

# RETURN TO SCHOOL

Education, Participation & Skills update October 2020



## Background

All schools re-opened at the start of term, albeit some had a phased opening for year groups. The back to school campaign emphasised safe opening and attendance was higher than expected.

The DFE are constantly reviewing and re-issuing advice and guidance for schools, particularly the information relating to actions required in the event that there are confirmed cases at a school. Schools in Plymouth are following guidance carefully and diligently.

## Suspected and confirmed cases in Plymouth schools.

Where schools have confirmed cases of Covid we are working with all alongside Public Health (PH) and Public Health England (PHE) to manage the situation. Since the return in September, and at the time of this report, 12 schools have reported a positive case amongst staff or pupils. The picture can change rapidly and we collect daily detailed information from schools on the number of suspected cases and staff who are self-isolating. The figures suggest that around 800+ children have been asked to self-isolate due to contact with a confirmed case or suspected case. In most cases just one bubble is affected at any one time, but the course of action is determined in consultation with PH and according to the school's risk assessment. In several cases no bubble has been affected as the member of staff had not been in contact with pupils.

The impact is felt on keyworkers and across front line services either because of the requirement to self-isolate or in order to undertake childcare.

## Testing

The availability of tests, and the speed with which they are returned, is a significant issue for schools.

Several measures are being put in place to address the situation:

- Colleagues in PH and PCC Commissioning are working with the CCG to put in place adequate resource.
- Across PCC, the CCG and Livewell, we have created local, innovative solutions
- Livewell and PCC are considering whether swabbing can be done at school sites or nearby in a community centre
- Schools are being encouraged to order replacement kits from the DFE site which they were able to do from 16<sup>th</sup> September
- Public being encouraged to provide feedback on Covid-19 testing process so that the Council can highlight areas for improvement to the government based on the experiences of Plymouth residents.

We continue to urge parents via schools and messaging to persist in trying to get a test. We have written to all parents and have asked schools to put the message on their website too. The letter includes information about testing, symptoms and self-isolation as well as reminding parents that the return to school has been a good start for most.

## **Transport and public spaces**

We have details of the opening times and any staggered opening times for most secondary schools. Working with the bus companies, we have negotiated 6 additional buses who can circle the school routes and collect any pupils who were unable to get on their usual bus. No other route closures have been notified to us. These 6 buses are deployed and we have the ability to procure more should they be required. Public transport has coped well and there have been few comments or complaints from parents. Our plan allowed us to respond quickly and negotiate routes where there were difficulties.

Colleagues from Civil Enforcement have monitored busy bus stops to observe social distancing and the entry and exit from buses. Again there have been few issues reported. We believe there will be continue to be capacity as bus usage by the public remains low in the city. We do not know how many parents have elected to transport their child themselves or encourage walking/cycling. Many pupils in the city travel more than 3 miles to school due to the specialist nature of provision and so it is unlikely that walking or cycling will be a viable option for many.

A small number of schools and parents have reported issues with crowding at the school gate or irresponsible socialising/mixing in local parks. We are working with colleagues to identify these locations and have a 'presence' from time to time to remind parents about social distancing.

## **Recovery and Improvement Plans**

The Plymouth Standards Partnership (PSP) has sought bring about a coherent approach to recovery and improvement by compiling a robust 'umbrella plan' that incorporates renewed focus on the breadth of school improvement, alongside clear strategies to address the 'new' needs of disadvantaged and SEN/D pupils and specific aspects arising from the COVID-19 crisis and the return to full-time schooling. Plymouth Secondary schools have a dedicated plan, working with the Plymouth Commission and incorporating the three strands; a working group of Plymouth Primary Headteachers, working in partnership with a PCC advisor have determined the implementation plan for their phase; and the Plymouth Special School Headteachers working in partnership with another PCC adviser have determined the implementation plan for their schools. All partners are represented in the Plymouth Standards Partnership (PSP) and progress and challenges will be reported and addressed in the PSP meetings that occur each term.

## **Catch up learning**

Schools are being offered a catch up premium of £80 per pupil for most schools, to assist with programmes of learning to support pupils who require additional support. It is recognised that many of these will be pupils who have not been in school since March 2020. In primary schools some year groups returned from 1<sup>st</sup> June. Attendance monitoring and soft intelligence showed that many disadvantaged pupils were not those considered eligible and take up of remote learning was very limited.

Ofsted have announced that they will be conducting assurance visits to schools between September 2020 and March 2021. The main focus of the visit will be to ascertain from school leaders what is being done to support catch up for **all** pupils. There will be a focus on disadvantage. Whilst schools with poor outcomes and inadequate inspection grade will be prioritised, all schools may receive a visit. This, alongside work we do as a city, will provide invaluable insight into what needs to be commissioned to accelerate learning and support disadvantaged pupils.

Ofsted have visited one of our maintained primary schools and the Headteacher has shared her positive experience with other colleagues. EPS are providing information and support for all maintained school headteachers to ensure that they are prepared, with necessary data and have to hand, information required by the Inspectors.

## Skills4Plymouth –Resurgam

We have launched the next phase of the Skills Launchpad to employers and schools in preparation for the development of the Schools hub and Employer hub. We are now able to secure further buy in and productive work on destinations as part of the Youth Hub development.

In preparation for the launch of Kickstart, we have gathered the latest information on 16-24 year olds in receipt of benefits so that we can work with the Gatekeepers already identified to match potential work placements with young people. PCC will offer placements to young people where possible.

## Wellbeing for Education Return

PCC has received additional grant funding to work with local partners and to tailor and deliver wellbeing and mental health training and support for education settings. It is recognised that's school staff may need additional support to recognise and understand the range of children and young people's reactions and know how to support them, their parents and carers, and their colleagues.

The Wellbeing for Education Return project seeks to better equip education settings to support children and young people's wellbeing, resilience and recovery in the context of COVID-19 and associated measures.

There are two elements to the project:

- A national training package, which will provide guidance and resources for education staff on responding to the impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of students
- The Local Authority will put in place one or more local experts who will work with partners and deliver to leads in education settings, and provide ongoing advice and support until March 2021.

The delivery of this project will be undertaken by The Zone Plymouth. The Zone has been engaging with and supporting schools and settings across the city for 4 years via Progeny, in partnership with the wider system, supporting the Emotional Health and Wellbeing of Whole School Communities. The project aims to equip nominated education staff with the knowledge and skills to introduce and contextualise clear, coherent information and resources to their settings' staff and to support and enable discussions with children and young people, parents and carers.

The Zone Plymouth will also provide ongoing support to maintained schools and academies through the Autumn and Spring terms (2020/21). The initial training will take place during the 2 weeks prior to October half term, with an opportunity for each setting to have one delegate attend.

## GCSE, AS and A level examinations

On 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020, Ofqual published a consultation seeking views on the proposed changes to the GCSE, AS and A level examinations scheduled for Summer 2021, and the arrangements for non-exam assessments undertaken by students who will be taking exams in Summer 2021.

The consultation closed on 16 July 2020. Ofqual received 28,972 responses. On 3<sup>rd</sup> August, following the consultation, Ofqual determined the following actions:

Overall, exam boards **should not**:

- Change the length, number or format of the exam papers, unless it is to accommodate specific changes to the exam and assessment arrangements.
- Make greater use of optional questions in exams, unless it is to accommodate subject specific decisions.

For specific subjects, exam boards **should**:

- Change how they assess content in GCSE Geography, History and Ancient History
- Change how they assess GCSE English literature to allow for some choice in the content.
- Remove the requirement for centres to make declarations appertaining to the mandated number of days of fieldwork in GCSE, AS and A level Geography. Retain the non-exam assessment in Geography at A level. Exam boards should be flexible in their requirement for students, at all levels, to use primary data.
- Remove the requirement for centres to make declarations appertaining to the mandated number of days of fieldwork in GCSE, AS and A level in Geology and AS and A level Environmental Science.
- Adjust the observational activity required for GCSE Astronomy.
- Report the assessment of spoken language as an endorsement for Modern Foreign Languages.
- Allow for a range of adjustments to accommodate potential public health requirements – eg. GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition; GCSE, AS and A level Music; and GCSE Physical Education.

The consultation considered issues of fairness, volume of content, subject specific matters, different approaches in GCSE, AS and A level, exam paper length and format, changes to the exam timetable and overall impact of the changes designed to reduce the pressure on teachers and students during the academic year 2020/21.

There was general support for a delay to the exams, to allow more time for teaching, but respondents were less positive if that meant a subsequent delay in the publication of results. Ofqual are currently consulting with the exam boards on the changes to the regulatory framework necessary to implement the decisions arising from the consultation. Ofqual, whilst planning for exams and assessments to take place in 2021, recognise that there could be further disruption and will continue to develop contingency measures and explore different options.

### **Vocational, technical and other general qualifications**

Learners taking vocational and technical qualifications have also experienced lost teaching time.

Ofqual launched a consultation on the assessment and awarding of Vocational, Technical and other General Qualifications in 2020 to 2021, on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2020.

The consultation closed on 14 August 2020. On 7<sup>th</sup> September, following the consultation, Ofqual determined the following actions:

- To enable awarding organisation to assist with mitigating the impact of disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment through adaptation of qualifications and assessments.
- To introduce a second version of the Extraordinary Regulatory Framework(ERF) called the Extended ERF, to be applied to all qualifications except GCSE, AS and A levels and apprenticeship end-point assessments.
- To make no provision for the issue of calculated results
- To retain ERF (May 2020) to enable eligible learners to receive a calculated result and permit appeals for qualifications awarded under the May ERF.
- Not prescribe a single approach to VTQs, but to issue statutory guidance to inform awarding organisation to support a consistent approach.
- Support awarding organisations to develop parity for similar qualification types
- Detail specific guidance of Special Consideration of the impact of the ongoing pandemic in the statutory guidance.
- Permit awarding organisations to adapt qualifications and assessments taken in international markets, providing this does not undermine the validity of the qualification.
- Certificates should be issued as normal with no reference to results being determined under the Extended ERF arrangements.
- Not to supplement the appeals process with any additional guidance around appeals in 2020 and 2021.

- To require awarding organisation to maintain records of decisions made when adapting assessments and qualifications; and have regard to any advice provided in the form of a Technical Advice Notice.

### **Summary of exams and assessments in 2021**

- At this time, it is intended that subject to some adjustments to content and activity, all exams and assessments will take place in the summer 2021 for GCSE, AS and A level.
- Vocational and technical exams scheduled to take place in 2021, will also take place, with some modifications to content and activity.
- At this time, there is no intention to award calculated grades for academic, vocational or technical exams.
- The calendar for examinations in Summer 2021 has not yet been agreed.

### **Remote Learning**

As part of the ever changing DFE guidance for schools opening, there has been increasing information about the requirements for remote education.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020, the DFE published a 'good practice guide' for staff responsible for the curriculum and its delivery in schools, although non-statutory, it outlines how schools can meet the expectations set out in the guidance for full opening.

Schools are being asked to plan for disruption to schooling throughout 2020-21. The DFE recognise that remote education, although not without challenges, has been a great innovation arising from the pandemic and subsequent closure of schools.

Schools are expected to have the capacity to offer immediate remote education for classes or groups who are required to self-isolate for a short period of time, or where there are local restrictions requiring pupils to remain at home.

It is expected that remote learning fits seamlessly into the school curriculum and the DFE will be publishing further support for planning a sequenced curriculum that can be adapted for remote delivery during the autumn term.

Many schools who have developed effective remote learning have utilised a range of interactive platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom. This has enabled schools to create virtual classrooms. Examples are evident from both primary and secondary schools, such as Yealmpstone Primary and Sir John Hunt Community Sports College.

Schools can apply for government funded support to access free-to-use digital education platforms such as G Suite for Education or Office 365 for Education. These platforms can also be used in both the live and virtual classrooms and beyond the individual lesson context and are effective for professional development and staff briefings.

Some subjects such as Physical Education are very difficult to teach remotely. However, schools can use video demonstrations if appropriate and encourage their pupils to take regular physical exercise to maintain fitness.

There are practical problems, such as a lack of devices. Schools are encouraged to distribute school owned equipment accompanied by a user agreement or contract; and remind pupils that access is possible through large-screen technology. The DFE continue to roll out devices and consider further requirements. Affected pupils can be supported to come into school to use school resources within any rules in force at the time. Text books can also be used at home to provide structure to learning, supplemented with other forms of communication to keep pupils on track or answer questions about work.

In a snapshot of the Ofsted visits this term, Ofsted have found that remote learning is not yet aligned to the regular curriculum, but the DFE have already outlined plans to address this.

In Plymouth, we do not yet have an overall picture of our remote learning capabilities, but anecdotally we are aware that some of our schools are completely able to offer remote learning and others have very little expertise or capacity at this time.