

Children's Neighbourhood Scotland – Early insights into the COVID-19 response

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[Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland](#) (CNS) is based in the University of Glasgow, working in partnership with the [Glasgow Centre for Population Health](#). In collaboration with [Policy Scotland](#) and the [Network for Social and Educational Equity](#) CNS is undertaking a [programme of research and intelligence gathering](#) in high poverty settings across Scotland that seeks to understand how local responses are working in the current rapidly changing context and provide insights that can support the next phase of COVID-19 action at both local and national levels. This document is the [part of a series](#) that shares regular insights emerging from the research.

Drawing out the lessons from the hubs: reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic

In response to COVID-19, and to slow the spread of the virus, Scottish Government declared all local authority early learning, childcare, and schools closed with effect from 20th March 2020, with the exception of critical provision which would be provided to vulnerable pupils, and children from key worker families. These "hubs" are strategically placed within each local authority. While Scottish Government announced the requirement of local authorities to offer this service, the design and delivery of the hubs was driven by individual localities resulting in a range of operating models. Some local authorities are working alongside private or third sector organisations, others foster closer collaboration between primary and secondary teachers, and some are delineating activities offered during typical school hours (run by teachers) and after school (run by CLD, librarians, active school and after school workers). This diversity in provision means that there is variation in the levels of access for children and young people from vulnerable families and from families of key workers. While there is variation in operating models, all hubs are open to pupils from primary to early secondary, with specialised provision for early years, and pupils with additional support needs, also in place.

Lessons learned from the hub model

The hubs provide childcare with a focus on the children of front-line workers, and vulnerable children. Interviewees reflected on a number of themes relevant to the planning that is well underway for schools to return in August 11th.

- **Speed of development:** Interviewees all commented that the speed with which the hubs were established and new ways of working set-up under highly unusual circumstances should be celebrated with the pandemic being described as creating a "perfect storm" in bringing about rapid change. The learning from the set-up of the hubs offers a valuable opportunity to review change processes and the associated bureaucracy.
- **Creation of new collaborative ways of working:** the successful operation of the hubs has in large part relied on both new and strengthened working relationships across different sectors and organisations

in the public and third sector. Interviewees commented that COVID-19 had “forced the agenda” of joined up working in their local authority and challenged siloed ways of working. Consideration should be given to how these new ways of working can be sustained and built on as part of the planning for schools to return in August. This planning should also take account of the very significant body of intelligence held by local organisations who have been delivering support to children and their families over the lockdown period.

- **Implications for learning:** The focus of the hubs on childcare rather than learning has led to the design of creative solutions to engage the children and young people who attend. Interviewees stated that they had seen higher levels of engagement than expected from some children and young people. It is worth reviewing the levels of engagement and associated experiences and considering their potential to support learning when schools return. This may include, for example, exploring opportunities for teachers to work across school and sector boundaries more consistently.
- **Looking outwards:** The activity in hubs has gone beyond the provision of childcare. Examples include designing PPE for NHS workers and creating community art for the local hospital. There is an opportunity to consider the design of the curriculum and where these new or different learning opportunities might be incorporated or replace those that may now be less relevant – whether as part of a face to face or a blended learning offer.

Looking ahead to August

National guidance cannot provide all the answers and there is a need for local, context specific responses in order to meet the needs of all learners, particularly those who are most vulnerable. However, the challenges of planning for a highly uncertain future are clear and flexibility and space to innovate are required across the system if change is to be supported. Practical support for teachers from those working at a national level should be readily available for schools to use as they move towards a blended learning model. This should build on the very significant work that schools and local authorities have already done over the lockdown period. Interviewees felt that this support could be enhanced through stronger collaboration and co-construction.

Those interviewed agreed that the learning from the set-up and running of the hubs offered an opportunity for change. The extent to which this can be capitalised on is dependent on the capacity across the system to respond to and develop the new ways of working that have grown from the hubs. There is a need to build on existing and new partnerships and collaborations across the system, including through the Regional Improvement Collaboratives, across services and sectors within local authorities and between and beyond schools and other partners.

Christopher Chapman, Alison Drever, Kevin Lowden and Joanne Neary

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For comments, feedback and further information please contact Professor Christopher Chapman chris.chapman@glasgow.ac.uk