



Covid 19 – Education Response

Cllr Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member, Children & Schools

Christine McInnes – Divisional Director, Education and Partnerships

Tracy Smith – Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets Education Partnership



Background and Context



- Schools were directed to close to the majority of pupils on the 20th March 2020 due to the Covid 19 Pandemic, with only “vulnerable children” and children of key workers able to attend.
- Around 70% of schools remained open, with hub schools and the Holiday Childcare programme operating during holidays.
- Schools provided on-line and packs for home learning.
- SATs, GCSEs and A Levels were cancelled; GCSE and A Level grades will be calculated on teacher assessment.
- From the 1st June 2020, primary schools were permitted to open for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6
- Secondary schools were expected to open for “some face to face contact” for years 10 & 12 from mid June
- The LA and THEP supported school leaders and staff through information, advice, guidance and training



The current position



- Concerns about the safeguarding of pupils, physical and mental wellbeing and the impact on education standards underpinned the work.
- HTs and COGs have the statutory responsibility for the safe running of the school, taking account of demand for places, physical space, staff available. The LA provided Risk Assessments and worked with the Schools Workforce TU Forum to support safe decision making.
- All primary schools in Tower Hamlets opened for at least one year group by 15th June, though the majority have multiple groups. All secondary schools opened
- Attendance was variable but improved over time; Behaviour and Attendance team provided intensive support to improve attendance.
- Staff 'agile' planning for September, taking account of government guidance.
- THEP supporting planning, training and emotional well being.
- LA services working with schools – Admissions, BASS, Contract Services, CSC, Early Help, Early Years, Governor Services, Music Service, Parenting and Family Support Service, Pupil Place Planning, SEND & SLS, School Buildings, School Library Service, THESS, Virtual School for LAC.



Safety in schools



- Schools supported by LA's Public Health and Health and Safety services.
- Detailed school level risk assessment completed, shared with union reps and staff, individual circumstances taken into account. QA by H&S service.
- Children with EHCPs have individual risk assessments.
- Risks mitigated in a variety of ways including using outdoors/marquees, enhanced cleaning and personal hygiene, teaching 'bubbles'.
- Comms campaign targeted at parents
- There has been reported infection of two pupils at one school and the Infection Control Plan process was successfully followed.



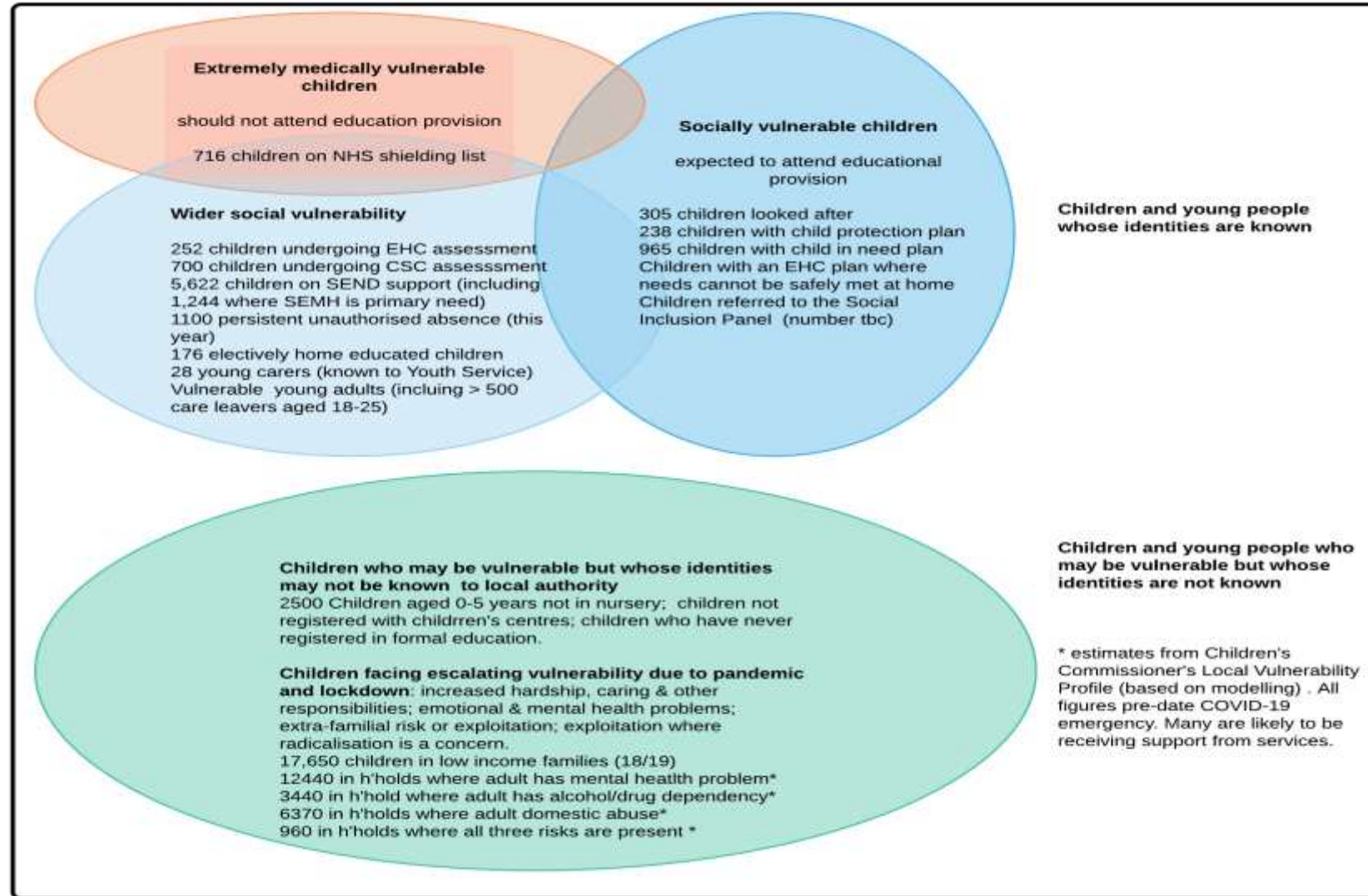
Children with SEND



- Work on assessing, amending and issuing new EHCPs has continued throughout. 98 new EHCPs were issued during this period and 58 were amended following annual reviews.
- The SEN Panel has been meeting remotely at least weekly, with attendance from all members, including health and social care colleagues
- Over the period of the lockdown contact with all special schools has been maintained, despite not all being fully open during the lockdown period. The headteachers were members of the Bronze Group – Medically vulnerable pupils and had input into the approach being taken to work with families of shielding children.



Vulnerable and Shielded Children



The provision of food



- A comprehensive council offer was put in place, with a number of community kitchens operating over the Easter holidays, food distribution to vulnerable families and food banks. The mayor's free school meal pledge was suspended and only children eligible under the national free school meals criteria had access to free school meals, except those attending school who had a cooked meal.
- Contract Services provided the contents for food bags to the agreed value to be packed and distributed by schools; some schools purchased their own vouchers for families. Food parcels were either delivered to or collected by parents. This provided opportunities to maintain contact with families.
- Over time most schools made use of the government voucher scheme provided by Edenred. There were many initial technical issues which schools worked hard to resolve. This system is working better now.
- Some schools supplemented what was provided by setting up their own food banks and extended the eligibility criteria to all self identifying as being in need.
- The Holiday Hunger Scheme (known in Tower Hamlets as Healthy Holidays) is running throughout August, with free food available for collection from 6 locations across the borough.
- We are also running our holiday childcare scheme with a focus on vulnerable children and those children of key workers.



Next Steps



- The aim remains for schools to fully reopen in September. New government guidance has been released which is being carefully considered by school leaders, staff, governors, THEP & LA services and union representatives.
- THEP is summarising government guidance and curriculum planning
- The LA has
 - updated PH and H&S advice and guidance
 - maintained a focus on safeguarding and vulnerable children
 - conducted a qualitative evaluation with school stakeholders, in collaboration with the TU Forum, identifying facilitators and barriers to children's' attendance
 - established a "Covid 19 Taskforce" which will include school staff, pupils, parents, unions and council staff to consider issues arising from the COVID 19 pandemic which impact on early years and school communities in the borough



Our concerns



- Children at all key stages achieve at a high level, particularly when the levels of poverty and deprivation in the borough are taken into account.
- Many of our children will be impacted by being out of education for an extended period and will need significant support to catch up and may need support to promote emotional health and wellbeing
- Schools provide pastoral support including to some of our most vulnerable families. This is much more difficult when children are not in school.
- More children have become vulnerable during the pandemic
- High number of children who receive FSM – voucher scheme helps but much more is done within schools.

