Written evidence submitted by Hackney Council

Hackney Council's response:

Summary

Hackney Council provides statutory and non-statutory services to support children & young people and their families in the borough. There are 21 Children Centres, 2 nursery schools, 79 maintained schools, academies & free schools and 2 colleges in the borough supporting a borough population of approximately 69,000 children & young people 0-19 years old. It is an area with growing prosperity but still some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country. It has also experienced one of the highest death rates from Covid-19 in the country.

Hackney schools and educational settings have responded effectively to the current situation with Coronavirus. However, a lack of clarity in messaging, particularly around the definitions of critical workers early on lead to different interpretations among headteachers. Moreover, the sudden nature of the announcement on school closures meant that schools had little time to prepare for home learning. Schools need sufficient time to prepare for reopening and to act on any guidance issued on how best to do this.

We are concerned about the impact that cancellation of exams and reduced teaching and learning time will have on pupils in Hackney. While home learning is possible for some, there is a 'digital divide' between those with access to digital technology and the internet, and those that do not. This is likely to have a negative impact on the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. The government needs to close the digital divide through a clear strategy, involving local authorities, which identifies where the needs are and addresses all year groups. Government should also double the pupil premium grant for at least 1 academic year (2020/21), or longer, to support the needs of students identified as lagging in one or more subjects.

We have also noted concerns raised by a number of parents and schools around the FSM voucher system, with parents unable to use these vouchers, once accessed, at a number of shops that they would normally visit. We recommend that the government includes local stores and more affordable supermarkets.

The childcare market is fragile in places. Private nurseries with a nominal number of funded children have closed their setting to furlough staff, impacting on available childcare places for vulnerable and critical worker children. Some are reporting financial difficulties. The government should consider a range of financial support measures, including insurance support or rates relief.

There has been a rise in the request for statutory assessment both from settings and parents between February & May 2020 (138 requests were received (approximately 29% of all requests received in 2018), but due to lockdown ECHP assessments have proved difficult. We recommend that legislative changes for EHC needs assessments & implementation of EHCPs are backdated to 20 March 2020 when lockdown was first implemented.

Many visits by social workers and early help workers to children and families are now taking place virtually. In Hackney, where there are high levels of deprivation, this risks social exclusion as it relies on families having access to appropriate technology. Visit to children at risk of harm, while able to take place, are more difficult as the adaptations needed to comply with social distancing measures mean that our ability to monitor the risk to and experiences of children is reduced. We have also seen a rise in domestic abuse referrals by 60 per cent during lockdown, from around 25 cases per week to almost 40.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Schools, settings and Local Authorities must be given sufficient notice to act on guidance issued. They require time to brief staff about new procedures and agree new protocols. With a phased return to school, there must be clarity of guidance to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both staff and students, whilst allowing flexibility to allow new arrangements to be embedded. We recognise this is a live situation and that schools, settings and Local Authorities are grappling with these issues right now, but learning lessons from this process will be vital for any future national, regional or local lockdowns as we move through the next phases of this crisis.

Recommendation 2: To ensure sufficient childcare places remain open, further financial support packages for EY providers should be considered, including localised measures to ease transition into the next phases (e.g., meeting restart guidance, part-furloughing, access to local authority discretionary grants, insurance support, rates relief, etc).

Recommendation 3: Pupil premium grant is immediately doubled for at least 1 academic year (2020/21), or longer, to support the needs of students identified as lagging in one or more subjects.

Recommendation 4: There should be a phased approach to Ofsted inspections with only focussed non reported visits for thematic reports held for at least the first term following full reopening of schools. Inspection guidance should be updated to reflect changing approaches to education in light of COVID-19.

Recommendation 5: Close the digital divide through a clear digital inclusion strategy, involving Local Authorities, which identifies where the needs are and addresses all year groups. A long term inclusive approach needs to consider the difficulty families might have renewing software licences, maintaining access to wifi/4G, or replacing damaged devices. Families will need support in learning how to use these devices safely and in accessing assistive software, e.g. for families with SEND.

Recommendation 6: Include COVID-19 loss and bereavement in the PSHE curriculum.

Recommendation 7: Free School Meal vouchers should be available at a greater range of shops, including local food stores and more affordable supermarkets.

Recommendation 8: There should be no perverse incentive to keep children at home rather than at school by continuing FSM vouchers only for children at home. FSM vouchers should be continued for all eligible, whether they are back in school or not, until the end of the summer term, and government should also provide funds to help tackle 'holiday hunger'.

Recommendation 9: FSM provision should be extended to all children living in poverty regardless of immigration status.

Recommendation 10: Legislative changes for EHC needs assessments and implementation of EHCPs are backdated to 20 March 2020 when lockdown was first implemented.

Recommendation 11: Fund additional support for the transition back to school in terms of therapeutic support, CAMHS and transport.

Recommendation 12: PPE advice is updated to acknowledge the range of students being supported and to reflect that personal and intimate care is often required to meet pupil needs in all Early Years and school settings.

Introduction to our organisation and reason for submitting evidence

Hackney Council provides statutory and non-statutory services to support children and young people and their families in the borough. There are 21 Children Centres, 2 maintained nursery schools, 79 maintained schools, academies & free schools and 2 colleges supporting a borough population of approximately 69,000 children and young people 0-19 years old.

Whilst Hackney is an area of growing economic opportunity, this growth sits alongside significant deprivation. Too many local families and individuals face persistent inequalities and are disproportionately affected by child poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency. Approximately 30% of pupils on roll in Hackney schools are known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals.

The Council's Children, Adults & Community Health Directorate are providing a coordinated response with our school and partners so that children and young people continue to receive an education and are safeguarded during this difficult time.

1. **The implementation of the critical workers policy, including how consistently the definition of 'critical' work is being applied across the country and how schools are supported to remain open for children of critical workers**

1. Prior to closure, schools and settings had been struggling to remain open in light of high numbers of staff absences. The initial announcement of school and setting closures gave little time for settings to organise home learning and in school care. When it became clear that schools and settings would remain open to vulnerable pupils and those of critical workers, setting leaders had limited time to reimagine the service.

2. In the absence of an official definition of critical workers immediately following the announcement, Headteachers and setting managers initially interpreted who critical workers were in different ways, leading to some confusion and inconsistency in approach.

3. Headteachers and setting leads were also required to take note of guidance that most children would be safest at home.

4. Headteachers and settings balanced the needs of these groups alongside the challenges in ensuring staff were safe and appropriately deployed.

5. Although variable, from closure up until 1 June approximately 650 pupils were attending Hackney schools per day, of which approximately 250 were from vulnerable groups. Schools initially overestimated the number of families who would take up provision with resulting numbers much lower than expected.

6. A lack of notice to plan and implement changes led to confusion and an inconsistency of approach following the announcement of school closure. This was compounded by delayed and unclear messaging.

7. **Recommendation 1**: **Schools, settings and Local Authorities must be given sufficient notice to act on guidance issued. They require time to brief staff about**

new procedures and agree new protocols. With a phased return to school, there must be clarity of guidance to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both staff and students, whilst allowing flexibility to allow new arrangements to be embedded. We recognise this is a live situation and that schools, settings and Local Authorities are grappling with these issues right now, but learning lessons from this process will be vital for any future national, regional or local lockdowns as we move through the next phases of this crisis.

**2.	The capacity of children's services to support vulnerable children and young people**

1.	During the COVID-19 lockdown the majority of Children and Families staff are currently working from home. Many visits by social workers and early help workers to children and families are now taking place virtually. In Hackney, where there are high levels of deprivation, this risks social exclusion as it relies on families having access to appropriate technology and wifi. This is a clear example of the 'digital divide' within communities, but this divide isn't just a question of kit, technology and access, but also affordability and poverty. While we welcome the government's scheme for free laptops, we are concerned that it does not go far enough in meeting the demand amongst vulnerable children and families and is short-term in approach.

2.	Direct visits to children/young people at home with their families/carers are still being undertaken in circumstances where a child has suffered harm or there is an immediate risk of harm. However, the adaptations needed to comply with social distancing measures mean that our ability to monitor the risk to and experiences of children is reduced. Our ability to undertake effective direct work with families to support them to make the changes needed for their children to be safer in the longer term is also hampered.

3.	Whilst support is being provided to families with children formally identified as a child in need, there will inevitably be a cohort of families who are in need as a result of the COVID-19 crisis who do not meet the threshold for statutory social care support but will need support from our early help services (e.g., due to increased home and financial pressures).

4.	The significant decrease in the number of Children's Social Care referrals received raises concern about the wellbeing of vulnerable children when professionals who would normally be seeing these children are less likely to have in person contact. Whilst we have increased the frequency of in person visits to the families we are already working with, this is not possible for families we are not yet working with. The service received 50 referrals in the week ending 24 April 2020, which is a 46% decrease compared to a weekly average of 92 referrals (based on April 2019 - February 2020 data).

5.	In line with other local authorities, we are experiencing an increase in domestic abuse referrals. Referrals to Hackney Council's Domestic Abuse Intervention Service (DAIS) have increased by 60% during lockdown, from around 25 cases per week to almost 40. We remain concerned that there will still be a significant amount of domestic abuse that affects children but is not being reported.

6.	Low numbers of vulnerable children with social workers attending school (approximately 19% of a cohort of 1,509 school-aged children and young people identified as high risk) is a concern. Education and Children's Social Care are working together to liaise with schools and settings to agree a plan in relation to school/setting attendance for these children.

7.	The impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable adolescents who ordinarily spend increasing amounts of time in peer groups, online and in neighbourhood spaces is a concern – these can provide positive experiences but can also be contexts that facilitate

exploitation and harm. A small number of young people have found it difficult to stay at home, with often decreased adult oversight there is a potential for an increase in harm and exploitation.

3. The effect of provider closure on the early years sector, including reference to:

1. **Children's early development**

1. Up until 1 June, the vast majority of children were no longer in receipt of early education. This may have an impact on outcomes in children's physical, personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, particularly for children at risk of poor outcomes.

2. The national Early Years Foundation Stage Profile assessment has been cancelled for 2020. Assessments will be undertaken when children return to their settings. However, given the time spent out of the setting, for many it is likely that it will take up to a year to catch up to where we want children to be for their age and stage.

3. Settings act as a protective factor for children in need. The wellbeing of the 60% vulnerable children who were absent is of concern.

4. **The early years funded entitlement and the childcare market**

5. Playgroups and independent settings with a significant number of funded 2, 3 and 4 year olds, are unlikely to be adversely affected by COVID-19. They continue to receive funding and have the option to furlough staff if appropriate.

6. The playgroup sector has a higher proportion of staff who are part-time, older women, many of whom have self-isolated, thereby withdrawing provision from vulnerable and critical worker children. Playgroups have worked with the local authority to secure alternative provision for their eligible children.

7. Private nurseries with a nominal number of funded children have closed their setting to furlough staff, impacting on available childcare places for vulnerable and critical worker children. Some are reporting financial difficulties.

8. Childminders who have been adversely affected by Covid19 are keen to continue to support families. The government's scheme to provide 80% average income over 3 years under support for the self-employed is helpful. However, new childminders without 3 years tax return may remain at a financial disadvantage.

9. <u>Recommendation 2</u>: **To ensure sufficient childcare places remain open, further financial support packages for EY providers should be considered, including localised measures to ease transition into the next phases (e.g., meeting restart guidance, part-furloughing, access to local authority discretionary grants, insurance support, rates relief, etc).**

4. The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment

1. **Impact on pupils**

1. Hackney remains the second most deprived local authority in England on the Government's Indices of Multiple Deprivation and all of the wards are in the top ten percent most underprivileged in the country. Our schools have greater proportions of pupils who are disadvantaged, SEND and from ethnic minority backgrounds than seen nationally.

2. Ofqual's <u>review of research literature</u> shows there can be bias in teacher assessment against gender, age, ethnicity, background and SEND.

3. Moving to a system of teacher assessment will have an adverse impact in Hackney. Performance gaps between boys and girls, disadvantaged, ethnic minority pupils and those with SEND and their peers will increase by greater margins than elsewhere.

4. For the past three years, against all headline measures, FSM, SEND and ethnic minority students in Hackney outperform national averages. Local strategies aimed at raising standards and narrowing performance gaps are successful because of the importance given to examination outcomes. This allows schools to target specific cohorts – setting ambition, arranging intervention and support. Cancellation of examinations will disrupt this.

5. Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores for Black Caribbean students, a priority in Hackney, show an improving picture when compared with 2018, particularly for boys. Nationally, on both measures, performance gaps for this group have widened.

6. Quickly implementing a new system of teacher assessment, moderated by statistical modelling, without there being total clarity increases the likelihood of inconsistency and inaccuracy.

7. Incomplete work, already drafted, cannot be progressed any further and may not be a fair reflection of ability and performance.

8. Some students, following mock examinations, will have lost the chance to improve attainment with Easter revision. This will negatively affect the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, least able and those with SEND. Students in less affluent areas will not have the resources or access to wi-fi that support effective working from home. These groups will fall further behind their peers.

9. **Recommendation 3**: **Pupil premium grant is immediately doubled for at least 1 academic year (2020/21), or longer, to support the needs of students identified as lagging in one or more subjects.**

10. It is not clear how unconditional offers for university applications will develop. Some students may choose higher education institutes that are not right for them due to having less support in making choices. This support is particularly important for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

11. By the time schools reopen, Year 10 and Year 12 will have lost at least 20% of their learning time. They will start the final year of examination courses behind all previous cohorts.

2. Impact on school leaders and subject leaders

1. Implementing a new system will be challenging. Subject leaders and teachers will not have the opportunity to discuss student work, some of it incomplete, and agree marking, grading and ranking.

2. School leaders and subject managers need practical guidance i.e. models about how this can be approached. Many are having to design systems for themselves.

3. Newer teachers and relatively inexperienced subject leaders will require support if the system is to be rigorously implemented.

4. Clear guidance on vocational and technical examinations is not yet available and will not help bring equality with academic qualifications.

5. Depending on each school's circumstance, some will be providing more welfare support to restore wellbeing than education.

6. This will impact on the role of external evaluation, particularly ensuring that Ofsted inspections remain fit for purpose and that they do not increase pressure on schools.

7. **Recommendation 4: There should be a phased approach to Ofsted inspections with only focussed non reported visits for thematic reports held for at least the first term following full reopening of schools. Inspection guidance should be updated to reflect changing approaches to education in light of COVID-19.**

5. **Support for pupils and families during closures, including:**
1. **The consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning**

1. All schools were encouraged to consider remote learning prior to school closures. It was understood that a closure period was likely to be lengthy and this would need to be considered in planning.

2. Whilst all schools have considered remote learning, different approaches were taken dependent on the context and phase of the school and the school's capacity.

3. Most schools have considered pupils who may not have access to IT at home, with some schools providing equipment and other alternatives. A reliance on digital technology is, however, a significant concern given levels of deprivation in the borough. It cannot be assumed that all children and young people in a family will have access to the technology they need. Furthermore, as the crisis continues, the impact on family finances and their ability to ensure access to wifi and digital technology is likely to increase as employment becomes less stable. This increases the risk of a digital divide between those families who can and cannot access digital technology to support their learning; ultimately impacting on the outcomes for those children from poorer families.

4. Whilst we welcome the government announcement on 24 April to provide laptops and tablets for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, there will still be a large cohort of families where digital technology is shared across a number of family members and it cannot be assumed that each child is benefiting from online learning throughout the school day. This will again contribute to a digital divide and reduced outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

5. The impact of remote learning on educational achievement, particularly for disadvantaged learners who are less likely to be supported or have resources for all family members at home is, therefore, paramount, with a genuine concern that the disadvantage gap will widen as a result of the current crisis due to the lack of capacity from some families to support or prioritise learning at home.

6. **Recommendation 5: Close the digital divide through a clear digital inclusion strategy, involving Local Authorities, which identifies where the needs are and addresses all year groups. A long term inclusive approach needs to consider the difficulty families might have renewing software licences, maintaining access to wifi/4G, or replacing damaged devices. Families will need support in learning how to use these devices safely and in accessing assistive software, e.g. for families with SEND.**

2. **Children's and young people's mental health and safety outside of the structure and oversight of in-person education**

1. The Council has developed multi-agency approaches to support the mental health and safety of children and young people through direct contact, physical resources and online support.

2. However many families will not have access to the technology to enable them to make use of online support. In particular, the orthodox Jewish community in Hackney is very restricted in their access to digital technology.

3. As the crisis progresses, it becomes increasingly likely that children and young people will experience bereavement, often for the first time. Reference to this in the PSHE

curriculum will help individuals come to terms with loss and learn approaches to manage their wellbeing.

4. **Recommendation 6: Include COVID-19 loss and bereavement in the PSHE curriculum.**

6. The financial implications of closures for providers (including higher education and independent training providers), pupils and families

1. Schools may face additional costs as a result of COVID-19 and we welcome the additional funding made available for schools to cover this.

2. Whilst some schools may experience a reduction in operational costs due to closure, there are additional costs which would not have been considered when setting the draft 2020-21 school budget (e.g. computers for home use, licenses for remote educational packages, curriculum supplies).

3. Business critical decisions such as Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS), year-end closure and budget approval will become the focus for governing boards. The expectation is that schools should meet the prescribed deadlines for submission, some schools may find this extremely challenging.

4. As set out above, some Early Years settings and childminders may have suffered a loss of income as a result of closures and reduced attendance. Whilst some support is currently available, financial pressure and potential closure will increase if attendance cannot be increased or settings are unable to access grants such as the Local Authority Discretionary Grant.

7. The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need)

1. **Free School Meals**

1. The delay in guidance to the issuing of Free School Meal vouchers meant schools taking varied approaches and placed pressure on schools to find a local approach at short notice in the face of parent demand. Some families were unable to access either vouchers or food during this period. While some families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) are currently eligible for free school meals for a temporary period, there was significant delay in this being confirmed and a number of NRPF families remain excluded, including undocumented children not receiving s. 17 or s. 4 support and those exceeding the income threshold of £7,400 p.a (equivalent of £616 per month, an insufficient amount to meet the essential needs of a family). The earnings threshold is the same as the threshold for families receiving universal credit, however unlike families subject to NRPF, families in receipt of universal credit have their earnings topped up by c. £18-24k p.a. To be eligible, NRPF families must therefore have an income that is less than half of that of families in receipt of universal credit.

2. The roll out of a National Voucher scheme was problematic, as schools were unable to access the portal, or applications were delayed. The range of shops where the vouchers can be used is a concern and we have written to the Secretary of State for Education urging him to work directly with retailers to widen the range of shops where vouchers can be spent, including at local food stores and more affordable supermarkets. Furthermore, schools have recognised that a combination of vouchers, food delivery and food collections is required; especially in light of single parent/carers not being able to easily leave home to use vouchers.

3. The delay in announcing provision of free school meals during the Easter Holidays led to many schools already being closed when the announcement was made and parents

becoming aware of the offer prior to Headteachers receiving confirmation of it. Furthermore, the late announcement reversing an earlier decision not to provide free school meals over the Spring half term led to confusion. We ask that announcements are consistent and give schools sufficient time to plan and respond to them.

4. **Recommendation 7: Free School Meal vouchers should be available at a greater range of shops, including local food stores and more affordable supermarkets**.

5. **Recommendation 8: There should be no perverse incentive to keep children at home rather than at school by continuing FSM vouchers only for children at home. FSM vouchers should be continued for all eligible, whether they are back in school or not, until the end of the summer term, and government should also provide funds to help tackle 'holiday hunger'.**

6. **Recommendation 9: FSM provision should be extended to all children living in poverty regardless of immigration status.**

7. **Vulnerable Children**

8. **Socio-economic -** Some children in need will experience shortage of food, overcrowding and lack of access to the basic requirements of a safe and secure home. They will be less likely to have access to the internet or devices required for home learning or for visits undertaken virtually until in person visits are fully reinstated. Young people not presently identified as 'children in need' will fall into this group due to the economic impacts of lockdown. The long term effects may impact on their physical and mental health.

9. **Wellbeing and Mental Health**

   1. The impact of COVID-19 and lockdown will impact children differently, often without any clear predictors as to why a given child may be more or less affected than another.

   2. Early data suggests COVID-19 cases and deaths are likely to have a disproportionate impact on people with protected characteristics. Given that approximately 30% of pupils on roll in Hackney schools are known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals and approximately 45% of the borough population are from ethnic minority communities, we anticipate that mental health will also suffer disproportionality in Hackney. This is particularly pertinent as ONS figures show age-standardised data for deaths per 100,000 population in Hackney are 3.5 times the average for England and Wales.

   3. There are a number of potential impacts on the most disadvantaged, particularly for young people who lose a member of their family, witness domestic abuse, experience hunger or are the focus of concern as to their emotional and physical needs being met. These may include PTSD as a result of anxiety about safety, dysregulation, lingering anxiety and / or low mood.

   4. Isolation from peers will disproportionately affect young people who lack resources to maintain online contact. Alternatively, young people vulnerable to exploitation through social media may be even more vulnerable, due to feelings of isolation and increased time spent on social media.

   5. Some children may find it difficult to settle back into the structure of school life, either because they have lacked structure during lockdown or because they are needed to support their family in caring roles or household duties.

10. **Educational Attainment**

    1. Inequality in access to resources is likely to open up existing gaps in attainment linked to wealth. Factors include:

- Lack of space to work due to more cramped housing or overcrowding
- Lack of access to IT equipment
- Parents less able to support learning if they have cramped living conditions, health needs and multiple children to care for.

2.   Teacher assessment on final grades creates greater risk of unconscious bias affecting children of African or Caribbean heritage, than the 'blind' marking normally used for public exams.

12.   **SEND**

2.   Hackney has continued to support approximately 2,400 children and young people with EHCPs and resource the settings they attend.

3.   There has been a rise in the request for statutory assessment both from settings and parents between February and May 2020, 138 requests were received (approximately 29% of all requests received in 2018). We anticipate that this number will continue to rise due to pressure on parents to manage their child's specific needs at home and schools supporting those parents in order to prepare for the future.

4.   We welcome the guidance issued on 30 April regarding legislative changes to the SEND legislation. This, however, stipulates that changes relating to provision of support and timeframes for EHC needs assessment came into force from 1st May 2020 and cannot be backdated.

5.   The implementation of lockdown on 20 March meant that, in the absence of any government guidance, local authorities had to react quickly to how EHCPs were assessed and implemented. Difficulties in professionals being able to complete face to face assessments and/or professionals contributing to assessments being deployed elsewhere to support the crisis have, therefore, contributed to delays beyond our control from 20 March.

> 6.   There are concerns that our Health partners / practitioners may be redeployed to support the NHS and that this may reduce their service to our SEND pupils. This will impact on our ability to complete EHC needs assessments within 20 weeks.

7.   <u>Recommendation 10</u>: **Legislative changes for EHC needs assessments and implementation of EHCPs are backdated to 20 March 2020 when lockdown was first implemented.**

8.   **Specific challenges to SEND pupils being taught at home.**

9.   Remote learning for children with SEND is particularly challenging. Specialist therapies cannot be delivered directly and there are difficulties for Speech and Language and Occupational therapists in using virtual platforms.

10.   Pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) are particularly vulnerable due to changes in their routine and the inability to socially interact with their peers outside the family unit. On schools reopening, these students require a structured return and may require part time education at the beginning.

11.   Children who suffer from anxiety and other mental health conditions, who may not be currently supported by CAMHS, may struggle to re-engage with learning in a setting and may require interventions from this service where waiting lists were already more than 18 months.

12.   The wider reopening also presents a challenge to SEND transport with social distancing requirements and an increase in referrals prompting an increase in demand. Students who have the capacity to learn to travel independently will need additional support to make the transition.

13.   **Recommendation 11: Fund additional support for the transition back to school in terms of therapeutic support, CAMHS and transport.**

8.   What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency

1. **PPE** - Supply of and guidance for schools regarding PPE has been a major concern throughout and continues to be so in planning for the proposed phased return of pupils from 1 June. National advice has been inconsistent and delayed - e.g., whilst advice for schools did not recommend the use of PPE, it is evident that in special schools and early years settings there is a level of personal care which requires PPE. Hackney adopted a pragmatic approach on the use of PPE in these settings. Furthermore, access to PPE supplies initially restricted frontline staff visiting vulnerable families. Greater contingency planning on a local and national level would have ensured access to PPE, supported by clear advice, to ensure a duty of care to staff and schools.

2. **Recommendation 12: PPE advice is updated to acknowledge the range of students being supported and to reflect that personal and intimate care is often required to meet pupil needs in all Early Years and school settings.**

3. It would be useful to have a suite of home learning activities that could be sourced rapidly that were aligned to the curriculum and year group (and in the case of vulnerable children equipment as well). This would enable a quick switch from classroom teaching to home schooling and would minimise duplication of work across the country as many schools and settings, academies, academy trusts and local authorities developed resources at the same time. It would also be useful to have school/home liaison guidelines that could be applied consistently across all schools and local authorities.

4. Clear and consistent messages from government as early as possible would have assisted in areas such as free school meals, critical worker definitions, use of PPE. Having a suite of policies ready to use would have brought clarity much sooner and will also help with any similar crises in the future

5. Once the acute phase of the response is over it will be an opportune time for local authorities to review business continuity plans, business impact assessment and for schools and settings to review their plans. Some of the primary contingency measures will be to ensure adequate staff availability for critical functions (and understanding what is a critical function); to ensure communication channels are well established between local authorities and schools, settings, staff and key partners (ensuring these are clear and understood); clear decision making processes to ensure a speedy response (through incident management team) and using established centralised decision making and escalation routes to coordinate Council-wide responses, including key health partners.

June 2020