
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	02 November 2021
Report By:	Head of Education	Report No:	EDUCOM/38/21/MR
Contact Officer:	Michael Roach	Contact No:	01475 712828
Subject:	Education Recovery Report		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give an update on projects and initiatives being taken forward as part of recovery planning for education services and partners.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report contains updates on the following:

- 2.2
- Update on Attainment Challenge
 - Return to school guidance update
 - Latest update from SQA
 - Update from West College Scotland
 - Introduction of universal free school meals for P6 and 7 in Primary Schools

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Education and Communities Committee is asked to:
- note the updates contained within this report.
 - agree that the roll out for universal free school meals for P6 and P7 pupils should follow the national timeline, awaiting the required adaptations to the kitchens.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 This report contains the relevant updates linked to the Scottish Attainment Challenge plan for 2020/21 and the ongoing recovery for education services after Covid-19.

5.0 COVID-19 recovery and updates

5.1 Update on Attainment Challenge Plan 2020/21

The annual report on the work of the attainment challenge during the academic year 2020/21 has been submitted to the Scottish Government. They have acknowledged that given the challenges presented by Covid-19 and the resultant school building closures, we do not anticipate that all activities planned for the delivery of Challenge Authority plans will have been undertaken.

The over-riding outcome from the 2020/21 SAC programme was the project's ability to be highly responsive to both the first lockdown and then the second lockdown from January 2021, ensuring that as much of the planned activity could still be delivered, albeit via remote / online means, as well as continuing to ensure a focus on the most vulnerable pupils.

The project continues to focus on three key areas of work, set out below as key headings:

Literacy and numeracy

From August 2020 the key focus of the project was to support schools and pupils understand the impact on outcomes from lockdown 1 and then support pupils to recover any lost learning. Alongside this there was a focus on ensuring that all existing staff, as well as those from the project team, were deployed effectively with newly appointed recovery teaching staff. Outreach staff were able to recommence their targeted support for identified SIMD 1 + 2 pupils although worked in isolated bubbles to follow the agreed mitigations.

From April 2021 to June 2021 we saw the return to full time face to face learning. Some pupils returned in a better place in relation to their attainment as improved home learning experiences had taken place with staff utilising the expertise they had developed from the first lockdown. However, it was evident that many pupils and families had found home / remote learning challenging despite everyone's best efforts.

A joined-up approach, involving colleagues across the service and external partners, focused on improving outcomes in Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing to support families and pupils was evident. Data analysis and interrogation continued to improve due to evidence-based approaches provided via Scottish Attainment Challenge officers and advice from Authority Education Services and Education Scotland staff ensured Head Teachers were more able to identify pupils requiring additional support and focus on identifying the poverty related learning gap.

Coaching and Modelling Officers in Literacy and Numeracy continued to provide virtual training in evidence-based approaches to support school staff enabling them to deliver high quality teaching and learning opportunities for all pupils. As well as this a significant amount of recorded content was recorded to support learning at home which eventually supported the development of the West Online school which has subsequently become part of the national e-learning offer.

Health and well-being

The Coaching and Modelling Officers worked closely with Educational Psychological Services in supporting staff and pupils with the recovery plan. They also adapted training for online delivery using TEAMS for teaching staff and support staff. Educational Psychological Services Staff produced clear policies and provided training across a range of specified aspects including "Bereavement, Change and Loss" "Trauma Informed Practice" and "Attachment Theory." This targeted approach ensured staff had the most up to date research to inform school practice.

Coaching and Modelling Officers delivered virtual training reinforcing Nurturing Principles. A focus on outdoor learning has been key to addressing many social and relationship issues pupils have been experiencing, providing them with engaging opportunities to reconnect with friends and staff.

The Play Therapist has been working directly with children and although there have been some issues due to the covid situation, a comprehensive level of input crossing the different strategic priorities has been undertaken. She is also a member of an authority strategic group leading play pedagogy which has planned support and input to the development of play across the Early Level.

Families and communities

Both Barnardo's and Community Learning & Development teams have adapted their approaches to meet the needs of the families and pupils in the communities they serve. This has had an impact on how families are supported as no group activities could be completed in schools or establishments. Face to face meetings have taken place outdoors to ensure a safety-first approach.

A partnership approach has also ensured that attendance remains a priority and this is evidenced through schools and establishments maintaining positive attendance figures for the last term. Staff had developed a better awareness of what to look for when supporting young people after the lockdown period as they had been through it once already and had received a comprehensive training package from Coaching and Modelling Officers and staff from Inverclyde Educational Psychological Services earlier in the session. Effective communication from all partner agencies ensured targeted support to families and pupils supporting their mental health and wellbeing.

SAC Plan budget 2020/21

In February 2020 Scottish Government approved the Inverclyde SAC bid for 2020/21 totalling £3.47m.

This was made up of employee costs (£2.50m), partner payments (£0.69m) & resources (£0.28m) but unlike previous years there was a number of changes made during the year as a result of the pandemic.

The programme continued to support all schools in line with the bid but with the approval of SG we were able to redirect any underspends arising to areas best able to support pupils; this enabled us to support primary education with 650 new laptops and secondary schools received £140k to spend on additional resources.

Due to demand issues of IT equipment £0.29m of these resources were not received until 2021/22 but SG approved these as part of the 2020/21 allocation ensuring the full grant allocation was utilised.

Most underspends arose from not being able to fill staffing posts due to the ongoing pandemic and from the approved plan we spent £2.19m on employee costs (under £0.31m), £0.83m on partner payments (up £0.15m) & £0.45m on resources (up £0.17m).

5.2 Return to school guidance update

The guidance for return to schools and early year's establishments was issued on Tuesday 03 August. The guidance was effective from 09 August 2021 and was reviewed on 15 September. The latest version can be found at this link:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/>

The early years guidance broadly follows the schools guidance which sets out that:

Local authorities and schools should continue to apply the mitigations that were in place at the end of the summer term, with the exception of some modifications as set out in this guidance.

This approach to retaining mitigations is expected to remain in place for a further period of up to 6 weeks (until the end of October), following which further advice will be provided the modifications that should be made to mitigations relate to:

- an updated wider policy on self-isolation, contact tracing and testing for U18 close contacts, which results in the ability to remove contact groupings in schools; and
- further minor adjustments to the previous mitigations to ensure consistency with measures in place in wider society.

Attendance

Attendance has been affected due to high positive case rate over the first 4 to 5 weeks of this term alongside high numbers of pupils awaiting tests and outcomes. Attendance was below the weekly national average earlier this term however it has now improved and is at least in line with the national average. The national average itself is lower than normal.

Staff absence has improved after having been higher than normal at the start of term, largely due to staff having to be absent from work pending the outcome of a PCR test. The actual number of staff having to be absent from work due to a positive PCR outcome or isolating due to being in contact with a positive cases, is low. This has meant that any additional staffing in schools such as recovery teachers, has had to be used to cover staff absences however this has now stabilised meaning that schools are in a better position to move forwards with the implementation of their recovery plans.

Vaccinations 12 – 15 year olds

All 12 – 15 year olds have now been offered an appointment with the NHS for a vaccine. These are being carried out at various vaccination centres across the local authority and not in schools. There is a possibility that mop up appointments could be delivered from school sites but plans to progress this are yet to be developed or shared.

5.3 Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) update

SQA exams will take place from 26 April to 01 June 2022 with results day on 09 August 2022. While detailed planning for delivering exams is now underway, it is also important that SQA, along with the whole education system, plans for any further disruption that may happen due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The SQA are continuing to discuss with the National Qualifications Group any additional measures that will help the education system respond to further significant disruption to learning or changes to public health conditions.

Planning for a full exam diet

SQA have also published a variety of proposals for contingency as well as mitigations for a full exam diet. The services is working with schools to develop our own approaches to ensure that current assessment process are secure and robust without creating a dual assessment approach i.e. over assessing now in case exams do not proceed.

More information can be found at the link below:

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/99158.html>

5.4 West College Scotland

At the Herald Scotland and Gen Analytics Diversity Awards, WCS won the Diversity through Education Award for the work of the cross College Digital Strategy Group, and their work to ensure that all staff and students were able to work and learn online.

Whilst COVID-19, inevitably had an impact on student outcomes, especially in subjects that required a practical experience, the College are now working hard to take forward their recovery planning and students are completing their awards in subjects such as Health and Social Care where mandatory NHS placements could not be completed during lockdown. Commercial training and skills delivery has picked up strongly post lockdown across the short course offering and strategic partnerships have continued to develop, in particular with a range of major and smaller engineering companies, supporting a growing number of

apprentices.

5.5 Introduction of universal free school meals for P6 and 7 in Primary Schools

The Scottish Government made a commitment to build on the free universal free school meals for P1-3 during the academic year 2020/21. This meant the introduction of free school meals for P4 in August 2021, P5 in January 2022 and for P6 and 7 by August 2022. Inverclyde already funded free school meals for P4 and so the decision was made to introduce free school meals for P5 in August 2021 with a commitment to review.

Alongside other Councils, Inverclyde are currently in the process of submitting the requirements to the Scottish Futures Trust for alterations to kitchens to meet the anticipated demand for the full roll out in August 2022. Whilst each kitchen is different, in Inverclyde this will include increasing oven size, additional hot plates, extra fridge and freezer space, extra steamer capacity, hot counters and hot units in some kitchens. As yet, we are unclear as to any capital allocation from the Scottish Government but local government are working through the Scottish Futures Trust to identify the overall requirements. Any work is expected to be completed over the school summer holiday period if possible. Overall dining room sizes are expected to be able to cope with the demand but there are a few schools where we may need to consider revising the lunchtime arrangements and explore extending the lunch time break or the school day.

Overall uptake for free school meals during COVID-19 has been lower than anticipated and what the service would expect to see, however given the changes to routines and the way meals have been served this may be expected. The hope is that as we begin the recovery process from COVID-19 and all primary schools go back to eating in dining rooms that the numbers will recover.

If the service were to offer universal free school meals for P6 and P7 from January this would mean alterations to the menu so that the current kitchens could cope. The capacity of dining rooms to cope is dependent on uptake but there is a risk that if schools have not had chance to explore extending the lunch time then in some schools the dining rooms could become overcrowded.

Officers are confident that after the necessary alterations to the kitchens, that Inverclyde will be able to offer universal free school meals to all pupils in Primary Schools. We are also aware through our networks that some other authorities are reporting that they are struggling to meet the timescale for the phased roll out and will require significant adaptations to kitchens and dining room capacity to meet the August 2022 deadline.

After careful consideration, it is the recommendation of officers that we remain with free school meals for only those who are entitled for P6 and 7 until the necessary changes to the kitchens are put in place for August 2022. The introduction of universal free school meals for all pupils should be a positive experience for pupils and a reduced or adapted menu in overcrowded dining rooms will not be conducive to encouraging uptake.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None.

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

6.2 **Legal**

None.

6.3 **Human Resources**

None.

6.4 **Equalities**

Equalities

(a) Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES
x	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

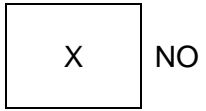
Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
x	NO

(c) Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES
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6.5 Repopulation

N/A.

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

7.1 Reference made in 5.4 to a national consultation re the SQA and Education Scotland.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 N/A.