

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Schools and Education Services Response to CoVid  
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## Summary

This report provides a summary of the actions taken by Gateshead schools and the Council's Education Service in response to CoVid 19 and, in particular, response to the partial closure of schools.

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## Background

As a response to a growing Covid-19 infection rate schools in England were required to partially close from March 20<sup>th</sup> to all children apart from those children of key workers and vulnerable children. This decision was made following similar decisions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The DfE announced that schools would begin to open up to more children from June 1<sup>st</sup> with children from Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 being welcomed back to school. It was planned that all primary age children would be back to school by the end of June, but on the 9<sup>th</sup> June the government announced that primary schools would not reopen further year groups.

Secondary schools were required to reopen for Year 10 and 12 from June 15<sup>th</sup>.

School attendance would not be compulsory for pupils, irrespective of whether there was a place available or not until the start of the new academic year.

There is a clear expectation that all pupils should return to school from the beginning of the autumn term.

## The Gateshead Response

- The Council and the schools agreed that all schools should remain open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children. This decision was made as it kept both children and staff in a familiar environment reducing any potential emotional stress and also it kept children in small and more 'safe' bubbles.
- The schools remained open for these groups through school holidays and Bank holiday.

- The School Meal Service provided all children eligible for a free school meal with a meal. If these children were not attending schools then school staff or volunteers often delivered meals.
- School staff often became part of a rota that reduced the number of adults in a school; reducing the risk of infection.
- Children attending schools were taught in small groups or bubbles with a highly adapted curriculum.
- Schools quickly produced online resources to support learning or signposted parents to high quality resources
- Most schools contacted pupils and parents/carers by phone to keep in close contact and provide academic or emotional support.
- Schools decided when they would open further to children beyond key worker and the vulnerable groups. Decisions were made following robust risk assessment and the Council supported this approach. Schools in Gateshead, largely, did not open further until June 8<sup>th</sup>. From June 8<sup>th</sup>, based on risk assessment, Schools opened more cautiously than the government's guidance of Nursery, Reception, Y1 and Y6 returning. A number of schools were only able to provide education for the key worker and vulnerable groups as class sizes were significantly reduced to allow for social distancing.
- A core group of the Council's education staff remained at Dryden to provide direct support for schools. A daily email (appendix 1) was produced since lockdown began. This email initially was only sent to Headteachers but then, subsequently, to the Chairs of Governors.
- The education team produced a recovery curriculum (appendix 2) that supported schools for the time when all children return to school. The Recovery Curriculum has a significant focus on emotional wellbeing.
- The Council's Social Care and Education Teams worked together to identify those children that would most benefit from returning to school. Approximately 70% of the identified pupils returned to school.
- Headteacher representatives met every week, in person and safely, with education, HR, schools meals & cleaning, public health and health & safety officers to discuss the practicalities of opening schools during a pandemic
- A council produced Risk Assessment was completed by all schools and shared with the Unions. Using this Risk Assessment schools decided how they would reintroduce more children to school. Not all schools followed the Government guidance of Nursery, Reception, Y1 and Y6 returning at the same time.

### **Readiness for September**

- All schools, at this time, are preparing to welcome all children back to school in September.
- Only a few schools will be a base for Summer Activities for children.
- The Risk Assessment document (Appendix 3) is now in a second version which addresses the issues of full schools in September.

- The Council's education staff plan to return to schools from September. Procedures and practices will be in place to minimize risk to the Council staff, the School staff and the pupils.

### **Recommendations**

OSC is asked to consider the response to the partial closure of schools by the schools and education services.

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