

Item 7: Portfolio Holder Update – Responses to Questions

Digital Divide

During the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, approximately 700 laptops, tablets and routers were provided by Bromley through a DfE-funded scheme. Our children were prioritised for devices, to supplement those already purchased and provided directly by the Virtual School using Pupil Premium Plus. The remainder of devices were provided to disadvantaged children through Bromley schools, including our special schools. We are grateful for the exhaustive work of schools to identify the children that were struggling to access remote learning and to provide them with devices.

After the initial allocation of devices, schools were provided with a number of opportunities to order additional devices directly from DfE, an offer which we widely promoted and encouraged schools to maximise. We checked regularly with schools for any issues or shortfall of equipment. Aside from some early teething issues with the DfE's supplier, which were appropriately escalated and acted upon, schools reported that they were able to access the devices they needed for their pupils.

We continue to work with Bromley schools and other settings to tackle potential issues with disadvantaged families having access to online learning materials and enrichment activities and will continue to raise any concerns with the DfE.

As part of our partnership working with schools, we are holding the final Headteacher Conference of the academic year next Wednesday 30th June on the topic of Technology in Education. This follows the success of our well-attended session on Closing Achievement Gaps, which was well attended by Headteachers and received very positive feedback.

Ofsted Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges

The Children, Education and Families Directorate is working closely with our statutory partners in the Metropolitan Police and with the oversight of the Bromley Safeguarding Children's Partnership (BSCP), following the publication of Ofsted's review. Any concerns about safeguarding children relating to abuse and in this context - sexual abuse in schools - received by the Council are always considered by Children's Social Care, including the LADO where appropriate and multi-agency partners following our procedures and legislation including Working Together to Safeguard Children and Care Act legislation.

The rapid review was commissioned by the Government following testimonies published on the Everyone's Invited website. A number of recommendations were made by Ofsted, in particular:

Multi-agency partners should: work to improve engagement with schools of all types in their local area, tailoring their approach to what their analysis (produced in partnership with schools/colleges and wider safeguarding partners) indicates are the risks to children and young people in their local area

I am pleased to confirm that this partnership work was already in place in Bromley and has been further strengthened since the publication of Ofsted's review. We have written to all secondary schools providing advice and support. Of course, if schools need further support the education safeguarding officer is available, as is their link Head of Service and the MASH number. Our school engagement work continues, with discussions having taken place at both the BSCP and Education Safeguarding Advisory Committee meetings in the past three weeks.