

Appendix 2 - Support for vulnerable learners during pandemic

Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and School Based Counselling team (SBC)

The following work was undertaken to support schools and vulnerable learners during the initial period of school closures during the Spring and Summer term of 2020:

- Direct visits and virtual meetings to the hubs in order to support staff with organisation and planning and to provide direct support to vulnerable pupils.
- Establishing two dedicated EPS phone parents and schools. The themes that emerged from these phone calls were around how to meet the needs of pupil's with ALN who were struggling to cope with the loss of structure and routine; competing demands on parent's time; family dynamics; supporting transition back to school; and pupil and parent wellbeing;
- Telephone check-ins/counselling by the SBC team;
- Weekly check-in calls by the SCB team with the School Links and support, advice and resources to schools in response to requests made.
- Individual and small group cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) input was provided to pupils in 3 out of 5 schools who were receiving this intervention prior to lockdown.
- Provision of resources on supporting wellbeing to schools to support their pupil check-ins and when speaking to parents (this has included information for parents and children and young people);
- Indirect support to pupil's who were taught at home by offering resources and support to staff who already had relationships with learners;
- Virtual meeting with the secondary Pastoral Leaders to discuss how schools are checking-in with and supporting pupils, share good practice and provide advice around this.
- Creation four evidence-based advice booklets (EPS) including: Coronavirus and Bereavement (Schools), Coronavirus and Bereavement (Parents), Supporting the Return to School after COVID19 (Advice), Supporting the Return to School after COVID19 (Practical Strategies). These were sent to all Head Teachers in the local authority.
- Accredited training for the SBC team to enable them to offer telephone, instant messaging and online counselling.
- Support for schools with bereavements during the lockdown period. This included a planning and signposting meeting and in 3 cases, a circles of vulnerability exercise to plan support for individual pupils and groups in the school.
- Internal supervision sessions to ensure the wellbeing staff.

The EPS has undertaken some evaluation through stakeholder feedback and more formal inventories (Becks Anxiety Inventory linked to CBT) and identified positive feedback received from schools, parents, hub staff and young people for example:

- The childcare hubs verbally reported that they found EP involvement helpful;
- Verbal feedback from parents who have had direct conversations suggests that they found being able to talk to a professional helpful, however the constraints imposed by COVID19 meant that onward signposting and the effectiveness of some strategies usually used to support young people was more limited.
- Pupils who received ongoing weekly telephone support from the school-based counselling service and the cognitive behaviour therapist (CBT) therapist have expressed to their counsellor that they have found this helpful and would like it to

continue. Similarly, pupils have also been able to withdraw from this service when they feel that their needs have been met and they no longer have any concerns.

- Initial analysis of the pre and post measures suggests that the CBT interventions have reduced pupil anxiety and have had a positive impact.
- Schools have expressed that they have found the bereavement and return to school packs very informative, practical and helpful and that these have been implemented.

Since September 2021 the EPS and SBCT has continued to support schools, children and families with direct and virtual support.

Youth Service

The following has been ongoing during the period of the pandemic:

- Youth workers have maintained contact with vulnerable young people and their families;
- contact has been sustained during the periods of school closures and school holiday periods, maintaining the support structures necessary for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable;
- The service's teams have coordinated the distribution of emergency food parcels, activity packs, cooking advice and recipes etc. in order to support families at a very difficult time;
- Greater phone communication linked to the restrictions of the pandemic
- Ongoing identification and response to NEETs, particularly relevant to those in Year 11 at the time of school closure;
- An increase in Youth Service representation on the SPACE wellbeing panel.

Children Looked After Team (CLA)

During the last 18 months a range of work has been undertaken to support schools and CLA learners. The CLA team has been reshaped recruiting a CLA coordinator ensuring a focus on compliance with the ALN Act and developing the roles of Education and Well-being Link Workers with a regional allocation of support to all schools with CLA.

During the initial stages of the pandemic support was provided via the hubs to some CLA children where it was identified this was a need. The CLA coordinator worked with colleagues and in partnership with schools and social workers to monitor and continually review hub access.

Termly Planning meetings are in place with schools to track and monitor (through RAG system) all CLA thus ensuring oversight of all CLA.

During the pandemic the CLA coordinator offered a variety of training to foster carers including Supporting Reading – Learning to read and promoting Reading at Home, understanding the new curriculum, support for blended learning, understanding and regulating emotions, Supporting Transitions, and strategies for health and well-being.

Designated CLA Lead training was also delivered virtually to schools.

Education Welfare Service

The Education Welfare Service have maintained contact with vulnerable learners and families throughout the COVID 19 pandemic as follows:

- Home visits have been made to pupils who schools have been unable to contact. At the height of the pandemic, this was in excess of 100 visits in a week
- Weekly outgoing welfare calls to families, and follow up with referrals depending on the issues arising. These were primarily based around technology and access, but as the pandemic progressed, they became more about mental health and wellbeing, and particularly food banks
- Increasing the uptake of free school meals by visiting homes
- An incoming helpline for pupils and families
- Tracking pupils moving in and out of the LA during the pandemic and ensuring that they are registered with a school

Feedback both verbally and through emails have been received from schools across the Borough.