

## Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Panel Briefing

<b>Date of meeting</b>	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021</u>
<b>To</b>	<u>Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Panel</u>
<b>Title</b>	<u>Supporting Schools</u>
<b>Project Sponsor</b>	<u>Peter Nathan, Director of Education</u>
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<b>Purpose of briefing</b>	This briefing provides an update on support provided to schools in Enfield by the Education Department and other council departments. Some services are at no cost to schools and some are traded.

## **Introduction**

Enfield Council provides a wide range of support to schools. Some of the support provided is statutory meeting legal requirements (the nature of these requirements varies between maintained schools and academy schools) whilst other services are traded. The most recent traded services brochure is attached to this report. This report will provide an update on the support provided to schools with particular reference to the period of the COVID19 pandemic.

## **Support to Schools**

i) A wide range of support is provided to schools covering all aspects of education. This ranges from the admissions process, attendance and exclusions, SEND, behaviour support, school improvement as well as support with school governance, personnel and legal services. Some services such as the support provided by the education psychology service (EPS) in term of the assessment process for Education, Health & Care plans are statutory. Other services such as that provided by schools' personnel are traded successfully with the majority of schools buying back the service. Maintained schools are entitled to receive support from the borough's school improvement service whereas academies can buy into this service or make their own arrangements.

ii) COVID19 has had an inevitable impact on some of the services provided to schools. In the first stage of the pandemic from March through to the end of the summer term, schools limited external visitors to school sites. This meant that the EPS, Behaviour support and school improvement advisers could not visit schools. Services like school swimming and PE support could not take place. In the autumn term after a staggered start to the school year, school visits by services began again especially those supporting vulnerable children and those with special needs. Specific visit protocols have been put in place to enable visits to take place although some school adviser meetings with senior staff have taken place on line. All schools have their own protocols which all Enfield staff follow when visiting schools.

iii) Because of the pandemic, many meetings moved online as did training events. For training and briefings this has meant a change in the nature of delivery but overall, there have been considerable advantages (despite some initial IT glitches). For example, in some training events held attendance levels reached a record high with hundreds of staff attending. Headteacher meetings have been very well attended too – it has been much easier for senior staff to attend as they do not have to leave school and there have been cost savings as venues do not have to be hired. Sourcing external speakers has become easier. For example, for some courses international speakers have provided some sessions without having to travel.

iv) The Enfield Education service has responded in a range of different ways to support schools during the pandemic. These have included the following:

- Ensuring a quick and effective communication flow of relevant information. This has taken place through the online platform “The Hub” which continues to provide updated COVID19 information including key documentation as a resource for schools. There have been weekly meetings between headteacher representatives and senior local authority officers since March and fortnightly meetings with education trade unions. Monthly headteacher briefings are being held and the Director of Education has been writing to schools once or twice a week with regular updates.
- The school improvement service developed “Enfield Learns Together” in the Summer term providing a range of learning activities for schools to use with pupils. In terms of professional development, three new long term courses have been developed and delivered online (Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021) focusing on “Recovery & Resilience”, “Digital Transformation” & “Unconscious Bias and Anti-Racism” (in response to Black Lives Matter). As noted earlier, attendance at these sessions has been high.
- The EPS has led an initiative called Enfield Thrives Together which has brought together a wide range of organisations providing mental health support to schools. This has included bringing KOOTH to borough schools which provides online mental health support to young people. The EPS was able to provide specific counselling support to the whole school community (staff, parents, young people) as requested as well as critical incident support when needed.
- For many other services such as in the special needs team, school place planning, admissions and behaviour support, business as usual support has continued particularly since September. Many processes have had to continue despite the pandemic and for example, some of the relaxation of rules regarding SEND have ended meaning a return to previous working patterns.

v) Schools have faced considerable pressures over the period of the pandemic, and this will continue over this spring term. There has been a high level of stress caused by the number of cases in schools and the need to react to them (acting as track and trace agents), the need to develop new ways of working and abide by safe COVID practices and the changing nature of guidance (often at late notice). Headteachers and their senior teams have had to work most weekends and evenings particularly as COVID19 does not work a 9 to 5 day. The local authority has been able to respond to this with a team of senior staff from education, schools’ personnel and public health being available to respond to queries and provide advice. The Health & Safety team provided a considerable amount of support and guidance with the development of detailed template risk assessments and individual staff risk assessments which have been essential in ensuring school safety. The regular dialogue with headteacher representatives and individual headteachers has meant that any issues raised by schools can be responded to and/or taken forward to weekly meetings with the DfE.

vi) Schools have received no additional funding through the DSG to cover COVID19 costs. They have, however, been able to claim some costs through the DfE such as for additional cleaning for the summer term and it is likely the same will be available for the autumn term. In some specific cases, schools will be able to claim staffing costs. Catch up funding has also been provided to support pupils who have missed large chunks of schooling. Secondary schools will be provided with some funding to pay for the mass testing scheme this term. There is no doubt that schools have had a range of additional costs and also many have lost a considerable amount of lettings income. This is likely to contribute to more schools moving close to or into deficit this year.

vii) Since September, schools have had to become used to bubbles of pupils and staff switching to home or remote learning. Support has been provided to schools on a national level providing Chrome books and dongles to those that need them, locally from the Education Services ICT team and also through schools working together to ensure that the best learning platforms are in place. A number of reports such as from the Education Endowment Foundation and from Ofsted have shown that there is a variation in provision and also in the engagement of pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. School staff consistently monitor pupils work when they are remote learning providing support as needed but feedback from headteachers indicates that some children do find this challenging. This is particularly true for younger children, vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs.

viii) As mentioned in vii) above, the government commissioned an organisation called Computercentre to provide laptops/chrome books and dongles to schools via local authorities in the summer term. Each local authority received a formula allocation which was to provide for vulnerable pupils and for disadvantaged pupils in exam year groups. There were some delays and logistical issues with this process although the equipment was eventually delivered to schools. This scheme was expanded in the autumn term to cover schools when bubbles were sent home or if a school had to close. Schools could order the laptops/chrome books directly but there have been logistical issues again with the supply of laptops and also schools receiving only a proportion of equipment requested. A further issue has been pupils actually being able to access the internet to learn (broadband width can also be a difficulty).

### **Update – January 2021**

As committee members will be aware, this term has started in a unique way. Primary school pupils will not be in school for at least two weeks and will be learning remotely (apart from vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers). Secondary pupils will not be in school for the first week of term (apart from vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers). In the second week of term, pupils taking exams will return to school and then in the third week of term, it is expected all other pupils will return. Secondary schools will be setting up testing centres in their schools during the first week of term to test staff on a regular basis as well as pupils when this is needed. All

special schools and alternative provision are expected to be back in school as normal from the first day of term, Most of these schools, however, will have a staggered start to term due to staff shortages, the need to set up testing facilities (secondary) or due to the vulnerabilities of pupils and their families.

A meeting was held with headteacher representatives before the start of term and a headteacher briefing was held on January 6<sup>th</sup> to discuss key questions and to ensure all headteachers were up to speed with new developments and the local situation with regard to testing and vaccinations.