

# Croydon Council

For General Release

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee 19 January 2021</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Education Quality and Standards: Blended Learning overview</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Debbie Jones – Interim Executive Director, Children, Families and Education  Shelley Davies – Interim Director, Education</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning</b>
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/ AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON</b>	<p style="text-align: right;"><a href="#"><u>Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022</u></a></p> <p>The recommendations in this report are in line with the new operating model – ‘getting the basics right for residents’ and will contribute to the delivery of the following key priority / outcome: ‘Our children and young people thrive and reach their full potential’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people in Croydon are safe, healthy and happy, and aspire to be the best they can be</li><li>• Every child and young person can access high quality education and youth facilities</li><li>• Ensure there are high quality school places for Croydon’s increasing numbers of children and young people</li></ul> <p>Education and Learning: working in partnership with all Croydon schools to deliver the very best for all our young people. Working with schools to ensure that resources are targeted at those social groups that currently under-perform in school exam attainment.</p>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report details and summarises the strategies Croydon Schools have in place to support pupils progress in terms of their learning and to help them catch up. This report will provide the Croydon perspective of a National issue. This report will also illustrate how schools are prepared for, and dealing with, students potentially returning to school and then having a period of isolation before returning to school due to Covid.

## 2.1 **Borough Context**

- No Croydon schools closed during the National Lockdown phase of the Covid Pandemic through the use of hubs and locality planning.
- Education Directorate Officers & Advisers worked closely with school leaders, Governors, Professional Associations and Trade Unions in supporting schools develop strategies for blended learning for pupils, a recovery curriculum, a safeguarding and pastoral focus for return to school while engaging in passive assessment to ensure pupils have settled before more formative approaches.
- All schools re-opened on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 with the majority holding inset days during the first week to update staff on Covid plans.
- A multi-agency approach has been undertaken to provide support for schools and other educational settings on Covid Safety.
- A multi-agency approach has been undertaken to provide for schools and other educational settings on non-covid safeguarding and recovery.
- Schools risk assessments and plans in relation to the new school year were approved by Governing Bodies and submitted to the Education Directorate. Follow up was undertaken as appropriate.
- Significant concerns, for example, around transport, attendance and funding have been escalated to the Regional Schools' Commissioner (RSC) (A weekly meeting has been undertaken between the LA and the RSC Office since March
- School Leaders have expressed concern and frustration around central government guidance on the examination series 2021 and also on what will be assessed. They have also expressed concern over digital resourcing.
- Case studies that show more detail of what schools have been doing can be seen in the appendix 1.

## 3. **Blended Learning**

### 3.1 **Walking Alongside Schools**

3.2 A toolkit for transition to September was published in July and was based on the Government Guidance that was published at the time. This toolkit was produced by the Learning Access team in the Education Directorate and included a checklist of activities, risk assessment guidance and also set out the offer of support that the Directorate could provide over the coming months. Headteachers were briefed on this throughout July in virtual Locality Meetings.

- 3.3 All Croydon Secondary Schools have a blended learning alternate plan. These have been identified in the schools re-opening risk assessment summaries which schools kindly shared with the Education Directorate. These alternate plans involve digital and more traditional approaches.
- 3.4 The Croydon issue with blended digital learning is that there are households that have only one device with pupils in different year groups in the Croydon Schools. This makes it difficult for households where there is more than one isolation case for pupils to engage fully in the digital programme.
- 3.5 Subsequent work has taken place to add to the checklist to secure additional resource for schools in this area. The Inclusion Adviser in the Education Directorate has continued to source additional devices through local charities and local businesses. A number of crowdfunding activities were explored but these were deemed non-viable. Uptake has been slow on this, however, organisations that are going through a period of natural renewal of their devices have been forthcoming in their support in line with recognised companies house regulations for the disposal of assets.
- 3.6 The DfE continues to offer support through device delivery for vulnerable children. Croydon recognises the National issue that the DfE has to address. Regular contact between the Directorate and the Regional Schools' Commissioner has this as a frequent discussion point.
- 3.7 Where pupils are isolating and they are unable to frequently or regularly access a digital device, schools have in place a system of support through more traditional work which is paper based. Schools recognise that this does not meet the high standards for engagement and involvement that they would like and encourage email contact when pupils can access a device to check progress and safeguarding issues.
- 3.8 The paper based work is distributed to pupils who are isolating through the postal system or are hand delivered in the same way that socially distanced home visits took place during the earlier lockdown in the last Academic year.
- 3.10 Headteachers and Governors would welcome additional resource from the DfE to more accurately support pupils who are self-isolating, particularly the vulnerable pupils. Due to the expenditure that schools authorised to support pupils in the first phase of lockdown many are facing financial pressures.
- 3.11 These plans are in place should there be individual isolation cases or should the proposed circuit breaker (at the time of writing) plan proceed. Schools were able to develop and hone their provision as lockdown proceeded and also when provisioning was widened in July (in effect having a shakedown as detailed in previous scrutiny reports).

#### **4. Assessment, Progress and Catch-up**

- 4.1 The first priority of all schools, has been to ensure that pupils are re-integrated to school following almost six months of no contact.

- 4.2 Secondary Schools welcomed years 10 and 12 back in June 2020 to begin the catch up process with them prior to September. These pupils are now in years 11 and 13. Catch up work was set, by selected schools, for pupils over the Summer and has been assessed and marked by teachers in Croydon Secondary Schools.
- 4.3 Headteachers have reported that they feel in an intelligence vacuum. With little or no guidance from the DfE on the examination season 2021. Headteachers and Governors would welcome clear expectations on the process of outcome measurement for 2021 in order to prepare the young people. This is adding to the wellbeing pressures on school leaders and teachers as they are preparing pupils for examinations and also ensuring there is robust assessment for any centre assessed grades.
- 4.4 Headteachers have reported that years 11 and 13 have returned to school well and that broadly they are aware of the risks that still exist as far as their outcomes in 2021.
- 4.5 During the Recovery Curriculum in September, the assessment emphasis was on pupil wellbeing and mental health. There was a great deal of pastoral support applied by Headteachers and school leaders to support their pupils across all year groups.
- 4.5 A number of secondary schools, in October, are now baselining pupils using a suite of tests and methods in order to assess where pupils are.
- 4.6 Headteachers and school leaders have reported back that during the lockdown stage a significant section of the course could not be taught in the way they would have liked. This has meant that there has been intense catch up sessions in lessons for these pupils. Headteachers and school leaders have also reported that they are anxious around the 'loss' of the Autumn term to prepare pupils for exams, however the quite rightly recognise that the Trauma of lockdown has to be addressed.
- 4.7 In line with the intense catch up sessions, headteachers and other school leaders have reported that clear guidance from OFQUAL on what is to be assessed in any examinations would be welcome. Indeed, a majority of headteachers expressed disappointment that they have not had this at the time of writing. The Local Authority can only offer advice in line with national guidance.
- 4.8 A number of schools are seeking to engage voluntary tutors to support catch up with examination groups. This has been slow because of CV-19 fears amongst the tutoring volunteer community, many of whom are in at risk groups. Some schools are carrying these out remotely but the lack of digital devices as detailed above mean that the schools are faced in a quandry by either removing pupils from class for tutoring and thus missing important knowledge and understanding or being unable to offer tutoring at all.

## **5. THE CROYDON PERSPECTIVE**

- 5.1 Like other Local Authorities, Headteachers and other school leaders have worked relentlessly from March to date without a break. They are determined to support

their pupils through the processes detailed previously, however, they are frustrated at the lack of guidance on the examination series 2021.

- 5.2 Headteachers and other school leaders have welcomed the support from the Education Directorate to support them with blended learning and the reporting of concerns to the Regional Schools' Commissioner.
- 5.3 The Education Directorate continues to support secondary school leaders in a bespoke way, recognising the variety of settings across Croydon.
- 5.4 Headteachers and Governors have noted that this is a unique educational period and that many have adopted the ethos of 'doing what is right over doing what can be measured' to secure the best possible futures for their pupils.
- 5.5 Summary – what have schools done across Croydon to support pupils in years 11 and 13
  - Pastoral care during and post lockdown.
  - Some schools have set Summer learning
  - Improving the quality of the blended offer through increased use of Google Classrooms (in the majority of schools).
  - Monitoring Public Health Guidance on Croydon Covid Cases
  - Ensuring pupils are assessed to identify the gaps in their learning
  - Ensuring lessons are brisk and supportive
  - Safeguarding comes first
  - Close working the Education Directorate on pupils who have yet to return to school and those who are at risk of Elective Home Education
  - Sought, at every stage, clear guidance from the DfE and OFQUAL on the format of the examination series 2021.
  - Attempting to source tutors for pupils.
  - Continuing to provide effective lessons in schools
  - Ensuring remote counselling sessions are available for pupils
  - Making pragmatic referrals to appropriate agencies for support for pupils.
  - Revision packs for pupils based on what content has been covered to date have been issued
- 5.6 Schools are managing resources with a number of pupils at home, self-isolating, and pupils in school. There is widespread concern that as a long term strategy this will not be sustainable due to the impact on the wellbeing of staff in the school who are effectively 'double teaching'.

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** None

**APPENDICES:** Case Studies

