

COVID 19 Vulnerable groups Addendum report

An addendum to Ealing's two reports on Vulnerable Groups published June 2020 and August 2020 capturing strengths of school practice during the C19 pandemic

*Report compiled by the Safeguarding and Wellbeing recovery committee reporting to Schools' C19
Recovery Board*

March 2021

Summary of strengths in approaches taken by schools to support and engage vulnerable pupils

This addendum profiles strengths in schools' responses to support and engage vulnerable pupils during the course of the national lockdown beginning January 2021 and ending 5th March 2021.

The information has been captured by officers undertaking telephone calls with Designated Safeguarding Leads, inclusion leads and Headteachers from 24 primary schools and from officers leading the DSL and behaviour and inclusion networks for Primary, Secondary and Special schools

High level summary

Overall, schools have built on the experiences of the first lockdown in March 2020 and continued to adapt and change both the remote learning offer and safeguarding strategies through the Autumn term 2020 when supporting pupils' self-isolation resulted in strengthened protocols. Strong practices led to much higher attendance of vulnerable groups overall in Ealing and above both National and London averages.

Primary

- All schools have established systems to ensure staff are in regular contact with non-attending vulnerable children and their families,
- Most schools have developed a separate system for parents and children to resolve ICT related queries.
- Most schools have deliberately left spaces free for contingency planning if/when a family may need their child to attend school or subsequent concerns were raised by staff
- Remote staff meetings and or regular safeguarding briefings have been used to identify key emerging themes which have then been used to refine support or offer a school place.
- One school used safeguarding case studies, including ones about remote learning, in weekly staff training to go through the practice expected, reinforcing safeguarding process and protocols
- There have been noticeable improvements in communications between school and families with excellent knowledge of individual children's needs including where children may not have previously been deemed vulnerable.
- Most schools have established consistent remote learning expectations amongst staff including protocols for raising and escalating safeguarding concerns
- All schools have created formal pathways for children to raise, discuss or report safeguarding concerns when at home, including 'worry' buttons via remote learning channels or platforms. The opportunity for teachers to have 1:1 discussion about learning and pastoral issues has also been developed

- Most schools report that Social Workers are actively involved with case work so that schools can follow up on any concerns raised regarding engagement and or safeguarding swiftly and regularly.
- Attendance and Children Missing Education Teams have worked well to support key messages from school and reinforce positive messages regarding attendance
- Schools report positive experiences of multi agencies carrying out welfare checks e.g. the police, Attendance team, Social care
- The remote learning offer has been successfully refined and adapted to meet EHCP/SEND children's needs. Many are also receiving therapies and interventions remotely including 'breakout room' interventions
- The use of remote learning platforms to successfully carry out pastoral activities such as family quizzes, talent shows, and challenge days has had a positive impact on engaging with online learning.
- One school uses a daily well-being check-in as part of the registration process. An agreed response can trigger a class teacher response the same day and escalation where necessary

Secondary

- Remote learning attendance online expectations have meant that routines are much better. This has impacted sleep and concentration positively because of the structured day
- Due to increased KIT calls between schools and families, DSLs have been able to identify those that will need support either getting back to school or in school
- Swift identification of pupils not engaging in remote learning and follow up by members of staff has reduced non-engagement
- All schools have reported carrying out home visits by HOYs, pastoral staff, DSL team, as well as attendance team, social care and police (including at times safer school officers carrying out joint visits with DSL leads)
- Part-time blended learning offered which has meant better engagement and building up to full-time attendance in school
- 'Social Workers in Schools' project has brought additional expertise and carried out home visits where there are safeguarding concerns
- Behaviour and Inclusion Service supporting remotely and, in the community, has been very positive
- Availability and 1:1 contact from counsellors, and schools investing in an increase in counselling services has improved capacity, attendance and engagement
- Schools have found better attendance following a 'personal' home visit
- The promotion of a weekly dedicated wellbeing session with a range of enrichment activities for both staff and pupils has worked well where it has been established

Summary of key challenges to be tackled by schools and by the partnership

Whilst remote learning has been an overall success and DSL teams' regular contact with families has resulted in high attendance and high levels of engagement with remote learning, it is acknowledged that there are some discrepancies between schools serving very different communities across the borough and challenges we need to address together

Primary

- Barriers to attendance were almost always due to **parental anxieties**; concerns about elderly relative, medical needs, members of the family isolating, using public transport
- All schools have seen an increase in **newly vulnerable children**, particularly around anxieties and behaviour related issues
- **Digital access** is still an issue for a number of schools, particularly the number of devices available in multi-sibling families.
- Most schools have reported strengthened communications and knowledge of families but there are concerns about the longer-term implications on schools' capacities to either **provide or broker support needed**
- **Long term effects**, including mental wellbeing, attainment, and transition of pupils is a concern for all schools involved
- School recognise the increased potential risk of exploitation for children with Social Workers and or EHCPs who have not been in school
- **Increased referrals** to social care that are not meeting threshold
- Increased enquiries from social care carrying out child and family assessments
- Increased alcohol abuse and Domestic Abuse incidents
- Some identified inconsistencies in the approach of some social workers

Secondary

- New systems have created **a lot of new administration**, particularly attendance and KIT phone calls/follow up resulting in a capacity issue, and subsequent need for recruitment of admin staff
- **Transition**, particularly in-year admissions and year 7s
- **Emotional impact** of living conditions has led to increased occurrences of relationship and family breakdown, further exacerbated when spouses are forced to stay in the same location due to lockdown. Increased Domestic Abuse and alcohol abuse
- Most schools have seen **increased self-referrals** to the counselling services for social anxiety and panic attacks and have faced difficult decisions about funding

- A **core group of pupils have not engaged at all in remote learning** even with wide-ranging efforts of schools (7-8%). This has big implications for learning and re-integration. (Usually where SEN identified as additional need)
- **Language of “catch-up”** curriculum causing anxiety
- Still **anxieties around new strain of the virus** – in fact wearing of masks may heighten that anxiety

Key questions for us to address as schools, social care teams, partnership

Schools

- **School self-evaluation for safeguarding and staff training.** In the new context, are current safeguarding protocols fit for purpose? Should schools now re-visit their safeguarding self-evaluation or audit? What should DSL and whole school training look like?
- Knowing to what extent time missed will influence and or increase a child’s vulnerabilities – how can we identify pupils quickly and action intervention? What resources do we have/can we offer to support this?
- Some high schools have mentioned an approach (vulnerable students) of focusing on engagement rather than the progress that can be made with remote learning. What implications does this have back in school and identifying gaps?
- How can we support parents with pastoral issues whilst there are restrictions to being part of the school community? (particular focus on Reception and Year 7)

Social Care

- Can multi-agency child protection training be promoted within education settings
- What lessons can we learn from the schools that are involved in projects such as the Social Workers in Schools and Trailblazers and how can we ensure sustainability?

Partnership

- How do we get a sense of numbers of **newly vulnerable** and what school-based criteria are being applied?
- What lessons can we learn from the schools working in partnership with **Mental health Support Teams** and how can we ensure effective roll out across all schools.
- Consider the process and protocol when there is a disagreement about **threshold**
- How do we balance expectations, the pressure on pupils to **‘catch up’** with the call for **enhanced approaches to mental health and wellbeing?** The narrative from Government/Ealing and schools will be influential (The inadvertent worsening of mental wellbeing because of the support to prioritise the catch-up curriculum rather than focus on wellbeing)

- Some schools have had an **additional challenge** of demand from parents for school places. How do we offer advice to schools to filter genuine requests? How does this relate to **vulnerable pupils**?
- How can we support schools with **attainment** in transition years particularly where there may be an unidentified additional need? (**Early Years**)
- Consider how we, the members of Ealing Learning Partnership **Safeguarding and Wellbeing Committee** connect and work with other **external agencies** like CAMH's and GPs to help manage the increase in referrals of students who are anxious, having panic attacks etc?
- Consider whether there is a need for further **self-help guidance** for **parents** whose children are experiencing **anxiety, low mood and or self-harm**

Recommendations – Responding to the needs of children due to the impact of covid-19

Communication connection and consistency

- To use the **Safeguarding in Education Self-Assessment Tool (ESAT)** to audit current safeguarding and child protection arrangements, identify areas for development and make any change necessary through a published action plan which is shared with Headteacher and safeguarding governor [Safeguarding in Education Self-Assessment Tool \(ESAT\) | NSPCC Learning](#)
- Attendance at **DSL networks** and **lightning briefings** will bring together emergent and current themes from a number of different strategy groups and will include updates from all service areas. (Safeguarding in Schools, Education and Social Care Forum, Southall in Focus, GRT steering group, Serious Youth Violence network, Contextual Safeguarding subgroup, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub strategic and operational groups). This will help to support any draft action plan (refer to first bullet point)
- Schools to consider a **DSL teams approach** and weekly briefings with all staff. Agree the key information that should be recorded in weekly DSL team minutes: the overall number of open cases and provide an update of the position with each case of CIN or CP, particularly any vulnerable children not in school and highlighting any children considered newly vulnerable
- Consider changes to school website to ensure **prominence of safeguarding**, how to lodge a concern including outside of school hours and relevant resources dependant on audience and context, e.g. resources for parents
- Consider using a **whole school approach** to mental health and wellbeing to assess, understand the current situation and action plan for change. The whole school focuses on **8 evidence-based principles** that are shown to **protect** and **promote** pupil mental health and wellbeing. A whole school approach involves all parts of the school working together, from pupils, parents, staff, and governors to the wider community. You can use the [Mentally Healthy Schools Audit Tool](#) and follow the Anna Freud [5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing framework](#) or the [Ealing Mental Health Toolkit](#) for a step-by-step guide.