

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

5 MAY 2021

STATEMENT OF EDUCATION & SKILLS PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Covid-19 – impact on schools and early years

I am pleased to say that the return to school following the Easter break has gone very well and attendance in schools is now almost at average levels seen before the pandemic, with average attendance at approximately 93 per cent across all schools in the county. We are also pleased to report that of the 1,100 educational settings in North Yorkshire, including schools, academies, colleges and early years providers, we have just 32 pupils or staff who have tested positive for coronavirus in the last 28 days. Secondary schools are underway with their planning for GCSE and A level assessments. They are working with tight deadlines to secure evidence to make accurate grade judgements. The high attendance rates will support this process.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of pupils in North Yorkshire are now back in school is great news for children and young people, not just for their education and learning, but also their wellbeing and emotional development.

Covid Winter/Local Grant Scheme

The local authority has continued to support vulnerable families through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme over two weeks at Christmas, one week at February half-term and a further two weeks at Easter. We are grateful to schools and early years providers in assisting the local authority in ensuring that support has reached the families that need it with up to c.19,000 families or individuals benefitting from this scheme (funding provided to the local authority by the Department for Work and Pensions). A continuation of the scheme through the Covid Local Support Grant has been confirmed for the summer-term holiday break.

From Easter, the local authority has worked to implement the “Food. Entertainment. Activities. Sport. Together” (FEAST) programme of enriching activities and nutritional advice for children and young people entitled to free school meals. Working alongside a consortia of partners including North Yorkshire Youth, North Yorkshire Sport and Rural Arts, a range of website resources have been made available in addition to the sourcing and distribution of over 11,000 activity bags containing age-appropriate creative ideas and resources for children and young people.

Primary Admissions

Ninety-five per cent of families (94.91% percent) of primary age children in North Yorkshire have secured their first choice of school for their child. Of all families in the county who requested a primary school place for their child this September, just over 98 per cent (98.29 per cent) received an offer from one of their top three preferences of school. This is very good news for North Yorkshire families and it is pleasing that so many families continue to gain the first preference from their choice of schools and that the percentage remains consistently high.

The service works hard with all North Yorkshire schools to ensure they deliver the highest standards of education so that families who are not given first preferences can still send their children to good schools. We wish those children starting primary school in September a happy and exciting start in their new school.

School organisation changes

The new school proposals for both Knaresborough and Northallerton are progressing. Applications from a number of Academy Trusts who wish to operate the schools were assessed in February and March. The LA has made recommendations for Trust appointments to the Regional Schools Commissioner whose final decision is expected on or around 6 May 2021.

The contractor appointment process for the Northallerton construction project is underway and the target opening date remains September 2022.

The Manse Farm, Knaresborough development site is however on a slower than expected trajectory for the residential and infrastructure aspects, in part we understand due to covid impacts on construction. As a result the developer is unable to complete the transfer of the school land to NYCC ownership to enable construction to start in summer 2021 as was planned. The decision has therefore been taken not to proceed with contractor appointment at this time, and the school's target opening date has been revised to September 2023.

On 9 March 2021 the Executive determined the closure proposal for St Hilda's Catholic Primary School, Whitby. The school closed on 9 April 2021.

On 23 March 2021 the Executive Member for Education and Skills determined the closure proposal for Kell Bank CE VC Primary School near Masham. There were no objections received during the representation period. The School will close at the end of the current academic year.

School funding

We have lobbied the DfE for a number of years now for a fairer distribution of school funding across England. Despite the DfE's intention to move towards a 'hard' national funding formula, we remain concerned over the financial sustainability of small, rural schools – particularly small secondary schools. We continue to argue that the costs of running rural schools should be fully reflected in the national funding formula; the local authority has engaged with DfE over the current simplistic way of calculating sparsity and the breadth and depth of financial support to support very rural schools.

We also continue to argue for reform of the national High Needs funding formula to better reflect actual demand in the number of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR PATRICK MULLIGAN