

London Borough of Enfield

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date – 4th June, 2020

Subject: COVID19 & Schools
Cabinet Member: Councillor Rick Jewell

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

1. This information report provides details on how schools in the borough have responded to the lockdown caused by COVID19 and how schools are preparing for the proposed return to school for certain year groups from 1st June. The report also outlines the council's position following the government announcement about extending school opening on 28th May.
2. Primary schools have been asked to respond to a survey outlining their arrangements with about a third of schools proposing to return on 1st or 2nd June (based on current returns) with others returning on 8th June or later. Some schools have yet to decide. Schools are also proposing to open in different ways. Some are opening classes for Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 classes at the same time. Some schools are staggering the return of classes, some are operating a rota system whilst others are closing on Wednesdays for midweek cleaning. All maintained schools have completed risk assessments and are following government guidance as provided for example on cleaning.

Proposal(s)

3. The council will continue to work with all schools to support the re-opening of schools in a way that is safe and protects staff and pupils.

Reason for Proposal

4. The proposal is a key duty of the council to ensure that schools safely reopen to more pupils in a way that protects both staff and pupils.

Purpose of Report

5. This report provides information on how schools have responded to the COVID19 crisis and the plans that schools must respond to the government's proposals that primary schools should reopen from 1st June.

Relevance to the Council's Corporate Plan

6. Children and young people need to be in school to receive formal education to support their learning and achieve qualifications if it is deemed safe for them to do so.

Background

7. With the advent of the COVID19 crisis, schools were closed to most pupils from the middle of March. The exception to this has been to vulnerable pupils and to children from key worker families. Most staff members worked from home with children who were in school being looked after by teachers and support staff on a volunteer basis often using a rota system.
8. Senior local authority staff have been meeting with headteacher representatives on a weekly basis to discuss a range of issues raised by schools and advice provided by government. School opening and attendance is monitored daily by the local authority. There have been and continue to be weekly meetings with the Department for Education and more recently with the Regional Schools Commissioner. The Director of Education has been updating schools twice weekly and all updates from the Department for Education and local updates are published on the Enfield Hub website.
9. During this period, most schools in the borough have remained open. Some academy chains have created hub schools, but these haven't always proved popular with parents and children who prefer attending their own schools. Because of the low numbers of pupils attending schools, arrangements have been made between schools with for example one school closing and pupils attending a neighbouring school. Secondary schools have had low numbers attending partly due to distances that some children must travel to attend school.
10. To support children's learning at home, many schools have online learning platforms although how developed these are does vary considerably from school to school. The Enfield School Improvement Team have developed "Enfield Learns Together" which includes a range of learning opportunities. There are a range of online materials published which schools are using to support learning. To support the emotional and mental health needs of staff, parents and pupils, "Enfield Thrives Together" has been developed with a range of service providers
11. Most Special Schools have been open throughout the lockdown period although to far fewer pupils. Each pupil was risk assessed as to whether they should be in school or not although many parents made the decision to keep their children at home. There has been much positive feedback from parents on the support provided by schools to children with special needs and their families
12. Government guidance has prioritised the need for vulnerable pupils (that is Looked After Children, those on Child Protection Plans and Children in Need) to be in school with specific guidance issued to support this. In Enfield, the numbers of vulnerable children in school has continued to rise and is now at

about 23%. (much higher than the national average). All children with EHCPs will have been risk assessed by their schools and a template for this has been provided by the SEND team. Some aspects of the legal framework relating to SEND have been modified such as on meeting the requirements of an EHCP and on the timeframe for the assessment process.

13. The government has announced the intention that schools will open to specific year groups of pupils (Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6) from the 1st June (from 15th June for secondary schools for Year 10 and Year 12) subject to a final decision being made on 28th May. In preparation for this, all schools have been risk assessing this process and a guidance template has been provided to schools (see Appendix 1). All maintained schools have returned completed assessments to the Health & Safety Team to be reviewed.
14. A survey was sent to primary schools on 26th May to ascertain their plans for the possible reopening of schools next week to specific year groups. The returns received showed that 21 schools intended to open on 1st June and a further 9 on the 2nd June. Others said they would open later in the week whilst some are intending to open on the 8th June. Some schools had yet to make a decision. From the returns received, it was expected that nearly all primary schools would be open by 15th June unless government advice changes. Because of staffing considerations, parental response to the opening and school context (for example classroom size), schools are considering opening in different ways. Some schools are staggering their opening gradually introducing different year groups whilst others are operating a rota system. Some schools are closing midweek for cleaning or early on a Friday.
15. The local authority requests returns from schools each day providing information on whether they are open and how many children are attending. The Department for Education also requests this information. Not all schools make these returns as they are not obligatory. From the returns received at least 38 primary schools were open to the children of key workers and also to vulnerable pupils. At least 12 schools had opened to extended year groups with one school reporting over 100 pupils attending school. As noted in 3.8, it is expected that more schools will open to extended year groups this week. Five schools had staff training days on the Monday and are thus likely to open on the Tuesday. Some schools clearly did change their minds later last week and over the weekend over whether to open on 1st June.
16. The government have advised that secondary schools should be open to Year 10 and Year 12 pupils from 15th June for some face to face provision. Schools have been advised they have considerable flexibility in interpreting this which could range potentially from a one-off pastoral meeting with individual students to a return to subject class teaching (albeit in small groups). Each school will determine their own approach. Maintained schools will be expected to return their risk assessments to the local authority for review.
17. The government have also indicated that they would like all primary school pupils to return to school before the end of term subject to scientific advice

on COVID19. There is little further information on this currently, but it will present a considerable challenge for schools to manage in terms of the current COVID19 safety arrangements,

Main Considerations for the Council

18. One of the main considerations for the council is that schools, when they open to more pupils, are safe places for children and staff. Thus it is essential that proper risk assessments are carried out by the school. It is recognised that the decision to open rests with the headteacher of the school itself as this is an operational decision usually taken in consultation with the Chair of Governors. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services has written to the Secretary of State (Appendix 2) outlining Enfield Council's view.
19. A further concern is that some children will not have been in school for 6 months and there is evidence that this will disproportionately impact on children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. Some pupils do not have access to a laptop or computer or internet in their homes which means little if any learning is taking place. Some secondary headteachers have expressed considerable concern about this. The government have introduced a scheme called Computers for Schools for vulnerable pupils and for disadvantaged Year 10 pupils but these have yet to arrive in the borough. The concern is that some children's life chances could be seriously impacted on by their loss of learning.

Safeguarding Implications

20. This is an information report providing information on how schools are responding to the COVID19 crisis. The government's policy has been to encourage vulnerable pupils to attend school because of the potential safeguarding issues that may arise in their home environments. Social workers have been working with families and schools to encourage attendance and this is now at 23%. Families have often been fearful of sending their children back to school in the current context.

Public Health Implications

21. There are potential public health implications of children returning to school which have been considered by the government's expert SAGE group which has provided expert scientific advice.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

22. This is an information report so does not require an EIA

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

23. N/A

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

24. Opening schools to more pupils is an operational decision for headteachers in consultation with governing bodies. Without support, schools may not be able to open safely for all their pupils.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

25. Actions taken to support schools will be monitored on a weekly basis and more frequently as needed through meetings with headteacher representatives. Senior managers will overview communications, educational, social and emotional support, risk assessments, HR and other support provided to schools.

Financial Implications

26. There are no specific financial implications although schools have incurred additional costs due to COVID19 such as remaining open during school holidays. Some schools have lost monies due to having very little income from lettings.

Legal Implications

27. This is an information report so there are no specific legal implications

Report Author: Peter Nathan
Director of Education
peter.nathan@enfield.gov.uk
020 83795492

Date of report 4th June 2020

Appendices

Background Papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

Appendix 1 – Risk assessment template (schools opening to further year groups)

Appendix 2 – Letter sent to the Secretary of State for Education by Councillor Rick Jewell, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education & Protection.