

COMMITTEE: FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 4TH MARCH 2021

Annual Report for Education and Skills Service 2019/20

Report of: Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson, Lead Member Children's Services

Purpose of report

The annual report overview for Education and Skills Service is provided to committee members to review the education performance in Northumberland, as known, in 2019/20; present the work of the central Education and Skills team and review the impact of the work to support continued engagement in education throughout the Covid 19 global pandemic; review the digital annual report attached to this report. The Education and Skills Service leads a number of specialist areas and supports Early Years settings, all key phases of education, virtual school, special educational needs and provides training for young people age 16-19, adults and apprentices across eight campuses in Northumberland as well as training in the workplace and the underpinning infrastructures to support the work through the school organisation and resources and the performance team.

Recommendations

Committee is recommended to:

- Review the content of the headline report
- Receive digital annual report and recognise the performance given the significant challenges of the global pandemic against operating circumstances and the valuable support provided to all learners within;
 - Early Years Settings and Schools
 - Special Education Needs support and service
 - Virtual School
 - Learning and Skills Service inc' Careers Guidance Team and Employability and Skills Service
 - School Organisation and Resources
 - Performance monitoring Team
 - Schools Human Resources and Health and Safety Team contributions

- Review the key areas for improvement in the Education and Skills priorities which inform how we review, revisit and shape future improvements and work programme
- Support the development of a Skills Strategy for Northumberland which supports our schools to build career pathways, develops the skills of our young people and adults to be able to have successful and sustainable jobs underpinning the economic priorities of the county.
- Develop a coherent approach working with businesses, building relationships which benefit industry, skills, schools and our residents

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- We want you to have access to the things you need; ‘connecting’
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential; ‘learning’
- We want you to attract more and better jobs; ‘thriving’

1. Key issues

- 1.1 The annual report for Education and Skills is presented as a digitally optimised report which provides viewers with a visual overview of the performance against national averages in 2019/20, considers the impact of the work undertaken and demonstrates the impact for our children and young people in 2019/20.
- 1.2 Performance should not be compared against previous years due to calculated grade processes and dynamic late changes to outcomes reporting.
- 1.3 Partnership working with schools has never been better, as recognised by schools themselves. The role of the central team (Including Schools HR and Health and Safety team) to support schools has been important to provide assurance and interpretation of guidance at a time of rapid change whilst schools and skills maintained safe environments in which to continue learning.
- 1.4 The digital world is embraced and the responsibility to become even more innovative and prepare our children and young people for a changed world is high priority.
- 1.5 The approach by the Inclusive Education service is an important priority to be able to work across services supporting some of our children with the greatest needs and to meet the rapidly emerging needs as a result of the global pandemic changes to lives, learning and futures.
- 1.6 The Northumberland Learning and Skills portfolio is changing to meet the priorities for the North of Tyne Combined Authority whereby more residents are supported into employment and greater in work progression.

2. Background

It is without doubt that the academic year 2019/20 has experienced seismic change for the whole education and skills sector. From March 23rd 2020 schools were 'closed' to the greater majority of pupils and remained open to pupils who were the children of key workers and those children with Education, Health Care plans. An extraordinary year, in which education and children's social care, have been hugely affected by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

This has been a year of 2 very different halves but what remained clear is the importance of our work for children and young people, whatever the circumstances we find ourselves in. The role and work of education underpinned being able to support the health and care professionals through continued access to schools, early years settings and skills sites throughout the pandemic lockdown. So many individuals and families experienced the life changing impact that covid had upon them, the work to support our children and young people, our workforce and our partners to continue the engagement, 'education' and safety of everyone through a fast paced, changing environment emerged over a very short period of time and shaped the focus of everyone through to the end of the academic year.

The resilient and determined approach by early years settings, schools, skills and education support services to support our children and their families and carers was outstanding and commendable. An unwavering approach to keep the child or young person safe and at the heart of decisions remained core to dynamic work practices.

The annual report for 2019/2020 in a digital format contains links to detailed reports for further reading and review, with the report highlighting key facets to remind everyone that the role they played and the achievements in such a significantly changed environment should not be underestimated, but celebrated and built upon.

As the sector continues to recover, respond and reflect, we highlight areas that we are focused upon to bring about even greater change and impact to improve the life chances for our children and young people in Northumberland.

The extent of the recovery required to narrow gaps is one of the biggest challenges we face and the shaping of services is prioritised to be able to respond and support our settings, schools, skills and partner providers to meet their challenges. Our work to narrow and close gaps in educational outcomes and engagement underpins social mobility and informs our approach to inclusive growth to support future life chances.

Headlines and Impact statements for 2019.20.

2.1 Early Years and Key Stages

2.1.1 19/20 saw our nationally reported figures for take up of eligible 2-year-olds reach a high of 92%, which placed us third in the county. Our 3/4-year-old take up nationally reported figures hit 115% (some come from out of county to attend) and placed us first nationally.

2.1.2 There were no recorded outcomes at the foundation stage profile due to Covid, (previous years placed us above the national average) put the monitoring of schools and settings demonstrated great provision across the county. Throughout

the Covid crisis every parent who needed a nursery place for their child in Northumberland was accommodated.

2.1.3 Primary outcomes in 19/20 were not recorded in their usual manner due to the impact of Covid. The vast majority of our first and primary schools were supported by the school improvement team and we continue to know all our schools well. Reports from the team indicated strong impact across key stage 1 and key stage 2 with a high focus on maths and English progression in conjunction with the broader provision of foundation subjects.

2.1.4 A focus on SEND learners remained a high priority across the sector, with the graduated approach making further impact in many cases. The only reported academic outcome in first and primary schools was the Phonics Screening Check where Northumberland remained above to national average with a combined score of 80.4%.

2.1.5 In 2020 Key Stage 4 results were based on centre-assessed grades or standardised grades (whichever was higher) as public examinations were cancelled due to Covid-19. Outcomes improved on the three headline measures published. Northumberland now exceeds the national average for Attainment 8 and 4+ in

English & Maths, and is 1% below the national average for 5+ English & Maths. Progress 8 figures were not calculated in 2020.

2.1.6 At Key Stage 5 the Average Points Score (both academic and vocational) per entry increased by over 6 points and now sits very close to the national average.

2.1.7 Northumberland pupils sitting technical level qualifications continue to perform above the national average.

2.1.8 Impact Statements:

The Early Years and School Improvement Teams have worked at 100% capacity throughout Covid delivering:

- Over 80 dedicated Covid information sessions for school leaders
- 1500+ attendees to training sessions for early years and school staff
- 100% of schools and settings allocated a to Covid support network
- SENDCo support by weekly updates
- Vulnerable pupil monitoring on a weekly basis
- 100% of asylum seeker children placed in schools
- Over 16,000 daily logins to the Northumberland Learning Platform by pupils on home study
- Regular and topical home learning opportunities to support parents
- All parental requests for nursery and school placements responded to swiftly
- All Covid outbreaks managed robustly and in line with Public Health guidelines.

2.2 Virtual School

2.2.1 The Virtual School was identified as a strength in the 2020 Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILAC). The inspection highlighted strong systems and processes, strong leadership and multi-agency working for the education of looked after children, children missing education and elective home education.

2.2.2 There was a significant improvement in GCSE achievement for looked after children, with more than twice as many pupils achieving the Basics in 2020

compared to last year and half of the pupils entered for at least 1 GCSE achieving the Basics.

2.2.3 All care leavers studying for level 3 qualifications progressed to university places, and all care leavers in the final year of their university degree courses achieved good classifications.

2.2.4 For looked after children, there were no fixed term exclusions for pupils in Years 6 and 11, no permanent exclusions and no referrals to the Secretary of State to direct admission to school.

2.2.5 The impact of partnership working with the Education Welfare team was that fewer parents took their children out of school for term time holidays, demonstrated by the reduction in the issue of penalty fines to parents to 31 in 2020 from 108 the year before.

2.2.6 Impact statements:

- GCSE results for looked after children were the best since the Virtual School opened, with more than twice as many pupils achieving the Basics in 2020 compared to 2019
- No Northumberland looked after children have been permanently excluded from school since 2008
- Fewer children in Northumberland go missing from education than in our regional local authorities and since tracking of children missing from education became statutory in 2008 only 4 pupils have not been traced

2.3 Inclusive Education and Special Educational Needs

2.3.1 As a result of the pandemic the SEND strategy has been rewritten, the formal consultation on the SEND Strategy for Northumberland is ready to be launched, which details our aspirations and priorities over the coming 3 years in relation to children and young people with SEND and their families. The strategy is built on data and information gathered over the past year, and importantly on the lived experiences of our families and children during the pandemic including what they told us would make a difference to their lives.

2.3.2 Our focus is on working together with parents and families, and across partners to provide the right support at the right time. This underpins the overarching priority of Education and Skills and the County Council more widely of ensuring that all children can attend an inclusive and high quality school or setting as close to home as possible.

2.3.4 By providing a good education with appropriate support, we will tackle any disadvantage gap or prejudice that exists in relation to children and young people with SEND and properly prepare them for adult life.

2.3.5 A survey was undertaken to gather the views of life in lockdown which is shaping the direction of ensuring the child/ parent/ carer is at the heart of our

systems and decisions. The survey value cannot be underestimated as the voice of our residents.

2.3.6 Impact statements:

- Across 2020, our specialist teaching and educational psychology services have provided support and advice for children and young people with special educational needs in 96% of our schools
- 50% of our schools have received support from 3 or more of our specialist SEN teams
- The number of learners with SEN who were persistently absent from school has reduced significantly over the past three years, and the number of learners with SEEN who were excluded from school has continued to fall

2.4 Learning and Skills Service including Careers Guidance and Employability Skill and Services

2.4.1 Adult Learning for those aged over 19 forms the largest majority of the service and remains as a GOOD performance with an achievement rate of 84%, just below the National Average. Given the challenges to ensure learners remained on programme, engaged and making good progress throughout the pandemic this achievement rate is good.

2.4.2 There were 2442 enrolments onto programmes across eight campuses in 2019/20 for adult learners and 45 enrolments for young people aged 16-18 with the largest majority (98.8%) of enrolments being adult learning. Overall achievement for apprenticeships All learning aims, levels and ages is at 83% which is 19% above the National Average.

2.4.3 Covid-19 created some significant disruption to learning in the early weeks of the National Lockdown, the majority of staff and learners made rapid progress in developing and embracing a fully on-line learning platform. 84% of learners remained engaged and on target working and making good progress through to June and July, the end of the academic year.

2.4.4 The Careers Guidance Team delivers a robust data set whereby the number of young people whose current activities in relation to education and training are unknown is low. In September every 16-18 year old is made 'not known' in the system and the team must then find and record and track their destination. In November 2020 (the latest figure available) there were 60 young people (0.9% of the cohort) whose current destination was not known. Conversely, this relatively low figure does mean that the NEET figure for the county (3.9%) is higher than in some areas where the 'not known' figure is much higher.

2.4.5 The Employment and Skills service has played a vital role throughout the challenges of 2019/20 academic year supporting residents through some really challenging personal phases of their lives, helping residents when any employment potential feels very hard to achieve and in particular supporting residents throughout lockdown and developing a new service to responsive to residents who

became unemployed or significantly at risk in their roles through the furlough scheme.

2.4.6 Support includes general employment support, employability and skills training along with health and wellbeing support i.e. mindfulness sessions and confidence support. 813 residents have started on the programme since November 2017 and 225 have gone into employment. Whilst some participants have felt too vulnerable throughout the pandemic to continue looking for work (due to health conditions) many have gone into roles in newly emerging sectors i.e. facilities management and home working.

2.4.7 The North of Tyne Combined Authority granted funding to create The Employment support triage Programme which commenced in June 2020. 3 staff act as a single point of access for all online or phone queries through the NCC Covid Communities hub, supporting employment issues faced by individuals in need and working with JCPs and local support providers. They are able to provide 'light touch' advice and guidance, direction to online resources, and if appropriate, referral to existing Council Employability and Skills programmes. To date, 300 residents have accessed the service

2.4.8 Impact statements:

- Overall apprenticeship achievement was 83%, 19% above the national average
- More than 90% of learners (both adults and young people) progress and complete another programme following their first engagement with the service
- 98% of teaching and learning observations were graded as good or better
- 84% of adult learners in the Learning & Skills service remained engaged on programmes and continue to make progress during lockdown 1
- Skills are actively pursuing capital funding to support plans for an industry leading welding and fabrication training centre within Port of Blyth. The pioneering centre aims to maximise vocational skills in the sector to underpin regional priorities, providing outstanding progression opportunities into high value apprenticeships and careers and is pivotal to the skills need and employment opportunities in this sector

2.5 School Organisation and Resources

2.5.1 The Council is continuing this year with an investment programme funded from the Local Authority resources in order to maintain the schools estate; grow school places and deliver projects to support school reorganisations. the team is delivering: 4 new build schools, a Leisure Centre, a Fire station, 30 maintenance projects, 2 major refurbishment schemes and 6 extension projects which has seen over £38m invested in education in the last year.

2.5.2 Northumberland has continued this year to be ranked the top authority nationally for offering children and young people their first preference place in secondary school with 97.3% of parents getting their first choice. 97.9% of parents

were also offered their first preference for entry into primary school, again Northumberland being ranked second nationally.

2.5.3 There was a reduction in both fixed and permanent Exclusion for 2019/20 with permanent exclusion being reduced by 43% in 2019/20, some of the reduction can be accounted for due to schools only being open to limited number of pupils during the summer term of 2020. However early indications are that this downward trend has continued into the Autumn term of 2020 when school were fully open to all pupils with a reduction of 33% in PEX and 20% reduction in fixed exclusions compared to the same period of 2019.

2.5.4 Teams across the education and skills services have shown considerable adaptability during the pandemic and have supported with everything from PPE allocations and deliveries, set up our local free school meals voucher system from a standing start in less than 20 days, supported our children and families with the supply of IT equipment, kept a daily check on children attending our schools and early years settings to ensure key worker children were given a school place in order that our key worker families could attend work, and our most vulnerable children were safe.

2.5.5 Due to the fantastic efforts of our schools during the first national lockdown we have had nearly 306,000 attendances and eventually we had all but 2 of our schools open. The highest number of pupils attending school was the last week of June where we saw nearly 43,000 attendances, our single highest day for attendances was on 6 July with 9,609 pupils in schools across Northumberland.

2.5.6 All in all a very challenging time, but has been a great success in forming new and hopefully long lasting relationships with our schools, on which we can build for the good of all Northumberland Children and Young People.

2.5.7 Impact statements:

- 33% reduction in permanent exclusions and 20% reduction in fixed term exclusions when comparing Autumn term 2019 to Autumn term 2020
- 98% of first preferences allocated in both the primary and secondary admission rounds despite colleagues working from home and both national offers days occurring during the first lockdown period
- 89% of HUGGG vouchers disseminated for FSM over the Christmas holidays have been redeemed
- 100% of schools and early years providers who requested a PPE support package in the first lockdown had one delivered by staff

- Children's Services have completed 10 capital projects, with a total investment in excess of £38m, since the start of the Covid pandemic

2.6 Performance Team

2.6.1 A rapid and informed response to capture and calculate the required data by the team ensured that all reporting from the onset of lockdown in March 2020 was able to be accurately and routinely reported.

2.6.2 Since introducing the data sharing agreement in October 2019, 99% of schools have now signed up to it. This is enabling them to receive from the Data Unit a report on which children are open to the social work service, which is run every week during lockdowns.

2.6.3 Impact statements:

- Schools know routinely the pupils who become known to social care
- Rapid system development to underpin vital reporting in lockdown

2.7 Schools HR and Health and Safety Team

2.7.1 The positive impact of the work to support schools by the health and safety team cannot be underestimated. The technical and interpretative advice and guidance as well as model documentation has been invaluable throughout the pandemic.

2.7.2 Health and Safety and Schools HR became an expected extension of the central team at the weekly schools briefings providing invaluable support throughout the working week.

2.7.3 Throughout 2019/20 Schools were able to maintain a good working relationship with Trade Union and Professional Body colleagues representing staff across the whole of the workforce in Schools and Skills. Clear, open and transparent discussions continued throughout lockdown to provide strong and effective working relationships

Impact statements:

- School voices were well represented in regional and national forums ensuring that the daily challenges were clearly represented and made a contribution to the evidence base to inform practice and future direction. The feedback from such forums was made readily available to inform decisions and keep all Schools up to date with planning and directions
- Communication with Schools and Skills; the routines established and the partnership working throughout lockdown led to further developing a very successful support infrastructure which helped to ensure that pupils were well supported in their need for a place in school and School leaders and their staff were confident, increased attendance were and able to meet the needs

of their most vulnerable pupils and learners and to support the pupils who are children of Key Workers in Northumberland

3. **Conclusion**

3.1 Academic Year 2019/20 is without doubt the one of the most challenging and remarkable years for Education and Skills across Northumberland. The approach to work alongside schools, including wider services across Northumberland County Council, and provide a supporting infrastructure has proven to be one of the most positive and biggest impacts to partnership working.

3.2 The outcomes for our children and young people cannot be measured against performance in previous years due to the nature of the calculated process and the very dynamic, last minute changes in grades awarded.

3.3 The most important element is that our young people were prepared and supported with the grades they needed to be able to progress to their destination of choice whether that is sixth form, post 16 study, University or into employment.

3.4 The rapid change to digital learning was exceptionally well supported with resources and staff expertise throughout the year and is now part of a more routine way of life. This is still not without its challenges as we work with schools and industry to be able to ensure all of our children are able to access timely high quality learning through devices, platforms and systems which supports their continued learning and develop the ‘new normal’.

3.5 Refocusing the Education and Skills priorities to ensure we are all well placed to be able to respond and know where we need to improve our performance is key. It is ever challenging in such an unprecedented environment, but is at the same time exciting, desirable and pivotal to support the ‘recovery’ of the education curriculum and our children and families in Northumberland.

Implications

Policy	The actions set out in this report support the vision and values of the Councils Corporate Plan. All DFE / ESFA policies and guidance are reviewed, interpreted and shared.
Finance and value for money	All budgets and decisions conform to expected DFE /ESFA funding requirements.
Legal	none
Procurement	none
Human Resources	none
Property	Eight delivery sites around the county – 7 are shared sites, one is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Service. Schools have delegated responsibility for buildings.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) N/A X	
Risk Assessment	All schools and staff have individual risk assessments. All sites are risk assessed. All Schools and Skills sites are covid risk assessed. Skills sites undertake reviews every week as well as spot checks on premises to ensure routines and expectations are being followed
Crime & Disorder	The report has considered Section 1 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
Customer Consideration	Service plans and systems are approached from the pupil/family/customer perspective. All learner facing approaches include the learner/ customer journey to improve satisfaction.
Carbon reduction	The increase in digital and remote learning as well as digital meeting spaces as significantly reduced the travel and carbon footprint in 2020.
Health and Wellbeing	Staff well-being is of high importance, a supporting Headteacher well being group is also established and bespoke arrangements are in place to meet individual needs.

Wards	All aspects of the service supports all wards in Northumberland, the digital reach has now expanded this opportunity.
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Report sign off

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