SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

Report

Report to:	**Education Resources Committee**
Date of Meeting:	**18 August 2020**
Report by:	**Executive Director (Education Resources)**

Subject:	**Survey results of Children and Young People and Parents/Carers Regarding Covid-19 Experiences and Return to School**

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ provide an update on the findings from the Education Resources children and young people and parent/carer surveys regarding Covid-19 experiences and return to school.
- ♦ outline the ways in which this engagement has informed the planning for school return and provision of support and services.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

(1) that the main findings of the children and young people and parent/carer surveys be noted; and

(2) that the planned next steps and communication strategy as outlined in paragraph 7.3 be approved.

3. Background

3.1. There has been significant focus on the potential short and medium term impact of lockdown and Covid-19 related changes on the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families, because of the complex and multi-layered outcomes that have included changes to and even loss of daily and weekly structure, loss of routine connection to friends and family, changes in family circumstances (financial, employment) and changes related to loss and bereavement.

4. Survey Design

4.1 The Education Resources Covid-19 surveys were designed to explore pupils' experiences, thoughts and feelings about the school closure period, and to gather their views and that of their parents/carers about plans to return to school.

4.2. The surveys were constructed in a way that would enable us to listen to the voices of children/young people and parents/carers, with a view to informing Education Resources' Covid-19 Recovery Planning.

4.3. Draft surveys were initially developed by the Educational Psychology Service and further refined through collaborative work with the Youth, Family and Community Learning Service, by trialling with young people who were engaging virtually with that

service at that time. Amendments were made to ensure accessibility to the greatest number of children and young people.

4.4.   The final survey was constructed with the support of the Consultation, Organisational Development and Equality Team within Finance and Corporate Resources. The survey was designed to elicit some of the more positive aspects of the lockdown experience for children, young people and families and the identification of coping approaches.

4.5.   The final range of surveys included:

- Parent/carer survey for all parents and carers with a child attending a South Lanarkshire educational establishment
- Child friendly version of survey for primary aged children from P4-7
- Young person friendly version of survey for young people from S1-S6

4.6.   Recognising, respecting and promoting the rights of children and young people is essential to improving outcomes for all children and young people. The surveys for children and young people aimed to not only find out about how Covid-19 lockdown had impacted on their rights, but also enabled and encouraged them to give their opinions and provide a context for adults to take these opinions seriously. The surveys also enabled children and young people to be actively involved in decisions impacting on them. (Article 12 of the UNCRC)

5.   Survey Completion
5.1.   The on-line survey was advertised via South Lanarkshire Council's Twitter account and through schools' and establishments' own communication pathways and social media platforms. Parents of children from nursery to S6 were invited to respond to the survey and this report presents the findings for all respondents.

5.2.   The surveys were open for response for one week in mid-June and had the following rates of response:

- Parent/carer survey – 5799.It should be noted that 14% of respondents reported that their child has additional support needs (ASN).
- Primary aged pupils - 1486
- Secondary aged pupils - 1563

6.   Survey Summary Findings
6.1   Parent /carer survey
Parents/carers were asked a range of questions using rating scales and more open questions. The rating scales focused on how the parents/carer's child/ children found the changes in lockdown, how easy did they think it would be to get their child back to school, and how confident they were about sending their child back.

Table 1

Question					
How hard has your child found the changes in lockdown?	Very Positive 3%	Positive 20%	Neutral 39%	Difficult 32%	Very Difficult 6%
		Easy	In Between	Difficult	Very Difficult

How easy will it be for your child to go back?	Very Easy 13%	27%	37%	17%	6%
How are you feeling about sending them back?	Very Confident 10%	Confident 26%	In Between 31%	Quite Anxious 23%	Very anxious 10%

6.2. Table 1 illustrates that overall, parents and carers report that the lockdown has had a very variable impact on their children. 6% of children were reported as finding it very difficult. 6% of parents say their children will find a return to school very hard. However, many parents feel confident about a return to school, and their child's ability to cope.

6.3. Parents and carers were able to identify some more positive aspects of lockdown, including having quality family time together/bonding as a family, and individual support, engaging in a range of activities, feeling relaxed and safe, and experiencing personal growth and development. However, the challenges for some included, adjusting to home learning, missing friends, changes to the normal routine, missed transitions and impact on wellbeing.

6.4. Parents had many practical suggestions for supports that needed to be put in place to support effective transition back to school.

6.5. Themes can be summarised as:

- Effective communication
- Ensure safety and health prioritised
- Transitional support
- Focus on wellbeing
- Flexible Structure
- Normalisation
- Promoting friendships

6.6. Comments from parents included:

Communicate. Communicate what plans are. Communicate with the child – explain why self-learning is essential if it can't be supported within school. Work in partnership both with child and parent.

Clear and full communication will be very important.

Security. Lots of teaching on washing hands. Facilities to do so. Putting him at ease that he is safe and well cared for.

Lots of patience and understanding, time to adjust and constantly checking in that he is OK and fully understanding what is being asked of him. Clear instructions possibly with the use of visuals. Good communication, space and time out if he is feeling overwhelmed. Support to let someone know if he is finding it difficult.

Phased return. Key adult. Buddy. Reassurance. As much information as possible and interaction beforehand.

6.7. Primary pupil survey
The survey was completed by 1486 pupils. Completion of this survey was likely to have been facilitated by parents/carers, because of consent issues.

Some of the main findings are illustrated below in Table 2.

Table 2

Question, how did you find……	Response		
	Positive or very positive	Neutral/ so-so	A little Hard or Very Hard
Not being with my friends	3%	21%	76%
Not being with other pupils at my school	10%	45%	45%
Being at home with my family	84%	12%	4%
Not being with other family members who don't live with me	2%	18%	80%
Using social media or gaming etc to stay in touch with friends	71%	19%	10%
Using social media or gaming etc to stay in touch with family	66%	22%	12%
Doing things differently than normal	23%	38%	39%
Learning at home	25%	27%	48%
Not having enough to do	13%	37%	50%
Staying in most of the time	17%	24%	59%

6.8. The most positive aspects of lockdown were cited as being at home with family, whilst missing friends and wider family were the most challenging. Primary aged children were more likely to say they were feeling better and a lot better than when lockdown started, but 9% said they felt a lot worse.

6.9. Positive aspects of lockdown, from the perspective of the primary aged children included being more active, getting outside and getting exercise, having a more relaxed routine, doing practical activities, connecting with friends/family and with clubs (i.e. on the phone/on-line), having more time for screen time, or to play, learning at their own pace and learning new hobbies or skills. Primary aged Children reported that the most challenging aspects of lockdown included missing friends and family, finding home learning difficulty, missing clubs and activities, teachers (including their support), and boredom and changes to routine.

6.10. Primary aged children made many suggestions for what would support an effective return to school.

6.11. Suggestions included:

- Information about what to expect when they return to school
- Reconnection with school staff and friends
- A nurturing approach and focus on wellbeing (i.e. staff being welcoming and understanding, and supporting transitions)
- Clear health and safety guidance, rules and equipment
- Having a slow start and fun on the first day
- Teachers having realistic expectations about learning
- A sense of normality

6.12. Comments from primary aged children included:

How my classroom is going to be set up. How are playtimes and lunchtimes going to work? Will breakfast club be on? Will after school clubs resume?

How are we going to social distance? Should we wear masks? Do we need to bring hand sanitiser? How long will we be in school for, like will we be in for half a day or a full day?

A full guide of rules, school and its set up, what class we are going to be in, who is going to be our teachers.

Time to chat with friends and my teacher.

I want to be with a teacher that is kind, explains things well and takes questions whenever we put our hands up.

I think that as I said before we should do lots of revision when we come back so there won't be too much pressure on the people that didn't do the work or couldn't do it.

Take it slowly, not too much pressure at the start.

6.13. Secondary pupil survey
This survey was completed by 1563 pupils. Some of the main findings are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Question, how did you find……	Response		
	Positive or very positive	Neutral/ so-so	A little Hard or Very Hard
Not being with my friends	4%	27%	69%
Not being with other pupils at my school	23%	45%	32%
Being at home with my family	68%	22%	10%

Not being with other family members who don't live with me	8%	28%	64%
Using social media or gaming etc to stay in touch with friends	64%	25%	11%
Using social media or gaming etc to stay in touch with family	51%	34%	15%
Doing things differently than normal	26%	36%	38%
Learning at home	21%	22%	57%
Not having enough to do	17%	40%	43%
Staying in most of the time	%	%	53%

6.14 Findings were similar to those for primary aged children, however the secondary group were more likely to view not seeing other young people who were not their friends as a positive, more likely to rate being at home with family as neutral or negative, and slightly less likely to be positive about home learning.

6.15. Secondary aged young people made many suggestions for a successful return to school including:

- Detailed information about what to expect when they return to school
- Reconnection with school staff and friends
- A nurturing approach and focus on wellbeing (i.e. staff being welcoming and understanding, and providing emotional support and reassurance)
- Clear health and safety guidance, rules and equipment
- Easing back into work and having an easier first day
- Teachers having realistic expectations about learning
- Revision of what has been learned/assigned during lockdown
- A sense of normality

6.16. Comments from secondary aged pupils included:

Our new timetable, what the new school will be like, what classrooms will look like, what will we be allowed to do, what will happen withy break/lunch, will we be with our friends, when are we in school, what will happen with school transport, do we have to wear masks, what will happen to make sure the school is safe?

Everything all sign posted well so we can understand what's happening and the changes to make us all safe including staff.

For schools to be patient with pupils going back into their old routine and not to overload our work schedule.

Be helpful and supportive.

Be kind, be there for people, listen to anyone who's struggling.

A friend, a timetable, an easy day to adjust back to the routine. A relatively normal school day.

6.17. Overall, there was broad consistency in the key themes on what would support an effective transition, from all surveyed groups, parents/carers and primary and secondary aged young people.

7. Next Steps and Communication Strategy

7.1 The full analysis of the survey responses has been shared with the Chairs of Recovery Groups and identified stakeholders, including the Children's Services Strategy Group to help inform recovery planning for school session 2020-2021 and beyond.

7.2 Education Resources are developing a communication strategy to ensure key stakeholders, especially parents/carers, children and young people and schools get key messages from the surveys, including how this process has supported decision making. This will include the use of social media channels, and include infographics that are accessible to children and young people, and parents and carers, and possibly use of a 'talking head'/ webinar approach. Secondary schools have already received summary data related to their young people to support their improvement planning around recovery.

7.3 It is proposed that the findings of this surveys are used to highlight the importance of supporting positive mental health and wellbeing during post Covid-19 recovery with all schools and educational settings. The universal approach to this will be underpinned by thorough implementation of the Education Resources Attachment Strategy.

8. Employee Implications

8.1 There are no direct employee implications.

9. Financial Implications

9.1 There are no direct financial implications.

10. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

10.1. There are no significant implications for climate change, sustainability and the environment arising from the recommendations in this report.

11. Other Implications

11.1 There are no significant risk implications in terms of the information contained within this report.

11.2 There are no implications for sustainability in terms of the information contained within this report.

12. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

12.1 This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to existing policy, function or strategy and therefore, no impact assessment is required at this stage.

12.2 This report is based on a consultative exercise with children, young people and parents/carers.

Tony McDaid
Executive Director (Education Resources)

10 August 2020

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives
- ♦ Protect vulnerable children, young people and adults
- ♦ Deliver better health and social care outcomes for all
- ♦ Support our communities by tackling disadvantage and deprivation and supporting aspiration
- ♦ Improve achievement, raise educational attainment and support lifelong learning

Previous References
None

List of Background Papers
None

Contact for Further Information
If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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