

11 March 2021

Special Report: COVID Update

Ward(s) All

Portfolio: Councillor Chris Towe – Education and Skills

1. Aim

To provide Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on:

- Covid-19 guidance for schools, including schools testing
- Attendance and opening of schools
- Remote learning and digital devices
- Data on Covid cases in schools

2. Recommendations

2.1 To note the contents of the report and to request further information, if required.

3. Report detail – know

3.1 The Education and Overview Scrutiny Committee met on 5 January 2021 and requested an additional report to update the Committee on the current schools position during the COVID pandemic. The Committee requested that the report covers the following 4 areas:

- Covid-19 guidance for schools including schools testing
- Attendance and opening of schools
- Remote learning and digital devices
- Data on Covid cases in schools

The Committee requested the report was circulated within 4 weeks and would be discussed as an agenda item at the next meeting in March.

3.2 Covid-19 guidance for schools including schools testing

Following the [Prime Minister's announcement on 4 January 2021](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision), only children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people should attend school or college. All other pupils and students will receive remote education. Early years settings (including nurseries and childminders) remained open. The definitions for vulnerable children and Critical workers can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Access and Inclusion staff have worked in partnership with Public Health and other areas of the Council, including Health and Safety and Human Resources (HR), to produce daily updates and resources to support our schools and settings and weekly virtual heads meetings through Teams.

All guidance provided for schools and parents can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-schools-coronavirus-covid-19>

Testing in schools

To safeguard the health of the teaching workforce and keep as many staff and pupils in school and college as possible, the DfE made rapid-result coronavirus (COVID-19) tests available to schools and colleges in the New Year. This will help identify asymptomatic cases – which make up a third of all cases – limiting the spread of the virus. This program is led directly by the DfE in partnership with the Regional Schools Commissioner.

From January, rapid-result tests were be provided to schools and colleges, starting with secondary schools and FE colleges, including special schools and alternative provision:

- For the school and college workforce to conduct weekly testing – this will help identify those who are carrying the virus without displaying symptoms, reducing the risk of transmission.
- For students and pupils as well as the school and college workforce to conduct daily testing for those identified as close contacts of workforce colleagues, students or pupils that have tested positive – this ensures that they do not need to isolate and are able to continue to benefit from high quality, face to face education.

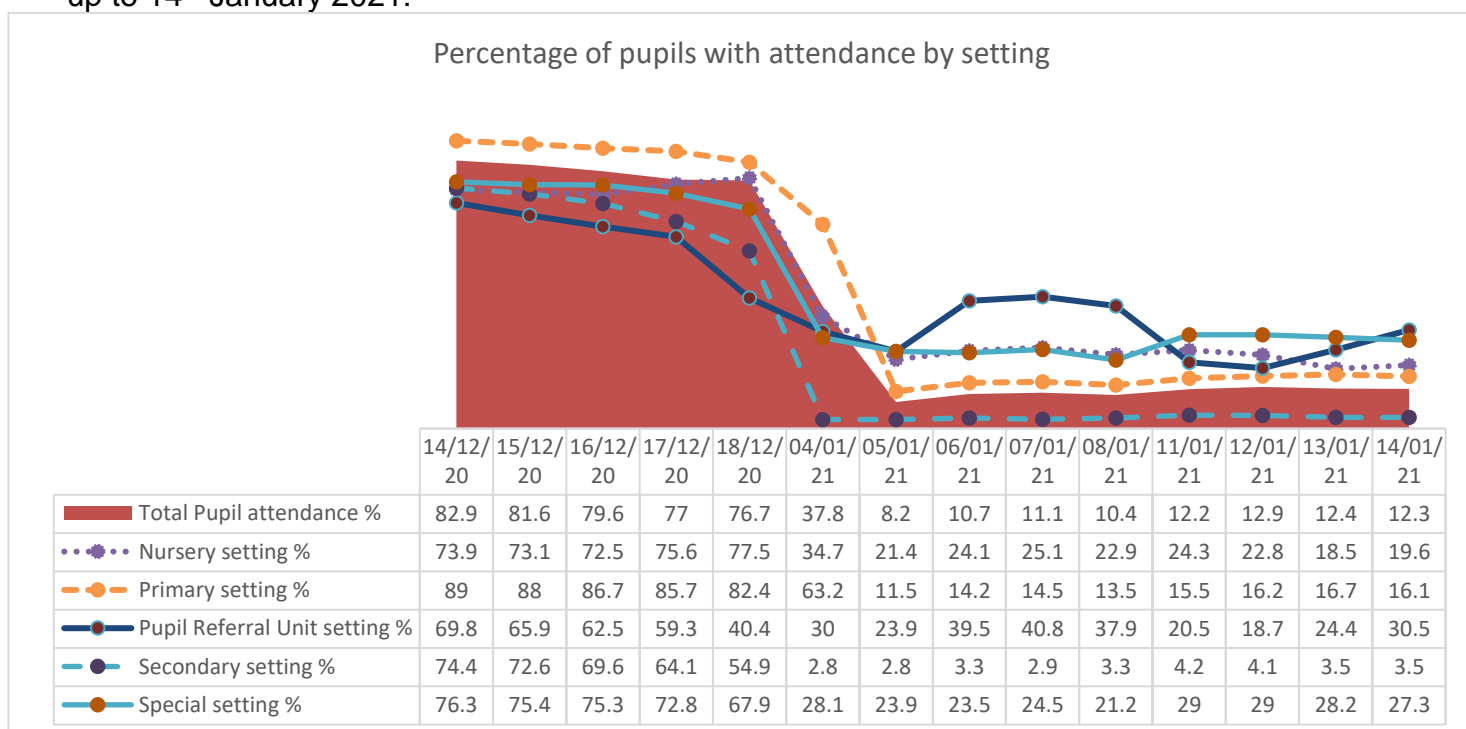
For every group, testing is voluntary but those who are eligible for tests are strongly encouraged to participate to reduce the risk of transmission within schools and colleges.

In line with routine infection control practice, close contacts who decide not to be tested daily will need to self-isolate in line with [guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#).

Schools in Walsall were supported by our local Public Health team and are rolling out the testing programme. The mass rollout of Covid testing for primary school teachers and support staff will begin from 18th January. Primary teachers and support staff will be able to self-administer the tests at home, with the Government providing a £78 million support package.

3.3 Attendance and opening of schools

The table below shows the percentage of pupils attending pre-Christmas, for comparison, and up to 14th January 2021:



National attendance is currently broadly in line.

Pupil Attendance percentage	National %	Walsall %
Total	14	12.3
Primary	20	16.1
Secondary	4	3.5
Special	29	27.3
Pupil Referral Unit	23	30.5

In response to the national lockdown and the new strain of the virus schools were supported to reviewing their risk assessments. We have done this in partnership with Public Health, Health and Safety, HR and also the unions.

3.4 Remote learning and digital devices

The procurement and distribution of laptops is now directly through the school setting from the Department for Education (DfE).

All schools in England have now been invited to [order their full allocation of laptops and tablets](#). If they have not ordered their full allocation they will receive a DfE email inviting them to order. Alternatively, they can [sign in to the get help with technology service](#) and follow the instructions to check their allocation and place their order.

DfE are also providing internet connections through free mobile data increases or 4G wireless routers for students who meet all 3 of these criteria. The student:

- does not have fixed broadband at home
- cannot afford additional data for their devices
- is experiencing disruption to their face-to-face education

Please note that only schools can place orders. Parents, carers and pupils cannot order devices or internet access through the DfE service.

In addition, the [DfE has set out requirements](#) for schools to provide high-quality remote education when children are unable to attend school.

OFSTED will look at how well schools are educating pupils in the current circumstances – which for most pupils means being educated remotely. They will also consider complaints made by parents about remote education to help resolve issues and make sure children are being well served.

If parents feel their child's school is not providing suitable remote education, they should first raise their concerns with the teacher or head teacher. If issues are not resolved, parents can [report the matter to Ofsted](#).

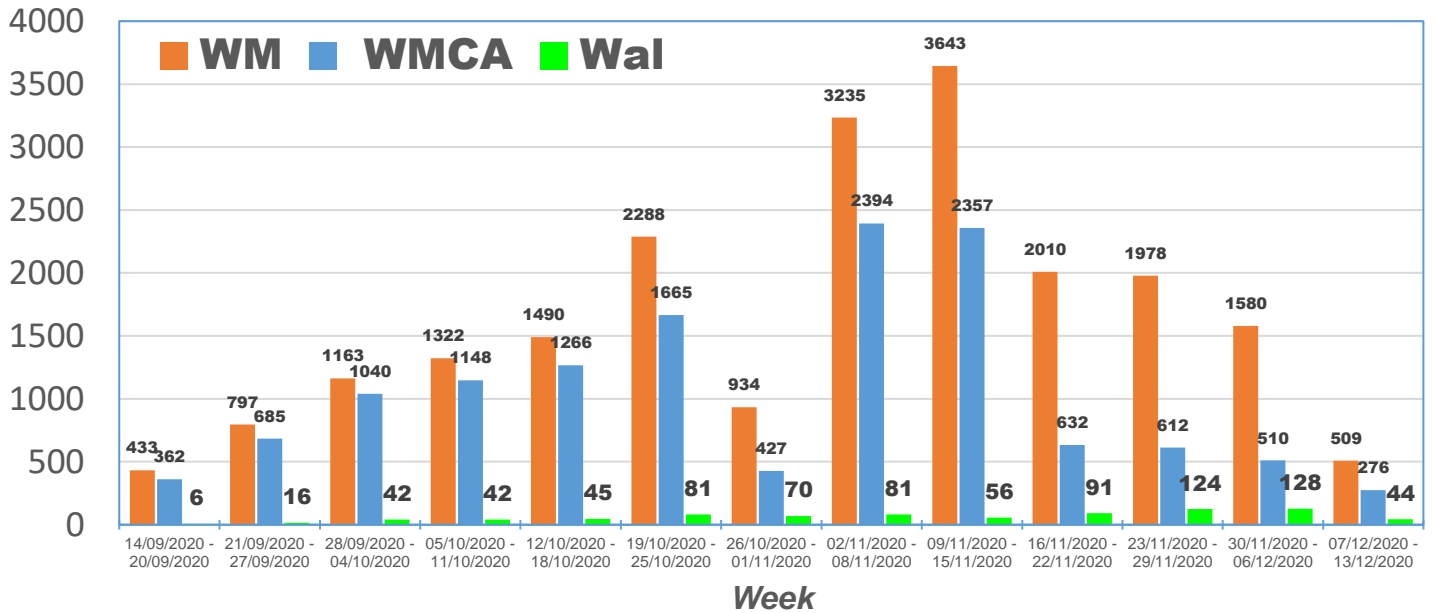
3.5 Data on Covid cases in schools

The most recent Covid data for schools is below

This shows confirmed cases in pupils and staff for the period from 14 September to 13 December 2020.

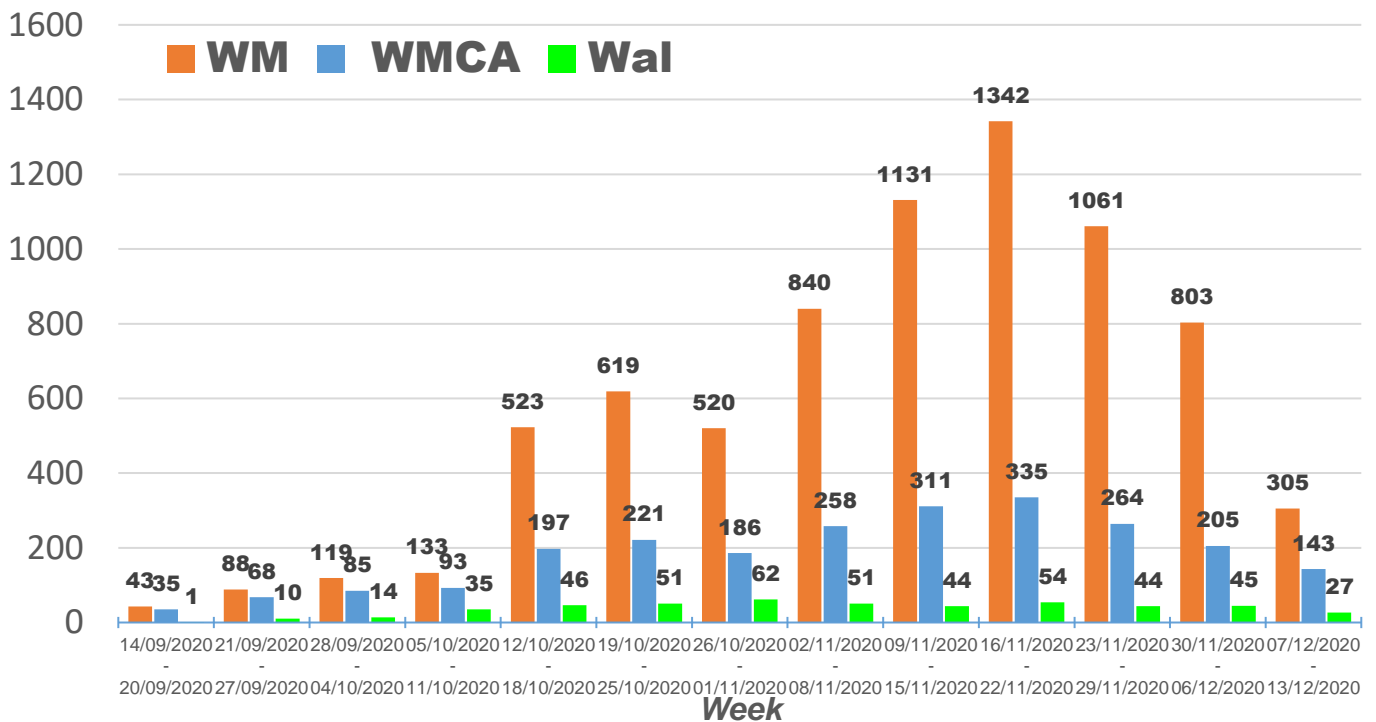
Weekly Trends: Pupil Covid Cases in Schools

LA Comparison: Region 14th September to 13th December



Weekly Trends: Staff Covid Cases in Schools

LA Comparison to Region 14th Sept to 13th Dec



4. Financial information

4.1 There are no financial implications set out in this report.

5. Reducing Inequalities

5.1 Services consider and respond to equality issues in all delivery of services. Equality issues were considered during the risk assessment process by schools.

6. Decide

6.1 To note the information set out in this report. To decide if there is any further information required.

7. Respond

7.1 The Committee will identify any further information they require and will add to the work program.

8. Review

8.1 Regular updates can be provided if requested.

Background papers: None.

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