Subject: The Impact of COVID-19 School Closures on Education Inequality in London

Report to: Education Panel

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat Date: 30 September 2020

This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

1.1 This report provides background information for the Education Panel meeting on the economic impact of COVID-19 school closures on education inequality in London.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Panel notes the report as background to its discussion with invited guests on the impact of COVID-19 school closures on education inequality in London.

2.2 That the Panel delegates authority to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.

3. Background

3.1 The Education Panel will undertake an investigation to understand the impact of the COVID-19 school closures on London’s children and young people. Emerging research makes it clear that not all young people will have been impacted equally: those from certain socio-economic and/or demographic groups will have been far more negatively impacted than others. Furthermore, it is likely that these impacts will have compounded pre-existing educational inequalities.

3.2 The investigation will seek to understand the effect of this emerging issue, and ask the Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare what actions are being taken to address this issue at a Mayoral level, and ask invited stakeholders what further action needs to be taken, at both a Mayoral and a national level.
4. Issues for Consideration

4.1 From 23 March 2020 until the beginning of the autumn term, nurseries, schools and colleges remained open only to a priority group of children and young people, children who have a parent who is a critical worker and vulnerable children.

Socio-economic impacts

4.2 With schools closed, access to the resources needed for online learning has been critical for children, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Children and young people from deprived backgrounds are less likely to have access to additional activities and support at home. Therefore, they are likely to rely more on any online provision provided by their schools. To access online learning, students need to have the necessary technology, including a computer or tablet, as well as an internet connection with adequate data allowances and a suitable place to study.

Analysis by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) charity has found that almost ten years of progress in narrowing the attainment gap in England between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates has probably been “wiped in a few months” due to the coronavirus pandemic. EEF’s analysis said its median estimate was that the attainment gap could widen by 36% but that “plausible estimates” indicated it could widen by between 11% and 75%.

Access to teachers, resources and the internet

4.4 Research by the Sutton Trust found that just over a third (34%) of parents with children aged 5-16 reported that their child does not have access to their own computer, laptop or tablet that they can use to access the internet on at home.

4.5 The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) found that four in ten pupils in England were not in regular contact with their teachers during the school closures. NFER also found that:

- Only one third of pupils at the most deprived schools are returning work to teachers;
- Poor pupils are twice as likely to have limited IT access;
- A third of pupils are not engaging with work at all;
- There is a ‘substantial deficit’ in curriculum coverage; and
- Parental engagement is ‘significantly lower’ in most deprived schools.

4.6 Research by Francis Green, a Professor at University College London Institute of Education found that:

- Children locked down at home in the UK spent an average of only 2.5 hours each day doing schoolwork;
- Most homework consisted of assignments, worksheets and watching videos. On average children were given two such pieces of homework a day; and

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1 Sutton Trust, Social mobility and COVID-19, April 2020
2 Green, Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty, 2020
3 Education Endowment Foundation, Impact of school closures on the attainment gap, June 2020
4 Sutton Trust, Pay as you go?, November 2018
5 National Foundation for Educational Research, Pupil engagement in remote learning, 16 June 2020
6 Green, Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty, 2020
• The extent of online lessons provision in state schools was minimal: 71% of state school children received no or less than one daily online lessons.

**Early years**

4.7 There is a risk that COVID-19 will widen the early years’ attainment gap further in both the short and the long term. In the short term, having providers temporarily closed is likely to have an impact on the poorest children who benefit from structure provision and are less likely to have the suitable home learning environment needed. The Sutton Trust argues that this could also have a long-term impact if providers do not receive enough support and are forced to close permanently, and provision is slow to recover once COVID-19 passes.

5. **Issues for Consideration**

5.1 Members will hold a public meeting with invited guests. The questions that will be asked will focus on:

- Understanding the impact of school closures; and
- Actions being taken to address the impact of school closures.

**Invited guests**

5.2 The following guests have been invited to attend the meeting:

- Joanne McCartney AM, Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare;
- Patrick Roach, NASUWT;
- Representative from the Sutton Trust; and
- Representative from the Education Endowment Foundation.

6. **Legal Implications**

6.1 The Panel has the power to do what is recommended in the report.

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7 Sutton Trust, Social mobility and COVID-19, April 2020
7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no direct financial implications to the GLA arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report:
None.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers: None
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