations of pupil cohorts. This graduated safe approach reflects the work done on effective Risk Assessments for each establishment.
- 5.6. Secondary schools have re-opened to their year 10 cohort in a safe manner with effect from 15 June 2020 as originally planned Again the pattern of attendance is a reflection of individual Risk Assessments: of site, staff, and safe practice.
- 5.7. In order to evaluate the worth and impact of distance learning for Bury pupils, we are jointly commissioning a review of practice. This work will be done jointly by the Bury Teaching Schools Alliance with the support of the Local Authority.
- 5.8. Looking forward, we must now consider the extended period of time through to September 2020, during which the majority of both primary and secondary age pupils will have been absent from school, to ensure that they are effectively supported by their school, to access learning. We report separately on the summer school activity programmes which are planned.

6. Phase Two: Medium Term Recovery Work: for at least the next academic year.

- 6.1. The four main elements of this phase are:
 - i. School and setting based strategies for pupil well-being and recovery of

learning; each school, early years setting, locality hub and the PRU are developing its own approach to assessing the needs of all pupils, including identification of those who have become newly vulnerable. In responding to those needs, support is available through the Local Authority, Multi Academy Trusts and Dioceses. This will include support from a range of LA services across Education and Inclusion and links with health partners in addition to safeguarding.

- ii. Support from the Local Authority and the Bury Teaching Schools Alliance, with additional regional HMI support is focused on key priorities; three cross-service themes have been identified as being critical in resetting an effective service delivery. The three themes link to recovery learning with a focus on specific vulnerable groups (children who are transitioning from one education establishment to another, children with SEND, the newly vulnerable and children who have fallen further behind in their learning than their peers). The three themes are School Readiness, the recovery curriculum and strengthening the impact of support for SEND and inclusion. Up to the end of August 2020, HMI will support and challenge LA Officers in the implementation and evaluation of the LA's COVID-19 recovery plan.
- iii. The National COVID-19 Catch Up one-off funding grant, to primary and secondary schools, will be available during the next academic year to support 'catch up' due to lost teaching time. Headteachers will be able to use this funding flexibly against need however, there is an expectation that this will include one to one and small group tuition. The scheme recognises that all children and young people will have lost time in education as a result of the pandemic. This means that additional support can be provided both to disadvantaged pupils and more widely to address gaps in learning and so raise attainment.
- iv. Local deployment of the National Tutoring Programme. This innovative partnership with the Sutton Trust, the Education Endowment Foundation and other partners, offers access to high quality individual tuition for some of the most disadvantaged pupils through approved and accredited Coaches and Tutors. This is a centrally funded subsidised programme for the 2020/21 academic year with legacy activity in 2021/22.

6.2. We are not clear whether the proposed resources from these schemes may be available during the summer break to support activities. This opportunity has been raised with DFE.

7. Phase Three: The Strategic Reset; concurrent with phases one and two.

7.1. Whilst members are familiar with the original School Improvement Strategy for the Education Service in Bury; and will recall the steady progress being made in restoring our performance profile; the Covid-19 pandemic has paused that programme, and it has required us to reset our approach to securing robust improvement in pupil attainment and school performance within the overall imperatives of the Bury Recovery Plan.

7.2. Each of the four council strategic priorities: Budget, Transformation, Health and Social Care, and Business with Infrastructure now require us to re-set the parameters for effective and relevant education and training. This work has begun.

- 7.3. Just as each school and setting will need to reset its performance priorities; so too the Local Authority has begun the process of re-basing our performance profiles and our strategic targets. This work will need to be based on revised data to show the profile of our pupils and students across each age group, key learning stage, by ethnicity, by special need and to reflect disadvantage. The programme will inevitably take time as it needs to be progressed on the reassessment of each of our pupils and students in a new education setting with different learning parameters.
- 7.4. Recent government announcements are assuming that the service will receive its full complement of pupils and students from September 2020. Whilst this is a laudable aspiration, we will in Bury need to continue to admit pupils and students in a safe and planned manner; one which is compatible with our risk assessments, and which reflects the local reality of the continuing pandemic. Our local scenario planning will enable us to manage further spikes in local infections: however these will continue to disrupt the delivery of education and they will further impede our planning processes. We are taking action to recognise and to mitigate these.

8. Conclusion.

- 8.1. In summary, the schools and settings in Bury have and continue to remain open; Staff in the main, are well. Understandably, colleagues are feeling the strain; particularly where schools have remained open during the Easter and half-term breaks.
- 8.2. We have in place a range of re-setting strategies, and are developing others as the situation requires. There appears to be a substantial consensus that our local planning framework for re-setting education is sensible and appropriate.
- 8.3. The local incidence of Covid- 19 remains a cause for concern; and requires maximum vigilance, and dynamic risk assessment to reflect changing circumstances.
- The children of critical workers and vulnerable children continue to attend their local school or setting; and we are supporting a progressive and measured increase in their numbers.
 - Each school and setting has a robust risk assessment to support its professional decisions on receiving pupils, its site management, protection of staff and site users with a particular focus on shielding and the position of BAME staff who each require an individual risk assessment. There is a continuing focus on effective hygiene, and appropriate cleaning, and deep cleaning arrangements.
 - The Local Authority is receiving a copy of each risk assessment and is working with colleagues in Health and Safety, and with a group of heads, to audit these reports; to take learning from the audits and to reflect this back to the service.
 - Secondary Schools advise that the partial return of Year 10 pupils from the week beginning 15 June 2020 is taking place smoothly. There is use of rotas, and phased attendance, with bubbles to group pupils, and zones to control movement, where appropriate.
 - Primary Schools advise that they have begun to admit additional pupils in Years 6, with Reception and Year 1, with all schools having re-opened to additional cohorts by week beginning 22 June 2020. Again, there will be use of rotas, and phasing, with bubbles to group pupils and zones to control movement, where appropriate.

- Parents and Carers will continue to exercise their own judgement regarding attendance of their children: the attendance figures are growing steadily, as the service begins to settle into a rhythm; and confidence in our work develops.
- Pupils continue to attend the Pru and the specialist hubs.
- Children with more complex special educational needs continue to attend special schools commensurate with the shielding regimes which have been put in place, with the support of the health teams; this to protect our most clinically vulnerable of our pupils.
- Both our local colleges are admitting students; using appropriate risk assessments.
- Many of our schools have conducted parental surveys to both gauge parental opinion, and to seek to build confidence in the risk assessment arrangements which have been put in place. We have been right in anticipating that at least initially, and until confidence is restored, there are be more places available than pupils attending in a number of our schools.
- We continue to monitor the local impact of the government's five tests, the test and trace programme, the availability of PPE, and availability of local testing.
- The local situation remains dynamic: and, as we have seen in three recent cases, can change at short notice.
- Our plans for resetting the service are underway

9. Issues, Concerns and Mitigation

- 9.1. The decision of the Council to delay the return of additional pupils and to reset the education service in a careful measured manner has proved to be prudent. Subsequent government guidance has validated this decision.
- 9.2. The need now is to maintain our vigilance regarding health, safety and wellbeing; whilst supporting the appropriate return of additional pupils to their schools. Through daily and weekly monitoring with close communications with our key partners in education, we are maintaining a rigorous approach to pupil, staff and community safety.
- 9.3. It is evident that there is a robust, resilient and determined focus among educational professionals to meet this challenge, and to recover the service for our children and young people.
- 9.4. Trust and Confidence: parents, carers staff and other school users will understandably want to be assured that we have in place systematic and rigorous measures to ensure health, safety and well-being. We have embedded our responses to this challenge in the detailed Bury Children's Services Recovery Plan. In addition, we continue to monitor the Test and Trace initiative, the availability of PPE and testing, the incidence of local infections, to implement scenario planning against a Covid 19 spike; and to maintain relevant and rigorous Risk Assessments.
- 9.5. The three phase programme to support return, re-assessment and a refocus on key priorities is continuing. There is appropriate local, regional and national support being made available to complement our own work, and resources in Bury.
- 9.6. Local, Regional, and National Partnerships: these are continuing to develop and to provide support: to Bury, from Bury to the region, and across the key groups of our

vulnerable pupils and students.

- 9.7. Local Scenario Planning: is being rolled out against the eventuality of a Covid 19 spike in any area of the service. There is regular monitoring of local data trends, of PPE availability and supply, of testing, and of the Track and Trace initiative.
- 9.8. There is a robust, resilient and determined focus among educational professionals, and our service partners, to meet the continuing challenge of the pandemic, and to recover the service, within the strategic framework of the Bury Regeneration programme.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. There are no financial implications arising as a direct result on the contents of this report. All additional expenditure, incurred as a result of the Council and schools response to COVID-19 are being separately identified to enable the full cost of the Council's response to be calculated.

11. Legal Implications

- 11.1. There are no legal implications arising from the matters raised in this report

12. Associated Risks

- 12.1. The cost of the Covid 19 pandemic is to well-being, to attainment and financially. We believe that morale in the service remains good; and that there is substantial resilience to sustain the service reset and recovery. We recognise that the pandemic continues, and that action may be needed through scenario planning to control any further spike in the infection rates.

13. Conclusion

- 13.1. The education service reset is in progress. It is carefully planned, is based on strong partnership working, and there is a high degree of professional consensus on what needs to be done to secure the service and achieve recovery.
- 13.2. A substantial programme of work will be required if we are to secure the lost learning for many of our vulnerable children. In this recovery we have some additional resource and support; from HMI, the RSC, from central government, and within our local partnerships.
- 13.3. Our ambition to become an education service which is, 'One of the Best', remains an achievable goal.

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