

COUNCIL: 21 OCTOBER 2021

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS STATEMENT

Covid-19 Update for Schools

Since returning to school for the new academic year, Covid-19 case numbers have continued to rise in both pupils and staff. To reflect this position of increasing cases, the risk level was raised at the start of this month to a high level for all Cardiff schools, alongside the reinforcement of mitigations including the consistent use of face coverings for staff, parents and visitors and the twice-weekly use of Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing. There has been a high take-up of LFD testing, with over 7,000 tests undertaken in the first week of October 2021.

In addition to these mitigations, being at a high risk level allows schools to put in place a wider range of additional mitigations. Advice on these wider mitigations is provided in the Local Authority guidance document on Addition: Mitigations to respond to local contexts. Daily and weekly case numbers are recorded and, where there are 10 or more cases in an educational setting, this is discussed at regional Incident Management Team (IMT) meetings and additional health and safety support is allocated to the school.

Due to staffing issues related to Covid and the lack of availability of supply staff, there have been cases where schools have had to close classes. Local councillors are being notified of these class closures when they occur. Since the start of the autumn term, the Schools Meals Team has also been experiencing the same challenges as those currently facing the hospitality industry, which include:

- Increasing staff absences due to Covid or Covid-related issues;
- Food supply and food delivery challenges, and;
- Kitchen equipment suppliers being impacted by global supply chain delays, together with driver and fuel supply issues.

These challenges are beginning to have an increasing impact on the provision of school meals in some schools in Cardiff. This includes a reduction in menu options or, in some cases, the provision of a grab bag. In a small number of schools, staff absence rates among kitchen staff have resulted in the temporary cessation of meal provision and pupils eligible for Free School Meals receiving a supermarket voucher.

Estyn Inspection

I can confirm that Cardiff Council will be subject to a full inspection by Estyn during the week commencing 29 November 2021, in accordance with the framework and guidance for the inspection of Local Government Education Services in Wales. A pre-inspection online survey by Estyn is currently live and is seeking the views of Cardiff residents, including parents, carers, learners or those work in or in partnership with education services. The findings will help Estyn inspectors to judge the effectiveness of education services in Cardiff. The survey will be live until 25 October 2021 and can be found at: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Caerdydd2021Cardiff/> The final inspection report is due to be published by Estyn on 9 February 2022.

School Admissions

Secondary school applications for Year 7 places in September 2022 opened on 27 September 2021 and will close on 22 November 2021. Families are being encouraged to apply on time in the first round and to use all five secondary school preferences. Offers will be issued on 1 March 2022.

Primary school applications for Reception places in September 2022 will open on 15 November 2021. Nursery applications will open in the New Year.

UNICEF Child Friendly City Accreditation

Cardiff Council entered into a partnership with UNICEF UK as part of the Child Friendly City programme in 2017. The Council then published its Child Friendly Cardiff Strategy on World Children's Day in 2018, which set out five clear goals to embed children's rights, with a particular focus on Family Services, Education and Health. After three years of delivering against these goals, UNICEF UK has indicated that Cardiff will be moving into the final assessment phase of the process in early 2022. Officers will now start to compile a suite of evidence across the programme to demonstrate the distance travelled, alongside work to ensure the meaningful involvement of children and young people in the assessment process. Cardiff is aiming to become the UK's first UNICEF Child Friendly City next year.

The Queen's Green Canopy

The Queen's Green Canopy is a unique initiative, which invites people and communities across the UK to 'Plant a Tree for the Jubilee' to mark Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 and 70 years of service. All schools are being encouraged to get involved with planting trees for the Platinum Jubilee and over 3 million saplings in tree packs are available on a first come, first served basis through the Woodland Trust's Free Trees for Schools and Communities scheme.

As part of this initiative, 70 Celebration Trees are also being gifted to selected primary schools in 69 cities across the UK, as well as to Crathie Primary School near Balmoral in Scotland, with the aim of highlighting the educational aspects of trees and the significance of giving young people access to nature. I was therefore pleased to attend a special ceremony recently for the planting of one of these trees at Greenway Primary School in Rumney. The school will celebrate its 70th birthday on 5 June 2022 and will be planting a further six trees alongside The Queen's Green Canopy Celebration Tree to mark each decade that the school has been open.

Edible Playgrounds

The Council is working in partnership with environmental charity, Trees for Cities, to deliver ten new Edible Playgrounds across Cardiff's primary schools in 2021/22. This is an innovative programme, which transforms school grounds into vibrant outdoor fruit and vegetable gardens that get children excited about growing and eating healthy food, as well as providing a valuable resource for outdoor learning. Each project is delivered so that it meets the requirements of the new Curriculum for Wales. Design work has already begun in seven of the ten projects, with the first build already completed. Further details of the work with Trees for Cities can be found at: <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/treesforcities/images/Greening-Cardiffs-Schools-EP-PDF.pdf>

Councillor Sarah Merry
Cabinet Member for Education, Employment & Skills
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