

28 October 2020	ITEM: 11
Council	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Education	
Report of: Councillor Andrew Jefferies, Cabinet Member for Education	
This report is: Public	

Executive Summary

Thurrock like the rest of the country has been dealing with a global pandemic – as I write my first report as Cabinet member for Education I wanted to start by thanking all early years, primary secondary and colleges for the hard work and commitment they have shown to our children & young people and adults.

I would also like to take the opportunity of thanking my education team who have worked hard to ensure that we are supporting all educational settings in these unprecedented times. It is also right to recognize both the CCG and public health who have worked closely with colleagues in education over the last 6 months.

This report sets out the work we have undertaken over the past year and identifies my key priorities for the coming 12 months.

My key strategic priorities are:

1. Undertake an education review to ensure we continue to support our educational providers to enable strong educational pathways.
2. To ensure we work to support our SEND children and young people and meet the outcomes within the Written Statement of Action.
3. To continue to support our skills development work – recognising some of the challenges that the pandemic has created.
4. Ensure we have high class facilities to deliver innovative learning environments for children, young people and adults.
5. To provide access to adult skills opportunities recognizing the economic challenges that COVID 19 presents.
6. To ensure we continue to support emotional wellbeing by providing support to schools in the further imbedding of our schools wellbeing service.

EDUCATION & SKILLS – supporting our children and young people and adults to achieve.

1. School Effectiveness

So much of what we would usually report in School Effectiveness is not available this year due to Covid-19 and its impact on early year's settings and schools locally and nationally. Due to the cancellation of most statutory data returns to the Department for Education (DfE), for Early Years Foundation Stage, SATs and GCSE/ A Levels, it will not be possible to report in the usual manner. There will be no DfE published data for any key stage. Instead Ofsted and the DfE will refer to the 2018/2019 academic years' data.

Our school effectiveness team have worked closely with schools over the past year to provide support and challenge – this has further imbedded our partnership approach with our schools. Thurrock has embraced the academisation programme and by the end of 2020 we will only have one maintained school in Thurrock – Grays Convent.

2. Early Years

There are 236 Early Years providers in Thurrock: 53 Day Nurseries or Pre-schools, 28 School based nursery classes and 155 childminders. Of these, only 3 are not yet rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, which is just 1.7%. Our Early Years Officers are working with those settings to ensure rapid improvement. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic all Ofsted inspections have been suspended until January 2021 at the earliest so there has been no change to these figures.

During the pandemic which struck in March 2020, many early years providers remained open for the children of critical workers, vulnerable children and children with Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs). Our providers provided early education and childcare for approximately 450-500 children per week.

Some settings were forced to temporarily close, either because they had no demand for places or because they did not have the staff to open due to shielding/ quarantine etc. In line with DfE Guidance to ensure that we had sustainable childcare, all settings were still funded for Government early years funded places whether they were able to open or not, based on their previous terms numbers. This has meant that to date we have seen no early education and childcare providers close.

During the period March – July, Council Officers worked with 28 parents to identify alternative early education and childcare provision where their own setting was closed. The team received a high number of compliments from the providers across the borough for the support they provided during March – July and for day nurseries who remained open during the summer break.

3. Schools

There are 56 schools in Thurrock: 40 Primary schools, 13 secondary schools and 2 special schools. There is one pupil referral unit offering alternative provision.

92% of primary schools remain rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. This places Thurrock at 59/ 152 local authorities for primary schools. 70% of secondary schools that have been inspected (10 schools) are judged to be good or better by Ofsted. One secondary school is still waiting its first inspection since opening. Five schools had an Ofsted inspection during the autumn term of 2019, and there were none in the spring or summer terms due to Covid-19. All schools that were inspected retained their previous judgement- four remained good and one remained outstanding.

Of the 40 primary schools, 38 are academies with the remaining two maintained schools are due to join multi- academy trusts this term. Twelve out of thirteen secondary schools are academies. Grays Convent High School is a Catholic voluntary aided school. The alternative provision is run by Olive Academies Trust. There are 12 Multi-Academy Trusts operating within Thurrock as well as a number of standalone academies.

3.1 School during Covid-19 period March 20 – July 31 2020

All Thurrock schools remained incredibly resilient during the end of spring term and throughout the summer term. Schools stayed open to offer provision for critical worker's children, vulnerable children and those with EHCPs.

During the very early stages of lockdown, schools were expected to undertake a risk assessment for these groups of children to determine if they were considered safest at home. If this was the case, the children were asked to remain at home where possible. The average attendance during this period was 300-400 pupils per day, who mainly consisted of critical worker's children.

48 schools remained open and offered Easter Holiday provision for critical worker's children, vulnerable children and those with EHCPs. Average attendance dropped during the holiday period to approximately 200 children per day.

As lockdown began to ease and the Government announced a wider opening of schools on June 1, schools were again expected to undertake a risk assessment, but this time it was focused on whether the pupils were safest at school. This enabled many more children to access school places and attendance began to increase. In the week beginning 1 June the average attendance was 1200 pupils per day. The biggest proportion of these were children from eligible year groups (Nursery (N) Reception (YR), Year 1 (Y1) and Year 6 (Y6)): approximately 60%, Critical worker's children made up a further 30% with the rest being vulnerable children and children with EHCPs.

As risk assessments took place and parental confidence grew, many more children attended school and by the middle of July there was on average 4000 children attending

school per day. The biggest proportion of these was again the children from eligible year groups which had been extended to Years 10 and 13.

All children returned to school in September and the attendance has remained high. Ofsted have resumed visits to schools and we have had two schools who have had an Ofsted visit. This is not an inspection but they will be looking at the schools risk assessment and reviewing school attendance. A letter will be published following the Ofsted visit, this will not be a graded judgement.

4. Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.

There were 1716 Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) maintained by Thurrock at the end of the summer term. This is an increase of nearly 5% since January 2020.

The national data for the percentage of EHCPs completed within twenty weeks is not available for 2020 as it was due to be updated in May 2020 via the national census which did not take place, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore the latest national data available is 2019, which shows that 60% of EHCPs nationally were issued within the twenty week statutory timeframe. Thurrock data for the first six months of 2020 shows that 82% of EHCPs were completed within the statutory timescales, despite the Covid-19 pandemic interruption to normal working, school closures and the ability to hold assessment and other types of meetings.

The Statutory SEND Service is committed to ensuring most EHCPs will be completed within the statutory timescales this academic year. In order to achieve this we have recruited a number of new caseworkers who have completed their induction and SEND training and the whole services has undertaken training throughout this year to upskill and improve performance.

4.1 SEND & COVID-19

The government issued temporary amendments to the law which meant that the rules around statutory timescales and delivery of provision in the EHCPs were slightly relaxed. School and Local Authorities were tasked with making reasonable endeavors to deliver the provision and plans. Where in a small amount of cases this was not possible, even after reasonable endeavors had taken place to complete an EHCP on time due to Covid, then they could be recorded as a valid exception

During the initial Lockdown phase and after the wider opening of schools, the SEND Service ensured that all pupils in Thurrock schools with an EHCP had been contacted regularly by their school.

School were asked to develop a reasonable endeavors plan for each pupil, which demonstrated how they were going to deliver the SEND provision identified in the EHCP. Schools were asked to discuss the provision with the parents and to work out

what was possible, what was possible with amendments, and what couldn't be delivered.

5. Virtual School (VS)

The Virtual School head is in charge of promoting the educational achievement of all the children looked after by Thurrock Council.

The school does not exist in real terms, or as a building. Children do not attend it - they remain the responsibility of the school at which they are enrolled. The Virtual School is a service which has been created for the effective co-ordination of educational services at a strategic and operational level.

In the summer term there was a total of 307 pupils aged 3-18 years supported by the Virtual School, which was an increase on the previous term. Twenty-nine of these were unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

5.1 Covid 19 Strategy and Virtual School Response

There were a number of actions that the Virtual School took as the result of schools closing and lockdown being imposed, to protect the education of looked after children.

For example:

- A letter of guidance was sent to social care and the carers to decide whether or not children and young people would be accessing an educational offer.
- Every family and social worker was contacted to check the status of children/young people.
- Every pupil was RAG rated to gauge the level of concern we would have and highlight where our initial support/challenge needed to be focus on.
- Carers were asked to provide daily or weekly updates to inform the VS as to the progress that was being made as pupils stayed at home,
- The team created a COVID 19 PEP which catered for pupils being educated at home.
- The team created a suggested list of activities and online learning sites to access for each phase.
- The team created a set of mental health activities and access to support to provide carers and pupils with information.
- The carers have been contacted to provide SDQ data to the Virtual School as part of the termly PEP so that we can then highlight those pupils needing the most emotional well-being support.

6. Education Welfare Service

The service received 628 referrals last academic year for a variety of reasons, including children missing, Elective Home Education (EHE), Admissions related issues, moving out of borough and no school place.

At the end of the summer term there was 222 pupils receiving EHE. At some point during the academic year 439 pupils had received EHE, of these 64 were returned to school, 40 were referred to school admissions, 52 moved away and 54 were closed at the end of the academic year as they were no longer statutory school age. (Post year 11).

Since September and the start of the new academic year, we have had 104 requests from parents requesting to EHE their children. This is a significant increase and is recognized as a regional and national issue. We have ensured that we are in contact with parents to provide guidance around the process.

7. School Wellbeing Service

The School Wellbeing service has been established this year to support the emotional wellbeing of children and young people across all our schools in Thurrock. A strong partnership group supports it with representatives across a wide range of areas. The service has successfully recruited to all its posts with a Team Lead, three senior practitioners' two wellbeing practitioners and administrative support. The service has established links with all schools in Thurrock, who now have a named member of school staff as emotional wellbeing lead in school who are linked to a key member of the service.

The Service has carried out initial assessments with all schools in Thurrock to establish the current support arrangements and needs within the schools. These have led to the establishment of action plans for schools to further develop these services with the help of the school wellbeing team. The service has developed a wide range of resources and training approaches to assist schools in their development of support for wellbeing.

The service has carried out the first phase of the Brighter Futures Survey with children and young people on mental health and wellbeing, which delivers essential data on the needs of young people. This information working with Public Health, supports the development of support in schools and will be followed up in the autumn term to incorporate information from children and young people post lockdown.

During the period of the Covid 19 lockdown and school disruption, the service has developed and distributed to schools additional resources to assist schools in meeting the needs of children and their families, an example of this was the creation of a telephone support line for schools which included staff from the Education Psychology service. The service has developed strong links across Health, Children's services and Third sector providers of services for children and young people to ensure a joined up approach is in place at this time.

The practitioners within the service have also worked closely during this time with the individual school leads for emotional wellbeing, and have successfully delivered telephone and reflective sessions for staff to enable them to be supported during this time. This service has been particularly well received by schools who have experienced a range of challenges in relation to pupil and staff wellbeing over the period of the lockdown. Moving into the new school year, the service will be working with schools to establish the appropriate level of direct and virtual contact to enable the delivery of a range of training and support to ensure all our children and young people have the right provision in place.

8. Inspire Youth Services

8.1 September Guarantee 2019 stands at 100% ensuring that every 16 year old had a place of learning reserved for them in September 2019. September Guarantee 2020 is on the same trajectory.

8.2 Grangewaters - This year we have created an exciting SEND offer at Grangewaters as a response to the SEND Ofsted Inspection – young people with SEND access Grangewaters for a range of training sessions getting them ready for the world of work and preparing them for adulthood.

SEND Post 16 service is reassessing its post 16 provision and its quality assurance – the service is actively working with the young people to enable provision to meet the young people's needs.

8.3 Adult Community College - Graded as Good by Ofsted and as such we are offering a range of courses to support getting into employment across the Authority. The adult skills agenda will remain a key focus during the current year as the country works on its recovery plan. Our ambitious plans include identifying new premises to deliver our new blended offer and looking to transform how we deliver our adult skills agenda.

8.4 OnTrack - OnTrack is a Youth Employment Initiative programme for young people aged 15-29 in Thurrock. It is part funded through the European Social Fund and managed by the Department for Work and Pensions. This 2.5 year programme is a £3.2m match funded project successfully awarded to Thurrock Council in 2015 with the following targets these were all achieved in July 2019.

- 1310 NEET young people engaged/supported
- 768 young people entering EET
- 261 young people in EET for 6 months

We have submitted a further application for a phase two programme this will build on the work already undertaken in phase one.

9. National Funding Formula and school budgets

In 2020/21 Thurrock implemented in full the National Funding Formula in the distribution of funding to schools. The challenge still remains around our high needs funding and we are working with schools and the ESFA at ways to address this.

10. Home to School Transport

10.1 Covid 19 – Seamless and consistent delivery

The Passenger Transport Unit was able to deliver transport to all vulnerable children and children of Key Workers who opted to return to school as of Monday, 30 March 2020.

- **30 March 2020** - Approximately 8% of the total Home to School Transport service was utilised during the first 8 weeks of the partial re-opening of schools. Officers in the Passenger Transport Unit and the Children's Transport Team worked closely with parents, schools and operators to deliver a service throughout that period including the Easter holiday. The service worked with operators during the Easter holiday and spent just under 10,000k to ensure the Council succeeded in its bid to support key workers, families of vulnerable children and most essentially the children.
- **1 June 2020** -Transport has been offered consistently and seamlessly to the initial cohort of children and the additional categories added over time including Year 10 pupils, children in temporary accommodation and any other pupils schools identified as being disadvantaged by the lack of school provision.
- **The Furlough scheme** – The Scheme was extended to operators in order to sustain our contracted services and support them to continue delivery in September 2020. All of our operators have been able to deliver in September.
- **Risk Assessment** All operators showed a good understanding of guidance; particularly around hygiene, transmission and contact protocols. Operators were made aware of their sole responsibility to carry out required risk assessments. Officers requested copies of risk assessments in order to review them and ensure they were adequately robust.
- **Parental Risk** The issue of parental confidence poses the greatest risk to the successful delivery of Home to School transport in September 2020. A set of Frequently Asked Questions have been prepared for parents and a separate set for schools; both to be published on the councils website and within other prominent platforms on 14 August 2020.

10.2 Home to School Travel and Transport policy update

A proposal to update specific areas of the Home to School Travel and Transport policy was presented to Children's Overview & Scrutiny in July – the committee felt one of the recommendations around the removal of transport related to children in temporary accommodation should be removed. In the Cabinet meeting held on 22 July 2020,

Cabinet fully support the feedback from Children's Overview & Scrutiny and as a result this recommendation was removed. The recommendations outlined below shows what was approved:

- the implementation of a charging regime in respect of Post 16 SEND transport
- the delivery of home-to-school transport in accordance with the legislation around the maximum walking distance set for primary and secondary students

The updated policy will enable the council to achieve the following:

- to deliver services in line with its statutory duty
- to ensure resources are geared towards eligible children and young people unless exceptional circumstances are involved
- to encourage greater resilience in children by reducing their reliance on transport to support the development of skills that enhance their ability to travel independently
- to improve health by increasing participation in active modes of travel
- to improve the environment as more sustainable means of travel are adopted

10.3 Independent Travel Training

The transport team have worked with our colleagues in Procurement for the launch of a pilot Independent Travel Training (ITT) programme that will provide young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) the skills and confidence required to make the home-to-school journey on public transport. Officers are working to introduce the training to the first cohort of post 16 SEND students for September 2020.

10.4 Travel Demand Management

The government have provided additional funding to ensure that we can manage the travel demand. The funds will be used to devise and implement creative measures that will resolve current and forecasted transport issues, but also give rise to sustainable travel plans and a marked increase in the offer/take up of active modes of travel.

10.5 Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy (SMOT)

The Children's Transport Team are working collaboratively with the Transport Management Team, the Road Safety Team and Public Health to revise the 2015 SMOT. The goal is to encourage more schools to share their Travel Plans with the council.

- **Accreditation** - Officers also seek to increase the number of schools attaining the Modeshift Stars Scheme award. Currently 37% (20 schools) are accredited. The scheme recognises schools, businesses and other organisations that have shown excellence in supporting cycling, walking and other forms of sustainable and active travel. We intend to achieve the goals by working with the Public Health Team to change mindsets around healthy lifestyles and heighten awareness of the free

services currently offered by the Road Safety Team including Road Safety On-road training for parents and children in specific year groups and Bikeability Cycle Training.

- **SEND and Active Travel** – Officers have developed various forms of training and incentives to reduce reliance on Home to School travel support, increase resilience and improve health. Bespoke cycle training is available for pupils with SEND attending Treetops School. The inclusion of children and young people with SEND is a key priority thus personal risk assessments can be completed for each pupil being considered for the independent travel training programme being launched in the new academic year. Various SEND incentives will also be available via the Sustainable Travel Reward Scheme; a scheme that can be tailored to each child and school's needs. Children are rewarded on a daily basis for walking, cycling or scooting to school. In order to encourage participation, particularly for children from low-income homes, bicycles are made available free or on loan.

11. Free School Programme and School Expansion

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that every child in Thurrock has a school place. We continue to achieve this with strong working relationships with our schools.

Thurrock's forecasting for school places to date has been robust and accurate. The PPP document 2019 forecasted 17,552 pupils (whole school numbers and on census day 17,196 pupils were on roll across secondary schools on census day in October 2019. Primary numbers forecasted within the same PPP document were 10,474 pupils with 10,173 pupils on roll on census day across all primary schools in Thurrock. The difficulty with forecasting is that, although forecasts are accurate, we are not able to identify how old the children will be that move into Thurrock and to what year group they will move into. This takes close monitoring and we ensure we are in a position, when necessary, to take swift action in opening up classes within certain year groups. This year we received a high number of late primary applications after national offer day, which resulted in bulge classes being opened at both Dilkes Primary and Belmont Castle, each taking an additional 30 places each.

There have been no additional secondary bulges classes opened as the two new free schools have opened in their temporary locations this September. Both Free schools are located in Grays. Thames Park is located behind South Essex College and Orsett Heath is located by Thurrock Rugby Club.

We are seeing a high proportion of pupils, after national offer day take up school places outside of Thurrock. This year saw 10.2% children accepting a school place outside of Thurrock.

As part of the schools capital programme we are currently delivering the following:

- Benyon Primary is expanding from 1 form entry to 2 form entry. This expansion is progressing well and is due to complete by the end of December 2020

- Phase two of the St Clare's expansion programme is due to complete in November 2020. Phase two includes the delivery of the new classrooms, dining facilities and sports hall.
- Corringham primary is a two phase project, phase one being the delivery of the new nursery building, which is now complete and handed over to the school ready for opening this September 2020. Phase two will consist of the demolition of the former nursery building, new play surface and tarmac to the new access road / car park along with the installation of the cycle shelter.
- Internal works at Thames Park Free School temporary location for both internal and external works were completed for the opening of the school in September 2020.
- In advanced of Bonnygate Primary converting from a LA maintained school to academy status, conditions works have been undertaken and completed to ensure we meet the timeline of 1st December for conversion of the school into the Osborne Academy Trust.

The two new free schools, Orsett Heath and Thames Park have successfully opened in September. As the portfolio holder I was invited to the launch of Thames Park and was impressed with the accommodation. The Trust complimented the LA on its work around ensuring the accommodation was really for opening in the temporary accommodation. The new permanent sites have been approved and we look forward to seeing the two new secondary schools being open in September 2022.

For our SEND learners the new free school that will open on the current Treetops site is due to open in September 2021. This will provide more places for SEND children and will continue to support our ambition around keeping our children and young people local.

12. Conclusion

I would like to end my report where I started by recognizing the outstanding work that our education providers from early years, schools, post 16 and adults have achieved in what has truly been unprecedented times. We will continue to support our educational partners over the coming academic year. I and Officers have been meeting with parents who have children/young people with additional needs – at a recent meeting I was struck by the partnership work between ourselves, the CCG and Public Health the parent commented on the strong support systems available in Thurrock – which is testament to so many colleagues who ensure our children, young people and adults receive a good educational offer and transition pathways are built on our ethos of positive working relationships.

Appendix 1 - Dedicated Schools Grant

* Additional financial resources are allocated and available as part of the wider skills and schools budgets. For the purpose of this report dedicated schools grant financial information has been provided.

<u>Dedicated Schools Grant 2020/21</u>	£
Schools Block	127,474,073
Central Services Block	1,850,237
High Needs Block	25,463,842
Early Years Block	12,481,456
Funding Settlement 2020/21	167,269,608
Less Academy Recoupment:	(124,068,017)
Funding Settlement 2020/21 (after recoupment)	43,201,591
The following budget allocations have been provided from the resources available:	
	£
Maintained Schools Budgets	6,719,627
School Licences	126,060
Growth Fund	1,259,000
Statutory and Regulatory duties	518,506
School Place planning	29,302
School Admissions	260,429
Schools Forum	10,000
SACRE	10,000
Contribution to Combined budgets	1,022,000
Place Funding	397,000
Top Up Funding - Thurrock Schools and Academies	11,039,671
Top Up Funding - Other Local Authorities (4-16)	1,043,000
Top Up Funding - Post 16	1,787,000
Pupils not in School	360,661
Non Maintained and Independent Providers	2,200,000
Commissioned Services	1,149,000
Travellers Team	53,157
Home to School Transport	1,787,000
High Needs Central Team	967,183
Early Years 3 & 4 Year old Offer - Payment to Providers	10,108,470
Early Years 2 Year old Offer - Payment to Providers	1,836,000
Early Years Central Team	518,525
Total Dedicated Schools Grant 2019/20	43,201,591