

# NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 FEBRUARY 2021

## STATEMENT OF EDUCATION & SKILLS PORTFOLIO HOLDER

### **Covid-19 – impact on schools and early years**

At the beginning of January the country entered another national lockdown and mainstream schools and academies were instructed to allow only vulnerable children and children of critical workers to attend. Schools were instructed to provide remote learning to all other pupils. This will be in place until at least the 8th March 2021.

Attendance in schools has been around 17% which is higher than in the initial lockdown last year. Attendance rates are highest in primary schools.

Lateral Flow Testing has been introduced by the government on a voluntary basis to nursery, primary, special and secondary schools. Revised risk assessment templates were produced by the Health & Safety team and professional associations were consulted. Tests are on a voluntary basis for all school staff and for pupils in year 7 and above in secondary and special schools.

The Local Authority has supported schools with regard to remote learning, both with access to digital devices and by providing remote learning policies, guidance and support materials. Schools are expected to provide a quality remote education offer to children not attending, this includes a mixture of online and offline learning activities. School leaders and governors are being supported by school improvement colleagues to do ensure their offer for families is appropriate.

A number of engagement sessions have been held with Early Years providers to discuss and alleviate issues in the private, voluntary and independent sector as well as in school based nursery provision.

### **Covid Winter Grant Scheme**

The Covid Winter Grant Scheme provides food voucher payments to ensure parents and carers hit hard by the pandemic can continue to provide the essentials, by helping meet the cost of food during the school holidays. The scheme was rolled out successfully over Christmas/New Year, when approximately 17,000 vouchers were distributed to parents in North Yorkshire within four weeks of the national initiative being announced.

The County Council allocated more than £700,000 of funding from the scheme to ensure children eligible for Free School Meals continued to have access to food over the Christmas holidays. The supermarket vouchers were distributed with the help of schools, academies, early years settings and post-16 colleges. The County Council also provided vouchers to care leavers. We are currently allocating further grant funding to schools, academies, care leavers, nurseries and other education settings before the start of the February half-term holiday.

Any families not eligible for Free School Meals who are struggling financially can apply to the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund, which makes emergency awards for food or utility vouchers. The County Council has increased its award entitlement for emergency provision

for a temporary period to help those hit hardest by the pandemic. More information is available at [www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf)

### **DfE Digital Devices**

North Yorkshire County Council was allocated 989 digital devices and 238 wireless routers by the Department for Education in 2020 to distribute to eligible vulnerable or disadvantaged children and young people across the County. These have all been allocated.

The DfE announced that schools would order any additional devices and routers directly from their supplier from the beginning of Autumn term 2020 onwards, with no ongoing involvement of the local authority in the process. However, we have supported schools to identify their allocation of devices and to order these through the DfE portal. We have focussed on this recently as a number of schools reported that they were unable to order devices and that this was a barrier to remote learning.

Each school has been allocated a number of devices and routers by the DfE based on their assessment of need. 3,149 devices (laptops and tablets) in total have been delivered or dispatched to North Yorkshire since the start of the scheme (this includes the 989 delivered directly to NYCC, with the rest to maintained schools. This does not include devices delivered to academy trusts). However, we are aware that there continue to be a significant number of children and young people who do not have access to a device. In response to this, Reboot North Yorkshire (<https://rebootny.co.uk/>) has been launched to support individuals and organisations to donate IT equipment that will be recycled and given to people in the county that currently lack access to these facilities. Devices will go to students, as well as other groups that may be socially isolated or do not have digital access.

### **School funding**

In January, school budgets were agreed with minimum per pupil funding levels of at least £4,000 per pupil at primary level and £5,150 per pupil at secondary level. In addition, teachers' pay and teachers' pension employer contribution grants were mainstreamed within funding allocations. Following consultation with schools and academies in North Yorkshire, the local authority agreed a +2% Minimum Funding Guarantee. A consultation has also been held with special schools to provide an updated funding formula.

The local authority continues to lobby for a fairer funding deal for North Yorkshire, in particular, the financial challenges faced by our small, rural secondary schools.

The local authority continues to actively engage with the Early Years sector to provide support through covid-19 and we recognise the challenges they face and the contribution that they make to children and young people across the county.

### **School organisation changes**

On 12 January 2021 the Executive agreed publication of a statutory proposal for the closure of St Hilda's Catholic Primary School, Whitby with effect from April 2021. The representation period closes on 19 February and the Executive are scheduled to take a final decision on 9 March 2021.

On 26 January 2021 the Executive agreed publication of a statutory proposal for the closure of Kell Bank CE VC Primary School with effect from August 2021. The representation period

closes on 5 March and the Executive are scheduled to take a final decision on 23 March 2021.

The new school proposals for both Knaresborough and Northallerton are progressing. The construction project for each school has reached the procurement stage and the successful contractors are expected to be announced in the coming weeks. Applications from a number of Academy Trusts who wish to operate the schools are currently being assessed, leading to a final decision by the Regional Schools Commissioner in May 2021. The intended opening date for both schools remains September 2022.

### **North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area**

The North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area Programme is a scheme funded by the Dept for Education and focused on improving social mobility in Scarborough, Whitby and Filey. Funding has been provided to continue the programme until August 2021.

The programme has continued to provide support for schools and young people in different areas during the last year, but has focused on teacher recruitment, speech and language support in primary schools and additional funding for to support learning at home.

To date, the programme has: supported the recruitment of more than 200 teachers; 232 children have received, and been discharged from, speech and language therapy, and more than 100 families have taken part in family learning sessions based on the 'PEEP learning together' model. The programme has responded to the impact of Covid 19 by providing additional funding for mental health support and to improve school readiness by helping parents interact with their children, especially in the early years.

We are expecting further information in the coming weeks from the DfE about the future of the programme.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR PATRICK MULLIGAN