

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee	Children and Young People Select Committee
Date:	14 January 2022
Title:	Attainment of Children and Young People in Hampshire Schools during the 2020/21 Academic Year
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform members about the alternative assessment arrangements that were made in 2021 in lieu of statutory assessments and examinations in 2021, that were again cancelled by the Secretary of State for Education due to the impact of COVID-19.
2. Consequently, it is not possible to report on the attainment of pupils in the primary age range for the second year running. Attainment in Key Stage 4 is within the context of the revised arrangements for 2021.

Recommendation

3. The Children and Young People Select Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

Executive Summary

4. This report seeks to explain the changes to expectations of statutory assessment in 2021 in Early Years, Primary and Secondary education.
5. Attainment in Early Years and in Primary education was not subject to external assessment in 2021, for the second year in succession. In normal times, primary aged pupils undertake Standard Assessment Tests (SATs). There were no moderated teacher assessments or externally marked assessments that were required by statute, or collected locally, although settings and schools continued to provide transition information to support pupils in Years 2 and 6. There is anecdotal evidence of the impact of the pandemic on attainment and progress of young children, partially supported

by some early small-scale studies nationally. This suggests that there has been a general slowing of progress that might have been expected overall but that this is very individualised and in a very wide range when comparing pupils with one another. This also impacts differently in education settings that are now faced with uneven consequential challenges in supporting progress of pupils and the regaining of lost curriculum experiences.

6. The same is generally true in secondary education with the exception that there have been more regularised assessment and qualification systems for students in Key Stage 4 in the past two years, with significant changes in 2021. The information gleaned from these suggests that students perform differently, and in some cases better, when not in the examination conditions of previous years, particularly more disadvantaged and vulnerable students.
7. The proposed and expected return to statutory assessment in all Key Stages presents a number of challenges. Statutory examinations and assessments test pupils on their understanding of the whole curriculum and ensuring this coverage is a challenge, due to pupils' very different experiences during the pandemic. The individual performance of pupils and schools will be subject to a greater number of variables in experiences. Finally, the use of comparative performance information about individual schools and geographical areas for accountability purposes will be challenging. This will be the case for governing bodies and school leaders and for agencies such as the Local Authority, the Department for Education and Ofsted.

Contextual information

8. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) there was no requirement placed upon schools and settings to undertake statutory assessment in 2021. In the absence of national statutory guidance, local guidance was produced by the Hampshire school improvement teams to support with end of Key Stage assessments. The purpose of these was to enable effective transition between Key Stages and settings.
9. Although there has been no collection of assessment information at each of these primary age Key Stages, there is a general professional consensus forming about the impact of the pandemic on overall attainment and progress. Overall, the pandemic would appear to have resulted in a slowing of progress when measured across a whole cohort of children whether in a school, Hampshire or nationally. Whilst this is impossible to quantify precisely, this would naturally result from periods of home learning, absence from school and disruption to the planned curriculum experienced in last two years.
10. Nonetheless, as is the case in other Key Stages to a lesser or greater effect, the impact of the disruption caused by the pandemic is unique to each child, family and setting. The range of complex and interwoven factors such as attendance of children and staffing, lengths of time at home and available attention and skills of parents and carers has had a highly differential impact.

It is also the case that some children have made better progress in some areas of the curriculum particularly suited to lower-level rote learning or repetitive practice such as handwriting skills, but this is not seen consistently.

11. In Early Years, overall, children starting school have shown signs of delayed development. Available evidence suggests that changes in access to Early Child Education and Care has had an impact on pre-school children in a number of ways, including social, emotional and behavioural development and mental health, physical development and school readiness. However, evidence also suggests that children and families have experienced the pandemic in very different ways, which has shaped any impacts on development, both positive and negative.
12. Sadly, it is inevitable that the negative impacts on children's development and mental health are most likely to have been felt more by disadvantaged children and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), as well as other children experiencing vulnerability, such as those open to social care. Again, though, there is variation here. Schools remained open for children with a social worker, and many attended regularly – more so in Hampshire than nationally. For some of these children, work in smaller groups tailored to their needs meant that they lost less learning time and opportunity than their peers. Variations were inevitably seen which were affected also by the family situation and the COVID impact on the home environment.
13. School settings in Hampshire are reporting that our youngest children were not as “school ready” as in pre-COVID years but that steady strides were already being made in accelerating progress over the Autumn Term 2021. This is supported in an Education Endowment Foundation interim report of the School Starters Study in April 2021, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-childrens-socioemotional-well-being-and-attainment-during-the-reception-year>
14. The survey of 58 schools in England found that 76% of schools reported children needed more support when entering school in the Autumn Term 2020 than previously. Communication and language development; personal, social and emotional development; and literacy were all cited as particular areas of concern by schools. However, once the school year had started most parents reported that children had settled well and that they were not concerned about their child's ability to cope. This was anecdotally also being reported in the Autumn term 2021.
15. Attainment at the end of EYFS is, historically, a strength of the Hampshire Early Years Sector. It seems likely that, given the higher levels of attendance than recorded nationally, Hampshire's children will have made the most of their access to education during this important first year in school settings in 2020/21. Research again suggests that better attendance in educational settings has a strong correlation with the development of receptive language

and gains in vocabulary size. This is also true of children at home who spent more time with caregivers, had less passive screen time and when caregivers read to them during lockdown.

16. In KS1, there has been an emphasis on maintaining an effective transition for children in Year 1, following the EYFS. Aspects of child development, delayed through a lack of sufficient exposure to educational experiences, cannot simply be added in through “catch up” without the supporting environment of the right physical resources and activities. This has challenged Year 1 professionals who are also mindful of the end of year standards that provide a firm foundation for Year 2 and the statutory assessments.
17. At the moment, the DfE is planning the re-instatement of statutory assessments at the end of KS1 and KS2 in the summer of 2022. This is a significant challenge for the current Year 2 (Y2) and Year 6 (Y6) cohorts, children and professionals. In part, the challenge is the same as for other age groups; to assessing the impact on individual children and make appropriate and ongoing provision in relation to curriculum strengths and gaps; drawing upon or working on important academic and personal skills and resilience and building back (over time) if there are deficits/gaps.
18. However, the additional pressure is that, in Y2 and Y6, the curriculum road has a finite end and is followed by a series of assessments and tests that will seek to measure performance against a determined national standard. The temptation to speed up coverage of the curriculum to make sure everything has been covered will be difficult to resist but ultimately counterproductive to ensuring sustainable progress that lasts across transition to the next Key Stage.
19. There is some disquiet in the profession that the reinstatement will lead to undue pressure on children, teachers and leaders in the year ahead. It is unclear how this will translate into school standards when these are revealed in late summer 2022. There will be no published national standards, but the assessment information will be made available to Local Authorities, the DfE and Ofsted for use in their statutory roles. Some schools have been harder hit by the pandemic than others and so any comparisons may well be flawed and misleading in relation to the quality of provision implied by standards achieved.
20. The Services for Young Children and Hampshire Inspection and Advisory Service teams are providing high quality guidance to all settings and primary schools in relation to the challenges of curriculum re-design and assessment of children’s needs. This includes specific support materials for end of Key Stage assessments and tests that make clear how best use can be made of the remaining curriculum time.
21. However, schools’ capacity to make full use of this resource and the timetabled curriculum is already under pressure as a result of the current resurgence of the COVID-19 virus. This throws more doubt onto the likely

readiness of current cohorts for end of Key Stage assessments in 2022.

22. It is helpful to review the experience for students and schools over the last two years 2020 and 2021 in Key Stage 4 (KS4). The Department for Education (DfE) announced that there would be no national reporting of finalised Key Stage 4 (KS4) results at a school or local authority level in 2020 and in 2021. Ofqual was tasked with developing a process that would enable individual pupils to receive grades for the subjects that they had studied. The 2020 process was reviewed and revised in 2021 and will be again changed in 2022 and 2023. This makes year on year comparisons of school or system performance very challenging.
23. In 2020 schools were required to produce Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) for pupils at the end of Year 11. The purpose of these was to gain entry into the next stage of education or training for pupils and to provide them with a record of their end of Key Stage attainment. These were not collected or published nationally. As schools had been closed to pupils since March 2020, and there was no time or provision for pupils to sit tests or complete extra work, these were based on the work that pupils had completed up to that point in time.
24. As was seen in primary schools, the experience of children in secondary schools varied widely over the pandemic. They too were influenced by the attention that parents and carers were able to give them, and their access to and engagement with high quality resources. It has also been widely reported that, perhaps inevitably, the negative impact on progress and mental health has been felt more by disadvantaged children and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), as well as other children experiencing vulnerability, such as those open to social care or those in receipt of pupil premium. Schools remained open to these children through the lockdowns and encouraged attendance, in the main, with rigour. For those children that did attend, the benefits to their learning were reported to be significant. Some reported that children thrived in the smaller groups and calmer environment of lock down schools, and, in a few cases, this has led to challenges for these children when dealing with the return of their peers and the bustle of usual school life.
25. The decision was made to ask Hampshire schools to report their Attainment 8 (A8) data to the Local Authority so that the impact of the CAGs on the performance of students experiencing vulnerability could be evaluated. A8 was the performance indicator of choice because it averages the performance of individual children in a range of 8 subjects, that must include the core subjects of English, maths and science, so provides the most holistic view of attainment at the end of secondary school.
26. This aggregated data needs to be used with extreme caution as there could be no checking or moderation applied to what was collected. This data showed that, overall, the aggregated A8 data had improved significantly from the published 2019 standards for all pupils. This was in line with what was

seen nationally. However, it was of note that the gap between the A8 data of children in receipt of disadvantaged Pupil Premium (PP) and the whole cohort had narrowed from 14 points in 2019 to 11 points in 2020, where 10 points is equivalent to one grade.

27. The reason that schools gave for this relative improvement of A8 scores for PP children was that it is this group of students can be disproportionately affected by the pressure of final exams. They report that, often, they are less likely to perform to their typical classroom achievement under exam conditions than their peers. These children are sadly more likely to have experienced trauma, and we now know that this impacts on the ability of the body to deal with stress. So, this improvement in reported attainment may be linked to the removal of this anxiety.
28. The impact of improved attainment in this more vulnerable cohort meant that that more PP children accessed level 3 courses than in previous years.
29. For the 2021 results at KS4, the DfE announced that there would again be no national reporting of finalised KS4 results at a school or local authority level. Ofqual was asked to develop a different process that would enable individual pupils to receive grades for the subjects that they had studied, and this resulted in Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs).
30. TAGs were produced for each child in each subject through a rigorous process of assessment over time. Ofqual asked exam boards to ask schools to generate, for each subject, TAGs for each student based on a range of evidence completed as part of the course, which demonstrated the student's performance on the subject content they had been taught.
31. Every school was asked to provide evidence of student work to exam boards, and schools were also asked to provide the evidence that they had used to determine the grades for a specified range of students in a range of subjects.
32. The decision was once again made to ask Hampshire schools to report their attainment 8 (A8) data to the Local Authority so that the impact of the TAGs on the performance of students experiencing vulnerability could be assessed. This aggregated data once again needs to be used with extreme caution as there could be no checking or moderation applied to what was collected. As was widely reported this data showed that once again the overall aggregated A8 data had improved significantly from 2020 for all pupils, which reflected the national picture once again. What was pleasing to see was that against the backdrop of rising attainment the gap between the A8 data of children in receipt of disadvantaged pupil premium (PP) and the whole cohort remained at 11 in 2021 and had not reverted to 2019 levels.
33. This meant that once again more PP children accessed Level 3 courses.
34. Schools were vocal about how much the continuous assessment system had advantaged a number of their PP children and how hard these children had

worked over an extended period of time to secure the good outcomes that they were aiming for.

35. The DfE has stated that the 2022 outcomes will be reported at school and national level and published in performance tables as they were in 2019. This remains a challenge for the current Year 11 cohort and there is concern within the profession regarding the significant additional pressures that this is placing on children, their teachers and school leaders. In particular, as some schools have been, and will continue to be, harder hit by the pandemic than others, there is concern that published data will be misleading in relation to the quality of provision and outcomes for the young people and schools involved.
36. Some concessions to the circumstances have been made by Ofqual. A choice of topics or content on which students will be assessed in GCSE English literature, history, ancient history and geography has been shared with schools, and Ofqual have agreed to providing advance information on the focus of exams to support students' revision in subjects where there is not a choice of topics. Students will be given formulae sheets in GCSE maths and revised equation sheets in GCSE combined science and physics. Requirements for practical science work and practical art and design assessments will also be adapted.
37. Ofqual also confirmed in November that, in the unlikely event that exams cannot go ahead, students will receive teacher-assessed grades instead. These grades would be based on a range of work, similar to 2021. It is important to note that Ofqual have shared that they are determined that the rises in grades seen in the last two years of TAGs and CAGs, driven by the difference in approach to assessment, will be manipulated to return attainment to 2019 levels over the next two years. This means that 2022 will be a transition year in which grading is moved to a point closer to midway between 2021 and 2019. Ofqual aims to return to results that are in line with pre-pandemic years in 2023.
38. So, in 2022, it seems likely that results will be controlled so that they are higher than in 2019, but not as high as reported in 2021.
39. Hampshire Inspection and Advisory Service teams are providing high quality guidance, including the provision of seminars for all schools particularly in relation to the challenges of curriculum re-design, assessment of children's needs and exam preparation.
40. However, schools' capacity to make full use of these resources is under increasing pressure as a result of the current resurgence of the COVID-19 virus. As with primary schools, this throws more doubt onto the likely readiness of the Year 11 cohort for end of KS4 assessment in 2022.

Finance

41. None

Performance

42. There is no national data that can be used to judge GCSE performance this year. The process used to derive grades means that comparisons with previous years are not valid.

Consultation and Equalities

43. None

Climate Change Impact Assessment

44. None

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

45. None

Carbon Mitigation

46. None

Other Key Issues

47. None

Conclusions

48. In conclusion, the variable experiences of children, teachers, schools in the context of the challenges of COVID are likely to be reflected in the achievements and progress of pupils since 2019. This is not to say that we shouldn't be ambitious for what our children and young people can achieve with excellent provision. Nor is it the case that we need be pessimistic about the long term impact on children's lives as there is evidence of significant resilience and positive responses to the challenges faced.

49. Nonetheless, there is significant doubt over the reliability and fairness of using performance information to compare the relative achievement of individuals and education settings subject to such variable factors. Also, comparisons with previous performance, for example pre-COVID 19 may be unhelpful moving forward.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	Yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	No
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None