



Northumberland

County Council

COMMITTEE: FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

DATE: 3RD MARCH 2022

Annual Report for Education and Skills Service 2020/21

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:

- inform and review the education performance across Northumberland in 2020/21
- present the work of the central Education and Skills team and review the impact of the work to support continued education challenges throughout the ongoing Covid 19 global pandemic
- inform and review the digital annual report attached to this report.

The Education and Skills Service is comprised of a range 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 supporting the whole education infrastructure.

Recommendations

Committee is recommended to:

- Review the performance in the headline report.
- Receive the digital annual report and recognise the performance given the continued challenges of the global pandemic 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

- Public Health, Schools Human Resources (HR) and Health and Safety (H&S) Team contributions
- Review the key areas for improvement in the Education and Skills priorities that inform how we revisit and shape future improvements and work programme.

At the conclusion of the 2019/2020 Annual report key priorities were identified for continuous improvement and accelerated development across Education and Skills. These priorities now inform the work of the established Education Strategy Board and the strategic and operational direction of the directorate. **(identification complete and work approach aligned)**

The development of a Skills Strategy for Northumberland was a key action to support schools, skills development and access to skills and businesses that align with the economic priorities of the County. **(complete)**

The development of a coherent approach to working with businesses and begin the work to support schools, skills and all of our residents. **(baseline established with work underway to accelerate greater engagement)**

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 to the committee as a written report and is supported by an additional digitally optimised report which provides viewers with a visual overview of the performance in the 2020/21 academic year and considers the impact of the work undertaken for our children and young people.
- 1.2 Performance is not compared against previous years due to teacher assessed grade (TAG) processes, but can be considered in the context of the broader county and national performance (where available).
- 1.3 Partnership working with schools continues to be good and is improving. The support and guidance from the wider Education and Skills team and support partners (Public Health, H&S and HR for Schools) is widely valued.
- 1.4 The digital world has rapidly become the ‘way of working’ for many and indeed the way of learning. An innovative approach connecting industry and education through a digital platform has raised the profile of the work in Northumberland nationally. Further work and development is needed to maintain the pace of change,

development and expectation as the continuously evolving digital world underpins learning for all and remains a high priority.

- 1.5 The approach by the Inclusive Education service continues to be an important priority to be able to work across services supporting some of our children with the greatest needs and to meet the continually emerging needs as a result of the global pandemic changes to lives, learning and futures.
- 1.6 In May 2021 the SEND re inspection was undertaken and the Written Statement of Action removed for Northumberland, having been judged as making sufficient progress in all three areas. The next phase of focus for Northumberland is to improve systems and processes with the lived experience driving the improvements and to invest in Preparation for Adulthood ethos so more of our children and young people are able to meet their ambitions and plan a future pathway from a much earlier age.
- 1.7 The Northumberland Skills portfolio continues to change to meet the priorities for the North of Tyne Combined Authority and the economic priorities and sectors in Northumberland whereby more residents are supported into employment and greater in work progression. Where gaps in provision exist, Northumberland Skills works to develop or partners with specialists to close gaps in provision and is dynamic in meeting emerging needs. Education development works hand in hand to identify the opportunities and partnerships to extend the breadth.
- 1.8 The School Organisation and Resources Team have adapted and are likely to need to respond rapidly to a changing environment. The work in particular with vouchers to support families across school holiday periods has been very successful and has supported thousands of families to access funds. The innovative thinking, design and modelling has ensured that uniform as well as food could be purchased with the available funds.

2. Background

The Academic year 2020/21 was another year of disruption, restrictions and remote learning amid challenging circumstances within which the profession maintained as stable a position for our children as they possibly could. In short, another extraordinary year in which education and skills have been hugely affected by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

This year has been very different to the previous and in many ways tougher for the schools and skills professionals as well as children, young people, residents and their families. However, what remained clear is the importance of our work for children, young people and residents - whatever the circumstances, we continued to respond and support at every opportunity.

The resilient and determined approach demonstrated 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 and strengthened approach to keep the child or young person safe and at the heart of decisions remained core to dynamic work practices. The development of a health and well being forum for the workforce was identified and well developed ahead of any national announcements.

The second annual report as a digital format for Northumberland contains links to detailed reports for further reading and review. The report highlights key facets to showcase to everyone the work undertaken that was built upon previous learning, and should be acknowledged and celebrated as incisive, purposeful, decisive and resilient.

The sector continues to recover, respond and reflect, particularly where a return to more usual routine education remains challenging ie Adult Community Learning and Apprenticeships. We highlight areas that continue to be a focus for even greater change to improve the life chances for our children and young people and residents in Northumberland.

The extent of the recovery required to identify and close gaps is one of the greatest challenges we face. It is difficult to begin to calculate the precise recovery required in such circumstances. Ofsted continues to inspect but do not examine outcomes and data in the same way and in particular examine the support infrastructures for pupils.

Our work supporting all aspects and phases of education remains a key priority with specific areas of focus to narrow and close gaps in educational attainment, transition, progress and outcomes. All the while being mindful of ensuring our approaches and systems are delivering social mobility and building our approach to inclusive growth to support future life chances for all.

Academic year 2020/21

2.1 Early Years and Key Stages

2.1.1 The quality of early years provision in Northumberland is excellent. 98% of early years providers were rated Good or Outstanding at summer 2021. Thirteen Ofsted inspections of childcare settings in Northumberland were carried out during the Summer term 2021. Of these, seven were inspections of childminding settings, six of

which received a good grading (one moving from a previous judgement of requires improvement) and one was judged as being compliant. Six private, voluntary or independent (PVI) group settings were inspected, with two receiving outstanding judgements and the remaining four receiving good judgements (one moving from a previous judgement of requires improvement).

2.1.2 The take up of 2-year-old provision is outstanding. 87% of all eligible 2 year olds took up their statutory entitlement to early education in the summer term 2021. This was a 9% increase on the spring term 2021, and was better than the national average of 62%, placing Northumberland 9th highest in the country.

2.1.3. In summer term 2021, 98.4% of parents got their first choice of primary school compared with 90.2% nationally. 97.6% of parents got their first choice of secondary school compared with 82.2% nationally.

2.1.4 Primary education in Northumberland is good. 91% of primary schools in Northumberland were judged by Ofsted to be Outstanding or Good in summer 2021. This compares to the national average of 88%.

2.1.5 Inclusion in primary education in Northumberland is good. Encouragingly, there were no children permanently excluded from a Northumberland primary school in the 2020/21 academic year; this compares to 3 in the previous year.

2.1.6 The quality of secondary education in Northumberland is improving. 67% of secondary schools in Northumberland were judged by Ofsted to be Outstanding or Good in summer 2021. This was below the national average of 76% and needs to improve further

2.1.7 Inclusion in secondary education in Northumberland is improving. There were fewer secondary age school children permanently excluded in the 2020/21 school year, reducing to 44 from 47 the previous year.

2.1.8 At Key Stage 4 schools have performed broadly as expected with no outliers in performance. Headline results have been received from all 16 Northumberland secondary/high schools. There were 3058 pupils in the cohort.

2.1.9 The proportion of pupils entering EBacc subjects continues to rise slowly over time ranging between 0% and 65% with an average of 20%. In 2019 the national figure stood at 40%.

2.1.10 The Attainment 8 figure of 49.7 continues the trend of improvement from 2017.

2.1.11 The gap between the proportions of pupils achieving 4+ English & maths and 5+ English & maths remains at about 25%. In 2019 the national figure stood at 22%.

2.1.12 At Key Stage 5 the greater majority of A level pupils in Northumberland have achieved the grades they required to move onto their chosen next step in education, employment or training.

2.1.13 Schools have performed broadly as expected with no outliers in performance. Headline results have been received from all 15 Northumberland secondary/high

schools. (The Blyth Academy is not running a sixth form at present). There were 1164 pupils in the cohort.

2.1.14 The average A level points score of 39 equates to a grade B. The national average in 2019 was 34.

2.1.15 The average Applied General points score of 36 equates to a Distinction. The national average in 2019 was 29.

2.1.16 90% of pupils in Northumberland achieved the grades that met their entry into their first choice university - around 400 of those pupils are attending Russell Group universities.

2.1.17 The local authority commissions places in alternative provision for pupils who have been permanently excluded from school. Provision at alternative providers or new schools has to be arranged within six days of an exclusion taking place. In the 2020/21 academic year, sixth-day provision was arranged within timescale for 98% of cases, which is a significant improvement on previous years where the figure has been around 75%.

2.1.18 Four hundred School Improvement Partner visits took place across the academic year providing support and challenge to schools including 31 Ofsted inspection and monitoring visits. More than 100 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) were supported in Northumberland, there were more than a 1000 attendees at early years development and training sessions and routine topical remote learning opportunities were provided to support all school staff.

2.2 Virtual School

2.2.1 The education achievement of Northumberland's care-experienced children improves when they enter care, and the highest achievers are those who have been in care the longest. 80% of our pupils who achieved 5+ GCSEs with grades 9 – 5 had been in care for at least 3 years. Being in care has a positive impact on education achievement.

2.2.2 The strong track record of successfully raising the aspirations of our care-experienced children continues. For the third consecutive year achievement at GCSE continued to improve and has almost tripled since 2019, meaning that more pupils are following level 3 courses at age 16.

2.2.3 The right support is being provided to develop meaningful pathways for school leavers into education, training and employment. Achievements at all post-16 stages are at record levels in Northumberland, with 80% of school leavers progressing into further education and more care leavers now studying for degrees.

2.2.4. Inclusive partnership working with schools and alternative providers continues to be strong. For the 13th consecutive year there has been no permanent exclusion of a care-experienced child and the PEP completion rate is 98%.

2.2.5 Relationships with families that electively home educate their children are good. An increasing number of annual reviews have been submitted (only one progressing

to a School Attendance Order), providing re-assurance that more children are receiving a suitable education at home.

2.2.6 The multi-agency strategy to safeguard children that are electively home educated is working. The number of children being educated at home has increased steadily to 294 at July 2021. This is in line with regional and national rises in Elective Home Education.

2.2.7 Overall attendance rates have remained steadily above the national average. With absence rates below national averages at 3.3% Primary (3.7% NA); 5.5% at Secondary (5.7% NA) and 10.25% at special schools (10.6% NA). The impact of the pandemic has been mitigated by targeting schools where there are high levels of persistent absence, children returning to school after a period of elective home education, and pupils who have been out of school for long periods of time.

2.2.8 The safeguarding process for preventing and finding children missing education is highly effective. Five children were reported as missing and were found, and over 1000 children were identified as at risk of going missing and tracked throughout the year.

2.2.9 School engagement with the Northumberland Strategic Safeguarding Partnership (NSSP) is good. The implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model, a role in the safe return of children to school and implementing learning from case reviews has emerged from the Schools Engagement Group. Safeguarding standards in Northumberland schools and education settings meet DfE, NSSP and Ofsted requirements

2.3 Inclusive Education and Special Educational Needs

2.3.1 Northumberland was revisited in the Summer Term by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and was one of the 2 Local Authorities out of 8 that term, who passed all areas for improvement. The SEND Revisit highlighted the 'significant improvement and a seismic change in leadership and culture', reflected the strength of the SEND partnership with the NHS and the demonstrable progress made.

2.3.2 Throughout 2020- 2021, our specialist teaching and educational psychology services have provided support and advice for children and young people with special educational needs in 98% of our schools.

2.3.4 The High Incidence Needs Teams (HINT) have delivered a service which has been free at the point of delivery, and as a result, they have received 36% more referrals than in the previous school year.

2.3.5 The HINT teams worked most extensively in Blyth, then Berwick followed by Alnwick, Bedlington and Ashington, though Northumberland Inclusive Education Services work has increased in all partnerships. Through 2020/21, the highest

referrals came into Speech, Language & Communication Needs, Autism Support and Emotional Wellbeing & Behaviour.

2.3.6 Low Incidence Needs Teams (LINT) received referrals for 229 children and young people (Sensory Support and Portage) with new referrals into both teams coming from every partnership.

2.3.7 Throughout 2020/21 the Educational Psychology service continued to provide ongoing support and advice to many of the educational settings in Northumberland and children and families, along with specialist advice for all pupils undergoing Education, Health and Care needs assessments. The Service also continued to provide support into our Children's Homes, and the Mental Health Support Teams in Hexham, Blyth, Ashington and Bedlington. They provided over 100 hours of support to children, young people, families and schools/settings related to a small number of critical incidents that took place across the year

2.3.8 The return to school following the pandemic brought challenges across the system, and although exclusions for young people with SEN had fallen significantly over the preceding three years, 202/21 saw a slight rise. Work is ongoing to ensure that support is provided by the local authority to continue the downward trend. For the second year running, however, there were no permanent exclusions for students with EHCPs

2.3.9 NIES delivered training designed by the DfE to support the return to school, 'Wellbeing for Education Return' and this was well attended by schools and settings. This has helped to equip schools with the knowledge and understanding they required to support the additional wellbeing needs of pupils and staff. As a result there has been good use of Kooth and Qwell, online platforms available to the children and young people of Northumberland and staff based in schools. Referrals to the Autism Support and Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour Teams rose sharply in the Summer term and we have expanded the teams in order to meet demand. Children and young people referred to the time limited pop up hub in Autumn 2020 continued to be followed up in the Spring term to ensure that appropriate support was provided to maintain their attendance at school.

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

2.4.1 2020-21 was another year of disruption and change and a very untypical academic year for education, skills and training. The Learning and Skills service self-assessment grades the service as GOOD, in terms of Ofsted gradings for 2020/21.

2.4.2 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 reassuring. English and maths programmes this year were impacted particularly by retention (i.e., student leavers). Programmes commenced across the year and when tracking the learners, it can be seen that leavers coincide with increased school restrictions and lockdown where parents and carers adjusted their focus to home learning. The achievement rate excluding English and

mathematics is 93%. Achievement rates for learners with EHCP is outstanding at 100% (learning continued on site throughout lockdown/ restrictions).

2.4.3 There were 1027 enrolments onto programmes across eight campuses in 2020/21 for adult learners and 38 enrolments for young people aged 16-18 with the largest majority (96.3%) of enrolments being adult learning. It is important to note that there is no publication of performance rates nationally and these cannot be compared to any previous year's performance.

2.4.4 Apprenticeship recruitment in line with classroom-based learning also decreased significantly. Apprenticeship performance rates overall have reduced with some leaving their roles, many owing to Covid-related issues. The 19-24 age group (the largest cohort) however performed well above their peer Apprentices. The introduction of a new Apprenticeship manager has focused the work of the model of delivery to help more Apprentices successfully complete and achieve but more importantly to focus on a pastoral element of support in the workplace. Positive learner feedback about blended delivery was received along with the appropriate level of challenge and support which has resulted in minimal delays with end point assessment (EPA). There was a good higher-level achievement at EPA for apprentices, for example, of the Apprentices working towards IC Qualifications EPA, their results for 2020/21 were more than good with 84% who completed their EPA achieving a higher-level result.

2.4.5 Internal progression is Good for learners, more than 94% progress and complete another programme after their first engagement but still not enough learners secure an Apprenticeship. As an example, of the 127 adult learners undertaking Health and Care qualifications, 97 progressed into employment.

2.4.6 Learner's attitudes to their education are positive and have been shown to have improved over time. Behaviour and attitudes of learners is good, with learners demonstrating effective behaviours for learning supporting what we know to be the expectations of employers.

2.4.7 Learners receive good links to industry throughout all curriculum areas, leading to the development of knowledge, skills and behaviours required to progress into high-quality destinations. The links are provided by staff and with business engagement being strengthened this year but with a recognition that even more engagement will benefit more of the study programme development.

2.4.8 Career's advisers work with a range of external agencies to effectively source provision from a range of providers. The Careers Guidance team performs the Council's statutory duties to encourage, enable and assist young people over statutory school age but under 19 (or 25 with an EHCP) to participate in education and training. The team is also responsible for the statutory duty to track, record, report

and support Northumberland residents in this cohort in relation to their post 16 education and training.

2.4.9 At July 2021 NEET (including unknown) was 4.7% in Northumberland compared to the all-England figure of 5.3%.

2.4.10 Learners excel in an environment in which they feel safe because staff and learners do not accept bullying, harassment or discrimination. Attendance remained strong across all curriculum areas whilst engagement posed some challenges during lockdown. Engagement was closely monitored throughout lockdown and all campuses were well managed to be covid safe learning environments.

2.4.11 The Employability and Skills Service has continued to work throughout the pandemic restrictions and challenges and the service has grown in response to resident's needs. We have increased our offer of employment-focussed programmes to respond directly to the expected high rise in unemployment. The team delivered 4 employment programmes – The DWP JETS Programme (job entry targeted support), DWP Restart Scheme and DWP Building Better Opportunities and the North of Tyne Combined Authority funded Triage programme, which commenced in June 2020 and ceased in October 2021.

2.4.12 The DWP Jets (Job entry targeted support) Programme continued, delivered with Reed in Partnership, as a digital employment support programme to offer support throughout the pandemic remotely. Referrals are from Job Centres across Northumberland and participants are residents who are newly-unemployed and have been impacted by the downturn in the labour market. Support is primarily digital, and 550 residents have started on the programme and 250 have moved into employment. Due to its success, the programme will continue until March 2023 to help residents who prefer digital engagement.

2.4.13 The service continues to be well positioned to respond particularly to North of Tyne Inclusive Growth projects where the prime aims are to support residents into gaps, reduce inequality and disadvantage gaps and to support progression into employment as well as in work progression through training. Working in tandem with the skills service provides a seamless referral point from engagement and initial training into more structured training supporting employment. To improve the progression from the non-North of Tyne funded programmes all of the residents who accessed the covid triage programme and DWP Employment programmes will be supported by the skills service.

2.5 School Organisation and Resources

2.5.1 The £48m Ponteland joint schools and leisure centre were completed this year. They are now home to a 420-place primary school, 1,600-place high school, library and leisure centre with 25m pool, learner pool, aqua play, gym, café, clip 'n' climb, soft play, spa, bar and 3G and grass sports pitches. The development offers all that was asked of it by its users, whilst also providing a lifelong legacy for the community, allowing residents of all ages and abilities to use the facilities.

2.5.2 Despite COVID-19 restrictions for leisure services, Active Northumberland has seen a 45% increase in membership, with exercise and swimming classes fully

booked each week upon opening. The scheme has also generated over £40.6m worth of social value in the local area and has had an enormous economic effect for the county of Northumberland.

2.5.3 The £37m Hexham Middle and Queen Elizabeth High schools also welcomed their students, opening the doors to their newly co-located buildings in September 2021. The 18-month construction programme saw the completion of brand-new modern teaching blocks, specialised spaces, contemporary sporting facilities as well the refurbishment of a Grade II listed building for use predominantly by the students but also the local community of Hexham to great acclaim and universally positive feedback. In total the council has invested circa £40m during the 2020/21 academic year in improving the school estate.

2.5.4 Permanent Exclusions are down by 12% and this is the third year we have seen a decline. 98% of permanently excluded learners accessed provision within 6 days; a further 69 exclusions have been prevented by offering schools support, advice and guidance re: inclusion including the brokering of managed moves and alternative provision placements.

2.5.5 Over 98% of first preferences were allocated in the primary and secondary admission rounds with Northumberland being the top-ranked authority in the Country for offering parents of children entering reception in September 2021 their first choice of primary/first school.

2.5.6 Since December 2020 over 47,000 free school meal vouchers have been issued at a value of over £2.1m to support children and young people entitled to free school meals to fund food and uniform costs over each school holiday period. Northumberland has had one of the highest take up rates for the scheme in the country with 95% of parents redeeming the vouchers provided for them.

2.5.7 A total of £860,236 exceptional payments were made to 81 Schools to support those who had additional exceptional costs arising due to the coronavirus. This was over and above the provisions set up by the Department for Education via their covid workforce fund.

2.5.8 The second iteration of the School Organisation Plan for Northumberland has now been published and covers the period 2021-2024, it sets out how the council will fulfil its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for all children and young people resident within the county.

2.6 Education Development

2.6.1 NCC has made significant progress towards opening the first of its technical training facilities. Over £1m funding is ringfenced in the medium-term financial plan to implement the Welding & Fabrication training centre at Port of Blyth, and as of October 2021 works tendering and work to agree lease on the nominated building are in progress.

2.6.2 Colleagues have worked together to deliver maximum value for Northumberland from the inward investment of the battery manufacturing Gigaplant located in Cambois. A three-part strategy to deliver maximum impact in the

following areas has been agreed between NCC and BritishVolt as part of the terms of the Section 106 agreement:

- Construction training, employment and procurement strategy, applicable during the seven year construction phase.
- Manufacturing employment plan, applicable for first 15 years of operation.
- Manufacturing education & training plan, applicable for first 15 years of operation

2.6.3 NCC education directorate has worked very closely with Regeneration colleagues to set out a number of aspirational education and skills-related projects to support a wide range of aspirational projects across the county. These include the Ashington Investment Plan, Blyth Energy Central Learning Hub, Kielder radion telescope development and the development of a county wide Skills Strategy underpinning the economic priorities for Northumberland.

2.6.4 NCC has supported Health Education England in the launch of work-based supported internships for young people with Educational Health Care Plans, these programmes being delivered within Northumbria Health Care Trust settings. Support to grow the provision continues, enhancing the impacts for young people with talent but facing challenges in accessing opportunity to enter valuable and sustainable career paths.

2.6.5 Global Bridge digital platform has been connected with 12 of the 16 secondary schools in Northumberland in 2020/21 and supported for a two year period. The direct linking of industry working with education on a global digital platform supports access to apprenticeships, work experience and in the world in which we now live and work, a digital profile for our young people to be able to showcase their achievements to potential employers. Northumberland is the leading Local Authority across England spearheading this work.

2.7 Supporting infrastructure teams for Education and Skills

2.7.1 the Data and performance team routinely configures available data to track and review performance without the comparability of national data. The collection and support for schools particularly when supporting children and families open to social care was valued by schools and most importantly supported some of the most vulnerable pupils.

2.7.2 The Data Unit gave schools early estimates of the amount of pupil premium they would receive, beneficial given that there was no May 2021 census so schools would have had to wait until July. The provision of weekly reports on which learners have an allocated social worker continued during the periods of lockdown and when restrictions lifted so that schools knew their vulnerable learners.

2.7.3 Public Health have become an extension of the Education and Skills team throughout the global pandemic. One of their strands of work 'Education Outbreak Control' is chaired by one of the education senior staff and has been available almost 7 days per week since March 2020 supporting early years settings, schools, and skills providers. The work, research, focus and attention to narrow down root causes and provide solutions has been relentless and valued by everyone involved.

2.7.4 Relationships with trade unions throughout a very challenging period have been supported by Schools HR very well. Dedicated support for schools, workshops for staff, briefing and routine updates as well as supporting a peer head teacher well being group has contributed well to the workforce relationships amid the challenging and rapidly changing guidance and expectations received under which the schools system has worked.

2.7.5 Health and Safety support and guidance for schools has continued to be of a very high standard with schools recognising the standard of advice and documentation provided as exceptionally high. Briefings, workshops, partnership and individual school guidance has been provided routinely to support the eco system and ensure Covid safe environments. Whilst recognising the responsibility and decision making is devolved to Headteachers and Chairs of Governors the working relationships are valued and welcomed by Headteachers, Skills and Early Years providers.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Academic Year 2020/21 has been a year of so many changes and challenges to navigate for children, young people, schools and skills providers. The system has not yet begun to quantify the 'levelling up' to return the sector to a stable baseline in 2019. There is much happening and to do to agree the baseline for future planning. The position for terminal examinations in 2021 is not yet agreed and with two years of disrupted education routine, there will be continuous challenges for a while to come. The role of the Local Authority team is to support and underpin the route to a steady baseline and support ambition, education and success for every child, young person and resident in Northumberland. The identified focus for priorities underpins this approach.

3.2 The outcomes for our children and young people cannot be measured against performance in previous years due to the nature of the assessed process in 2021 (different to 2020). We are able to review collectively the performance across the county and provide assurance that there are no performances that are significantly differing to regional or national performance figures available.

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. The average grade performances continued to rise at A level and Attainment 8 figures continue to improve. A focus for improvement at Progress 8 is required.

3.4 For Adult Learners, the return to a classroom has been much more challenging. As parents or grandparents caring for children to support family incomes, their engagement in learning has reduced. Enrolments have reduced this year. The investment in digital equipment to support this has helped but the residents do not have the time to spend long periods on line learning and value much more face to

face classroom engagement. Continued engagement has been good but a confident return to learning in the classroom will be a focus.

3.5 The extent of the recovery required to identify and close gaps is one of the greatest challenges we face. It is difficult to begin to calculate the precise recovery required in such circumstances. The work of School Improvement with schools across Northumberland will continue to target areas specific in each school and will work with Headteachers, all staff in school and governors to achieve this and raise the levels of attainment and progress at each key stage even further.

3.6 The work to promote and engage with stakeholders so they are informed and own the identified priorities forms a key cornerstone of the work of the Local Authority team. Everyone talks about the impact of the global pandemic as unprecedented. In Northumberland that recognition was revised a year ago with clearly focused priorities shaping the work undertaken and we are now beginning to see some of the focused work beginning to make a difference and will continue to be dynamic and evolve to meet changing needs of our education eco system. Our recovery and steadfast approach is non-negotiable and has every child, family and resident at the heart of the approach.

3.7 The impact of the work undertaken by the whole education system across Northumberland is documented in this report. At a headline level performance in 2020/21 continues to improve for our children, attendance is improving and exclusions are reducing. Our performance against peer authorities in aspects such as admissions and first choice school places remains in the upper decile nationally.

3.8 Our approach to meet more children's needs much closer to home is, as we see the rising demand for our Inclusive Education Services, an accelerant for our immediate actions and work. Improving outcomes for some of our most disadvantaged residents and ensuring our work at every level is joined with relevant services and partners to ensure we are targeting the right and best outcomes is the core of our strategy to achieve best value at pace.

3.9 There is much for the sector to celebrate across Northumberland, the sterling work and professional standards demonstrated in challenging environments showcases the resilience and hard work and commitment for our children, young people and residents' futures.

Implications

Policy	The actions set out in this report support the vision and values of the Council's 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	Northumberland County Council has statutory responsibilities with schools and academies as well as colleges and post 16 providers. The statutory responsibilities are clearly defined within policy and priorities for Education and Skills; within specific officer roles and also within the Board structures that engage with schools and academies and wider stakeholders to engage and to assure all that statutory duties are met. Formal reporting routines are embedded across the corporate calendar to ensure oversight and decision making is clear.
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 has significantly reduced the travel and carbon footprint in 2020/21.
Health and Wellbeing	Staff well-being is of high importance. Systems such as Kooth and Qwell are in place to support pupils and staff as well as bespoke arrangements to meet the needs of particular circumstances.
Wards	All aspects of the service supports all wards in Northumberland, the digital reach has now expanded this opportunity.

Report sign off

Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

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This report has been prepared on behalf of Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director, Children's Services by Audrey Kingham, Director of Education and Skills,
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