

COUNCIL: 22 OCTOBER 2020

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS STATEMENT

Covid-19 Position in Schools

All schools in Cardiff are aware of the protocols for what to do in the event of a positive Covid-19 case. They all have access to a Health & Safety and Educational Management team link for their school, as well as advice from the Assistant Director of Education & Lifelong Learning and the Operational Manager for Health & Safety, following notification of a positive case. In the event of a positive case, all mitigation factors are discussed with each school to ensure that appropriate infection control measures are being implemented. In a small number of cases, an additional meeting is convened between representatives from the school, Education, Health & Safety and Public Health Wales in order to implement further measures. Local councillors are also informed when there are positive cases in schools.

As at the week beginning 12 October 2020, there have been 104 positive cases in schools in Cardiff, with less than half of the schools in Cardiff not having a case as yet. Of those positive cases, 70% were pupils, with the other cases relating to teaching and support staff.

Since September 2020, 3,700 pupils and 150 staff have had to self-isolate as a result of being identified as a close contact. This represents under 7% of the pupil population and less than 2% of staff.

School Catering

The provision of school meals has now restarted in the majority of schools across the city. Provision has started with a limited menu offer, but this will be stepped up and extended over the coming weeks as staff and pupils get used to new working arrangements within schools. For those pupils eligible for Free School Meals, who have been instructed to isolate as a result of Covid-19 cases in their school, the School Catering service has arranged to provide a supermarket voucher for their period of isolation.

The Welsh Government also announced this week that it has allocated an additional £11m to guarantee the provision of Free School Meals for all school holidays up to and including Easter 2021. Ensuring the continuation of Free School Meal provision has been a key priority for the Welsh Government as it has responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. I know that this good news will be both reassuring for, and very much welcomed by, families in Cardiff.

Attendance

Current attendance in primary schools is 85%; in secondary schools is 77.20% and in special schools is 70.32%. Schools have worked hard to ensure that pupils have returned to school, but some challenges remain. Schools are reporting that there are still significant numbers of pupils whose families remain anxious due to Covid-19 and are reluctant for them to return to school. A small number of families also remain shielded due to the extreme medical vulnerability of either the pupil or a family member.

With an increase in the number of pupils who have tested positive for Covid-19 since the start of September 2020, the impact of pupils being sent home and required to self-isolate has resulted in a drop in attendance figures in recent weeks. In addition, a significant number of pupils who had travelled overseas have not yet been able to return, or are back in the country but have had to quarantine before returning to school.

The Council has been required to realign data collection processes in order to meet revised Welsh Government reporting requirements. Instead of a weekly data collection from schools, this is now being done on a daily basis and has resulted in some data quality issues. Officers are working with schools to help them resolve these issues. As a result, we anticipate that the current position on school attendance may actually be more positive than the recent figures suggest.

Key Groups Update

The Key Groups teachers and teaching assistants have returned to schools, supporting Ethnic Minority/English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils and More Able and Talented (MAT) pupils. Other team members are providing support remotely or in accordance with the guidelines for school visits. If certain groups or individuals have to self-isolate, the Key Group team will support schools to ensure that pupils have access to learning at home. This includes continued access to digital devices and access to the internet. The team continues to link closely with local authorities across Wales, alongside Welsh Government, so that good practice is shared.

The Looked After team is continuing to work closely with schools and Children's Services to ensure that children who are Looked After in Cardiff have access to a good education. Designated teacher forums, which are now delivered remotely, ensure that the central team remains connected to the leads within schools and that innovative practice is shared.

Youth Support

The Youth Service has supported large numbers of young people in the return to school and transition from school period. Carefully planned appointment-only, open-access provision has re-commenced at some centres. The main face-to-face contact is via the street-based and outreach teams, with nearly 500 young people accessing information, support and guidance and over 2,000 interactions. These interactions are across the age range (11 to 25 years), with over half relating to young people aged between 14 and 16 years old.

The Youth Service conducted over 1,500 young mentoring engagements throughout September 2020, with over 570 young people receiving mentoring support to help them engage in further education, training or employment. The service has also expanded its digital reach and has had over 100,000 contacts across its various platforms.

School Admissions

Applications for secondary school places for admission in September 2021 opened on 28 September 2020. As of 6 October 2020, 2,132 applications had been received, which represents 50.6% of the Year 6 transfer group. The first round of applications closes on 23 November 2020.

It is extremely important that parents apply on time in order to have the best possible chance of securing a place in one of their preferred schools. The child-friendly “7 Tips to Apply” admissions campaign, which is designed to support families in applying for a school place and provides related guidance, is now live and available in nine languages and can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqFFf-qb0HU>. Schools, council services and wider community partners are helping us to ensure that these messages reach as many families as possible across the city and I would also urge members to help direct parents to this information.

Applications for Reception places in primary schools for admission in September 2021 will open on 16 November 2020.

Qualifications 2021

On 28 August 2020, the Welsh Government Minister for Education issued a [Written Statement](#), which provided an update on the independent review of the arrangements for awarding grades for the 2020 summer exam series, as well as considerations for 2021. This is expected this month before the October half term. At the time of writing, the WJEC November 2020 and January 2021 series examinations were due to go ahead as planned. The WJEC has published GCSE and AS/A Level subject adaptations booklets for assessments in summer 2021. In addition, the summer 2021 provisional exam timetable has been published, including a contingency period starting from end of June 2020.

Period Dignity Programme

In response to the school closures in the summer term during lockdown, female students in Years 7-13 in receipt of Free Schools Meals were provided with a £15 voucher to enable them to purchase period products. Additional period products were also provided in secondary schools when they reopened at the end of June 2020, and the next step is to provide schools (secondary-only) with eco-friendly disposable products, along with reusable products. This will be accompanied by guidance and educational materials for both schools and families.

Councillor Sarah Merry
Cabinet Member for Education, Employment & Skills
15 October 2020