



Mayor and Cabinet

Education Service response to recommendations of the Digital Inclusion Task and Finish Group

Date: 15/06/22

Key decision: Yes

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Director of Education

Outline and recommendations

In February 2022, the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish Group published its report and recommendations to tackle digital exclusion in education in the borough. This report provides responses to those recommendations by Lewisham's education service. Mayor and Cabinet are asked to note and consider these responses.

1. Summary

The pandemic, with its disruption to normal schooling, brought into sharp focus the issue of digital access and connectivity, along with educational outcomes, for pupils most in need. In that context, the work done launched by the Task and Finish Group during the last lockdown in early 2021 has been extremely valuable.

During the pandemic, an immense amount was done to improve digital access. In the face of an unprecedented challenge, schools rapidly adopted digital teaching methods during the peak of pandemic, going from mainly paper-based work-packs during the first lockdown (in March 2020) to nearly every pupil having a device by the time of the second lockdown (in November 2020). Lewisham Learning, our school improvement partnership, provided borough-wide training and peer-to-peer support for teachers and headteachers. The Department for Education provided 5,000 devices in Lewisham, but that this still fell short of the need and schools in Lewisham had to buy devices for another 5,000 pupils themselves, while some schools crowdfunded additional devices and worked with local business to acquire unused and refurbished office devices. Lewisham Learning also encouraged schools to take up offers through the London Grid

for Learning (LGfL).

Nevertheless, the Task and Finish Group identified continuing issues relating to devices and connectivity; support for parents; and space for pupils to study. In February 2022, the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish Group published its report and recommendations to tackle digital exclusion in education in the borough. The Group's report provides a very welcome account of the key issues, and the recommendations set out a valuable agenda, which has helped inform the education service's work to build on the progress made during the pandemic to increase levels of digital inclusion in education, responding to the challenge of ensuring all pupils have the necessary access and support they need for their education. Not least those identified as under-achieving prior to the pandemic, and who may need to catch-up via on line learning outside of the school environment – mainly at home.

This report is the response to those recommendations from Lewisham education service.

2. Response to recommendations (from the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish Group)

2.1. Recommendation 1

Encourages the council's education department and schools to continue to make the most of London Grid for Learning (LGfL) offers on more affordable devices, and in particular the special data and device offers being developed through the work of the Mayor of London, and to make sure that all schools are aware of the offers available.

2.1.1. Response 1

The education department will continue to encourage schools to maximise knowledge of good practice, software and resource development and up-to-date offers and access to digital technology through:

- London Grid for Learning (LGfL)
- Mayor of London's digital inclusion programme
- Local Government Association's (LGA) digital inclusion forum
- Strategic Education Leads London (SELL)
- South East London Teaching School

Schools will continue to receive up to date information through LGfL and the education service will disseminate other information through the weekly bulletin and headteacher forums. The Council will publicise and encourage schools to seek to maximise any fundraising or charitable opportunities which became available.

2.2. Recommendation 2

Recommends that the council's education department and schools produce information and guidance for parents and pupils on where and how to access affordable data (e.g. social tariffs) and devices (e.g. refurbished), as well as where and how they can access local digital support (i.e. libraries, housing providers) and skills (adult education). This should also include guidance on the specifications of devices/hardware that pupils will need and guidance on making the best use of the software and platforms commonly used by schools.

2.2.1. Response 2

Schools are encouraged to share this information with their pupils and parents directly based on the context of their digital strategy, curriculum, use of devices and software.

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The education service will continue to publicise and encourage schools to take up any LGfL or other offers of affordable devices, data etc. and to share relevant offers with families.

Through the Council website and our weekly schools bulletin, we will share information about local digital support libraries etc. as the council's Digital Strategy is developed and any new resources become available.

Regarding guidance on devices and platforms the school uses, please see recommendation 3 below.

2.3. Recommendation 3

Recommends that the council's education department states to schools that it is best practice to include guidance on digital platforms in the induction process for new parents, and to consider issues relating to digital inclusion as part of end-of-term evaluations for each subject.

2.3.1. Response 3

The education department will use existing forums to encourage schools to share good practice in including digital advice through their mechanisms for working in partnership with parents/carers and particularly in year 6-7 transition programmes as part of induction processes, including:

- Sharing information with children and families at Y6 visits
- Induction pack/meetings for new year 7s
- Additional meetings for families of children in resource bases & those with an Education Health & Care plan (EHCP)
- Include information on e-safety & digital literacy
- Holding regular parents evenings (primary & secondary) to support digital literacy and e-safety

Lewisham learning will support schools to self-evaluate and set priorities for their digital curriculum and the demands of e-learning. Ofsted will in addition continue to judge how well schools are meeting digital needs and the quality of their digital curriculum.

2.4. Recommendation 4

That the council's education department engages with other local authorities, through the Mayor of London's Digital Inclusion Programme and the LGA's Digital Inclusion Forum (and other similar national forums) about best practice and benchmarking in relation to digital inclusion in education.

2.4.1. Response 4

The education department will continue to engage with other LAs through a number of forums and organisations who share best practice and digital education developments:

- Mayor of London's Digital Inclusion Programme
- LGA's Digital Inclusion Forum
- SELL (Strategic Education Leads London)
- South East London Teaching School

2.5. Recommendation 5

That the council's education department and schools produce information and

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guidance on the best digital platforms, tools and websites for learning, particularly in relation to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

2.5.1. Response 5

The education service will disseminate and signpost schools to the comprehensive information and guidance on the best digital platforms, tools and websites for learning that is available on a number of specialist, high quality platforms. The education service will continue to promote high quality national and London resources to schools and settings:

- London Grid For Learning maintains comprehensive and up to date information and guidance on the best digital platforms, tools and websites for learning, <https://www.lgfl.net/>
- Oak National Academy also collates and distributes adaptable resources for teachers <https://www.thenational.academy/>
- LGfL has an excellent guidance on the best digital platforms, in relation to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). <https://www.lgfl.net/Inclusion/>

2.6. Recommendation 6

That any information and guidance for parents is available in different languages and signposted to those most likely to experience barriers to digital inclusion – such as families with children with SEND, families with English as an additional language (EAL), and families living in temporary accommodation.

2.6.1. Response 6

The education department will encourage schools to explore cost-effective digital translation services where appropriate and promote these amongst their networks.

2.7. Recommendation 7

That the council routinely takes digital inclusion into account in Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, including the digital skills of parents/carers, and consider the adoption of a definition (see Chair's introduction) of digital inclusion to better identify pupils who need support.

2.7.1. Response 7

As the local definition and policy for digital inclusion develop, the SEND team will share this across the SEND local partnership so that contributing professionals are able to consider it in specifying provision for children and young people, where appropriate. We will encourage schools to support parents of children with SEND with digital literacy, as in response 4 above. The SEND Green Paper is currently under consultation and may influence the digital landscape within SEND. The provision contained in EHC plans has to be recommended and specified by a professional and must by law refer to the needs of the children, rather than the parents.

2.8. Recommendation 8

That the council's education, housing and IT departments explore the feasibility of providing Wi-Fi in council-managed temporary accommodation and hostel accommodation.

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2.8.1. Response 8

The education service will share this recommendation with Housing colleagues and encourage schools to continue to identify and prioritise children in temporary accommodation for any available devices, dongles and other resources which facilitate digital inclusion. This would provide continuity when families move on from temporary accommodation.

2.9. Recommendation 9

That the council's education and IT departments and schools explore the feasibility of at-scale and ongoing technical support (such as a dedicated IT helpline) for teachers, pupils and parents in relation to devices and platforms used by the school.

2.9.1. Response 9

Ongoing support to teachers is available through platforms that schools buy into - LGfL's free IT helpline, for example.

In terms of support for pupils and parents, as in response 2 above, given the individual digital contexts in schools, we will encourage them to continue to share good practice in offering IT advice to pupils and parents, where possible (e.g. secondary schools sharing contact details for their IT departments).

2.10. Recommendation 10

Encourages the council's education department to continue to provide CPD for teachers in relation to developing and upskilling relevant digital skills.

2.10.1. Response 10

Schools access CPD in relation to developing and upskilling relevant digital skills through the providers they buy into. Teachers and staff can, for example access LGfL's comprehensive CPD and support at no extra cost to them. LGfL offers in-school and virtual support, training, webinars and conference events. Schools can access whole school curriculum development through the LGfL Energise curriculum service, again provided at no extra charge for schools. As Lewisham Learning develops and strengthens peer-to-peer support for teaching and learning we will encourage schools to maximise and share expertise around digital inclusion in itself and across the curriculum.

2.11. Recommendation 11

Encourages schools to appoint link-governors for digital inclusion and support for parents.

2.11.1. Response 11

The role of governors in supporting schools to promote digital inclusion will be discussed at The Director's Briefing for Chairs in September 2022. This could include nominating a specific governor or ensuring that digital inclusion is included in the brief for key link governors, Inclusion, SEND, Pupil Premium and safeguarding.

2.12. Recommendation 12

That the council's education department works with schools, libraries, community centres and Youth First to audit and explore opportunities for in-person digital support hubs for pupils. Particular consideration should be given to those areas likely to be the most digitally excluded.

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2.12.1. Response 12

The education service will offer advice to colleagues in the council in developing the 2022 digital strategy to maximise opportunities for increasing digital inclusion with regards to education and learning issues. They will share best practice from other London boroughs who are developing/have developed such hubs, including developing them in schools.

The 2022 Digital Strategy is currently being formed, to address how the council will deliver key digital services and infrastructure to residents to thrive and live happy, healthy lives. The overarching ambitions of the strategy are the development of a modern, sustainable borough that harnesses the latest in digital technologies and infrastructure.

2.13. Recommendation 13

That young people are asked for their feedback on any in-person support like that mentioned in the previous recommendation (including the development of the new Catford Library, for example) at an early stage and throughout.

2.13.1. Response 13

The CYP Directorate will facilitate consultation between relevant officers and the Young Mayor's Team and schools to identify how the voices of young people can contribute to plans in this area.

2.14. Recommendation 14

That the council explores the feasibility of working with the Young Mayor's Team to establish a network of digital champions to continue to consider issues relating to digital inclusion in education.

2.14.1. Response 14

In July 2022, Education and CYP Directorate managers will meet with the Young Mayor's Team to explore the feasibility of working with them to establish a network of digital champions to continue to consider issues relating to digital inclusion in education.

2.15. Recommendation 15

That the council's education department's briefing session for headteachers discusses and comments on the recommendations of this task & finish group when it meets in the Summer.

2.15.1. Response 15

The education service will disseminate the recommendations of this task & finish group and seek comments at the headteacher forum in September 2022.

3. Policy Context

3.1. The Council's Corporate Strategy (2018-2022) outlines the Council's vision to deliver for residents over the next four years. Delivering this strategy includes the following priority outcomes that relate to digital inclusion for people with learning disabilities:

- Delivering and defending health, social care and support - Ensuring everyone receives the health, mental health, social care and support services they need.

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- Building an inclusive local economy - Everyone can access high-quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy.

4. Background

- 4.1. In July 2021, Cllr Colin Elliott led an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to consider: how can we identify lack of [digital] access and improve connectivity, along with educational outcomes, for those pupils most in need?

In February 2022, the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish Group published its report and recommendations to tackle digital exclusion in education in the borough. This report is the response to those recommendations from Lewisham education service.

Lewisham published its first creative and digital industries in 2017 outlining how the council and its partners plan associated industries within the borough. The 2022 Digital Strategy, currently being formed, addresses how the council will deliver key digital services and infrastructure to residents to thrive and live happy, healthy lives. The overarching ambitions of the strategy are the development of a modern, sustainable borough that harnesses the latest in digital technologies and infrastructure. The council is in the process of developing the 2022 Digital Strategy with this anticipated to be released in mid-2022.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1. In responding to the recommendations of the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish Group, the council will seek to maximise and not duplicate existing national, regional and local resources.

All schools receive funding as part of their delegated budget share and supporting grants. Individual schools will determine their digital strategy, taking into account the needs of their pupils, curriculum plans and financial situation. They will be able to draw on local, regional and national good practice. For initiatives in school, there should be no additional call on central Dedicated Schools Grant funding or the Council's General Fund.

With regards to the wider proposals for developing digital inclusion (e.g. through hubs etc.) these will need to be considered by relevant directors as part of their transformation strategies, along with the financial implications.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The Council's Constitution provides at paragraph 6.11, Article 6 that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may from time to time appoint sub-committees, to be known as task and finish groups which will exist for a period of no less than 3 months, nor more than 12 months from the date of their creation. It further adds that "Any task and finish group shall consist of 5 members and be established for the purpose of examining a particular issue in depth. The terms of reference of any task and finish group shall be agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which shall also appoint members to it."
- 6.2 The Constitution also provides at paragraph 24 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules that when a task and finish group completes an investigation it shall produce a report which it shall refer to Mayor & Cabinet and / or an appropriate Council decision making body for consideration who shall then refer their response back to the full Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

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- 6.3 The Council has the legal power to undertake the activities recommended in this report.
- 6.4 The report does not indicate that expenditure will be required to undertake the activities recommended in this report and explains the resources and existing framework that can be accessed and are available.
- 6.3 In the event that Council expenditure is envisaged to occur, the relevant approvals should be sought before proceeding from the relevant officer according to the value as set out in the constitution and where applicable, in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedural Rules.
- 6.4 Schools are subject to their own financial rules and policies and Governing Bodies have the appropriate powers to implement or embed / embody the activities mentioned in this report.
- 6.5 This is not a key decision, though as mentioned above at paragraph 6.2, any responses from Mayor and Cabinet shall be referred back to the full Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

7. Equalities implications

- 7.1. The Equality Act 2010 brought together all previous equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales. The Act included a new public sector equality duty, replacing the separate duties relating to race, disability and gender equality. The duty came into force on 6 April 2011. It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.2. The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 7.3. Schools are responsible for considering equalities implications of their digital learning and inclusion strategies. The responses to the recommendations from the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish Group outlined in this report, seek to support schools in their role of tackling digital inequalities; the gap between different demographics that have access to technology (computers and other devices and the internet) and those that do not. They seek to improve equity in physical access to technology, parent engagement and digital skills, and the home learning environment.

8. Climate change and environmental implications

- 8.1. There are no direct climate change and environmental implications arising from the responses to the recommendations from the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish Group, outlined in this report. Should any plans developed as a result of them have climate change and environmental implications, these will need to be given due consideration at the time.

9. Crime and disorder implications

- 9.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from the responses to the recommendations from the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish group,

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outlined in this report. Should any plans developed as a result of them have crime and disorder implications, these will need to be given due consideration at the time.

10. Health and wellbeing implications

- 10.1. There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from the responses to the recommendations from the Digital Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Task & Finish Group, outlined in this report. Should any plans developed as a result of them have health and wellbeing implications, these will need to be given due consideration at the time.

11. Background papers

None.

12. Glossary

[Link to Oxford English Dictionary here.](#)

Term	Definition
Digital exclusion	The gap between people who have access to technology and people who do not.
Digital literacy	The skills you need to live, learn, and work, communicate and access information.
London Grid for Learning (LGfL)	Organization providing a filtered broadband connection, network services, a common learning platform, online content and support communities for all schools across London.
Lewisham Learning	Schools/Local Authority partnership delivering Lewisham's school improvement programme.

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14. Appendices

None.

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