

TEACHER PANEL

SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Purpose

1. This paper provides an overview of some of the actions being taken to support vulnerable school age children and young people affected by Covid-19. The panel is invited to discuss progress and whether further actions are now required.

Background

2. Schools are a key source of support to vulnerable children and young people. Since schools closed in March following Covid-19 health advice we have been working closely with local authorities and other partners to ensure that vulnerable children and young people continue to be able to access the care and support they need during this challenging time. This has meant taking new and flexible approaches and putting in place a range of monitoring mechanisms to allow emerging needs to be addressed swiftly and ensure that no one is left without support.
3. A comprehensive package of funding has been provided to local authority partners to ensure that vulnerable children and young people continue to be cared for and supported while Covid-19 is disrupting normal delivery mechanisms.

Key drivers and actions to address those drivers

4. Much work is taking place at both central and local government level to ensure children and young people can access a range of care and support. Key actions are set out in the paragraphs below:

Free school meals

5. Free school meals continue to be provided to those who are eligible due to families being in receipt of qualifying benefits and other families experiencing financial hardship. Provision is delivered via vouchers/giftcards, direct financial payments, delivery of food parcels or at an education or early years hub. The latest monitoring returns show that over 150,000 free school meals are being distributed daily.
6. Local authorities have been provided with £30 million of new investment from the SG Food Fund to support families unable to access food as a result of Covid-19. £15 million is specifically for free school meals, however local authorities can use the overall £30 million to meet emerging local needs and circumstances. Discussions about what provision of free school meals and any additional funding may be required to cover summer holidays are currently taking place.

Mental health support

7. Schools remain a key link for parents and carers in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people and continue to be available to discuss any concerns with guidance staff or senior management.
8. Education Scotland has provided educational professionals with accessible information on resources and signposted organisations which can help to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. They have also developed e-learning resources and updated information on the Parentzone website to specifically address the mental health of children and young people in the current context.

Children and young people with additional support needs

9. Local authorities and schools are using creative ways to support children and young people with additional support needs during this challenging time, including direct support from Educational Psychologists, and development of specific resources and advice for parents and carers. Bespoke learning activities, support and advice is available for parents and carers through the Scottish Government's Parent Club website and partner organisations including CALL Scotland, Dyslexia Scotland, Reach and Enquire.
10. Looking ahead, schools, clusters and local authorities are considering new and innovative approaches to transition in relation to curriculum and wellbeing matters.

Children and young people with complex additional support needs

11. Local authorities have put in place a wide range of provision to ensure that children and young people with complex additional support needs continue to benefit from the care and support that schools and nurseries provide for them, guided by the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and public health experts. They can continue, where appropriate, to attend hubs to secure continuity in their care and support, and [further information](#) has been published by the Scottish Government.
12. Around 1% of pupils attend educational hubs each day, the number of vulnerable children and young people attending hubs has begun to rise slightly in recent weeks.
13. Children and young people with complex additional support needs who are learning and living in residential special schools continue to receive the required care and support, through specific arrangements made with independent and grant-aided schools where this is appropriate.

Closing the poverty-related attainment gap

14. We are continuing to invest £182 million from the Attainment Scotland Fund in 2020/21. We have committed to extend funding for the Scottish Attainment Challenge at current levels beyond the lifetime of this parliament and into 2021/22.

15. The Scottish Government is providing local authorities/schools with flexibility to redirect Attainment Scotland Funding aimed at closing the attainment gap to help mitigate the impacts of school closures on our most disadvantaged families for whom home learning arrangements may prove more challenging to adapt to.
16. Local authorities and teachers have flexibility to redirect Pupil Equity Funding and wider Attainment Scotland Funding resources and support to our most disadvantaged families to ensure learning is disrupted as little as possible. Examples include providing tablets for home working and transport for those attending hubs.
17. On Friday 1 May 2020 we announced that over £250 million in Pupil Equity Funding will be made available to schools over 2020/21 and 2021/22 meaning that, for the first time, PEF allocations have been confirmed for two years, to provide more certainty for head teachers and aid learning during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Digital inclusion

18. Scottish Government, working with key partners, has been considering how best to support educational continuity during the Covid-19 outbreak. As the vast majority of children and young people are currently learning from home, and we expect any phased return to school/ELC-based learning to involve significant elements of continuing home learning, access to a digital device and connectivity will be key to achieving this. We have therefore undertaken urgent work to establish what the options are for ensuring that children and young people are not disadvantaged in their education during the Covid outbreak and beyond due to digital exclusion. The age range in scope includes early years and school age.
19. This work seeks to make best use of the expertise in, and the structures developed for, Connecting Scotland.
20. The provision of digital technology and connectivity will enable many children, and their families, to become digitally included, providing the support they need for digital learning at home as well as enabling them to access vital online services and family support.

Vulnerable children and young people who do not attend hubs

21. Recognising that many vulnerable children are not attending the hubs, in addition to the support that schools are providing with online learning, a range of local services are ensuring that support is sustained to children in their own homes.
22. Local authority, health and third sector services have transformed their delivery models in a short period of time, using online approaches as well as practical assistance, to ensure that children receive the level of support appropriate to their needs.

23. A data set has been agreed with SOLACE, to evidence the support that is being provided, and inform further developments. This confirms that children on the child protection register are being contacted regularly and 90% were seen (face-to-face) by a professional within the last fortnight, and that around 75% of all children with a multi-agency plan are being contacted by a professional at least weekly.
24. A report has been published on the initial impact of the crisis on children and families, and updated reports will be provided on a regular basis as the pandemic continues.
25. We understand that children and families will be experiencing significant challenges just now, and that this will lead to increased demand for services, once the lockdown is relaxed. We need to be able to respond with practical and community-based help for families, avoiding the need for high level supports such as care placements and referrals to specialist services.

Questions for discussion

26. The panel is invited to note the contents of the paper and consider the following questions:
- Does the panel agree that sufficient action is being taken at a local, regional and national level to ensure that vulnerable children and young people continue to be supported? If not, are there other actions that need to be taken at a local, regional or national level?
 - Can the panel share any local examples of where these actions are working well?
 - Is the panel aware of any examples of current approaches that are not delivering as well as they could be? What are the reasons for this? What more needs to be done to address these issues?