Insight

Updates, guidance and resources for your whole leadership team

Child Protection in Education 2021
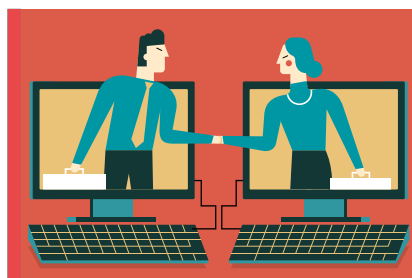
Stay up to date with the latest safeguarding guidance and implement a robust safeguarding culture and procedures

ONE DAY NATIONAL CONFERENCE
28 SEPTEMBER 2021 - LONDON | 30 SEPTEMBER 2021 - MANCHESTER

BENEFITS OF ATTENDING:

STATUTORY UPDATE: discuss the most recent guidance in KCSIE 2021 with safeguarding lawyers and consultants.

MULTI-AGENCY WORKING: evaluate your use of language and cross-agency working to escalate referrals and ensure action.

RECOGNISE EXPLOITATION: identify young people at risk and develop strategies to support.

CONSISTENCY AND CULTURE: ensure a robust culture, procedures and communication across your school or trust.

EXPERT SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Ann Marie Christian
International Safeguarding Consultant and Trainer

Dai Durbridge
Partner, Browne Jacobson LLP

Joanna Nicolas
Safeguarding Consultant and Trainer

Craig Pinkney
Founder and CEO of Solve: The Centre for Youth Violence Conflict

Ella Savell-Boss
Safeguarding Trainer and Consultant

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What's in your Optimus Education Insight magazine this month?

OPTIMUS EDUCATION

In-House Training Library

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All courses, all staff — one price	Track your progress	Flexible learning
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- Accelerate Progress with Metacognition
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- Appraisals and Capability
- Assessment without Levels
- Careers-related Learning in Primary Schools
- Coaching for Change
- CPD Leadership: Essentials
- CPD Leadership: Strategy
- Developmental Lesson Observation
- Differentiation for Catch-up
- Differentiation in Practice
- EAL for Classroom Teachers
- Early Years SEN
- Effective Careers Education in Secondary Schools
- Effective Lesson Planning
- Effective Self-Care
- Effective Use of Pupil Voice
- EYFS Bite-size Training
- From Teacher to Leader: Middle Leadership Essentials
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- GDPR in a Nutshell
- Health and Safety in Schools
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- Managing Self-Harm
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- Outstanding Governance
- Positive Relationships
- Preventing and Tackling Cyberbullying
- Preventing Extremism and Radicalisation
- Preventing Prejudice-Based Bullying
- Questioning for Challenge
- Reducing Stress and Challenging Behaviour through Low Arousal
- Safeguarding Mental Health
- Safeguarding Whole-School Programme
- SEND Inclusive Teaching Programme
- Sexual Exploitation and Grooming
- Staff Wellbeing
- Tackling Low-Level Disruption
- Tackling Staff Underperformance
- Teacher Development Programme
- Teaching Assistants: Successful Classroom Partnerships
- Understanding Stress and How to Manage It

Have a go at our Staff Wellbeing course for free today

Welcome to Optimus Education Insight

Dear Reader

'There is a heightened respect for the teaching profession, and the realisation that it's not an easy, nine-to-three job!' Speaking to Andy Taylor, adviser on the Leading Parent Partnership Award, I was heartened to hear about the genuine gratitude many parents are expressing towards school staff. Surely that is a pandemic silver lining? Andy is encouraging schools to think carefully about the innovations they want to retain, and what to set aside (turn to page 10).

Remote recruitment may have been forced on UK schools by the Covid-19 situation, but I suspect it's here to stay in some shape or form. HR lawyer Gill Martindale shares valuable advice around safe recruitment and provides suggestions for remote interview tasks on page 18.

An increased sense of anxiety has been a common side effect of the pandemic. On page 32, Nicola Harvey unpicks some of the forms anxiety takes and how symptoms might manifest in children and young people.

While physical activity and getting outdoors can be an antidote to stress, many children have been much less active over the past year. Bryn Llewellyn and Ian Holmes are on a mission to get pupils moving and have lots of ideas for incorporating action into classroom learning. Join the movement on page 24!

Liz Worthen
Head of Content
Optimus Education

Movement and gratitude

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If someone has shared this magazine with you but you don't currently have an Optimus membership, we'd love to hear from you. Call us on 020 8315 1506 and you can speak to one of our account managers about membership options and take a demo of the website.

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We work with a wide range of practitioners to bring members the most relevant, useful and up-to-date content. If you would like to contribute by writing for us or presenting at a conference, please get in touch via customer.services@optimus-education.com

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ℹ **Remember to visit the website at my.optimus-education.com**

Conference calendar

Optimus Education's conferences and training days are designed to provide practical strategies and ideas to take away and implement back at school. Here's what we have coming up in your focus area

MISSED ONE OF THE CONFERENCES?
Premium Plus members can catch up via recordings of digital sessions. Speak to your account manager for details

JUNE

Leading Safeguarding
10 JUNE, 17 JUNE, 24 JUNE, DIGITAL
Ensure leading safeguarding provision throughout your school.
🔲 SEN and Safeguarding

HR and Employment Law in Education
16 JUNE & 23 JUNE, DIGITAL
Benefit from a comprehensive legal update to ensure robust HR processes.
🔲 School Business Management

SEPTEMBER

DPO Continuous Development Programme Year 1
11 DIGITAL SESSIONS BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2021 AND MAY 2022, SMALL GROUP TRAINING
Keep up-to-date, stay compliant, and have your questions answered throughout the academic year with this training course and network of DPOs.
🔲 Leadership and Governance

Child Protection in Education
28 SEPTEMBER, LONDON
30 SEPTEMBER, MANCHESTER
6 OCTOBER & 13 OCTOBER, DIGITAL
Stay up to date with the latest safeguarding guidance and implement a robust safeguarding culture and procedures across your school by attending the 17th annual *Child Protection in Education* conference.
🔲 SEN and Safeguarding

OCTOBER

DPO Continuous Development Programme Year 2
12 DIGITAL SESSIONS BETWEEN OCTOBER 2021 AND MARCH 2022, SMALL GROUP TRAINING
Build on your learning from Year 1 to focus in greater depth on the key issues, build your confidence, reduce resource need, and limit or remove the necessity for external legal spend.
🔲 Leadership and Governance

Delivering Statutory RSE
7 OCTOBER, LONDON
DATES TBC, DIGITAL
Develop your RSE culture and curriculum to equip pupils to recognise and build healthy relationships and emotional wellbeing.
🔲 Teaching and Learning

NOVEMBER

MATs Summit
10 NOVEMBER, 11 NOVEMBER & 12 NOVEMBER, LONDON
Now in its sixth year, the MATs Summit 2021 is the flagship summit for multi-academy trusts of all sizes. Provoke thought and enable networking with MATs nationwide, sharing best practice to empower your executive office to move as one.
🔲 Leadership and Governance

ℹ️ For a full list of our upcoming conferences and training days, please visit **my.optimus-education.com/conferences** For further information or booking queries, please call the conference team on 0755 748 7910.

DPO Foundation Training
16 NOVEMBER, 18 NOVEMBER, 23 NOVEMBER & 29 NOVEMBER, DIGITAL TRAINING
Ensure you are equipped and able to evidence training for your GDPR compliance role with this comprehensive foundation level training.
🔲 Leadership and Governance

DPO Training Update
17 NOVEMBER, 22 NOVEMBER, 24 NOVEMBER & 30 NOVEMBER, DIGITAL TRAINING
Ensure you are up to date, staying compliant and able to evidence training for your GDPR compliance role with this interactive course to update your knowledge.
🔲 Leadership and Governance

Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools
23 NOVEMBER, MANCHESTER
25 NOVEMBER, LONDON
DATES TBC, DIGITAL
Secure a strong mental health and wellbeing culture for your staff and students.
🔲 SEN and Safeguarding

What's in this month's Leadership and Governance section?

The pandemic might be tailing off but its effects will remain. After extended periods away from school, teaching and support staff alike may be finding their return difficult. Mike Lamb explains how to provide a safe, supportive, open and positive working environment. Read about ways of adapting to the 'new normal' on page 8.

How can you let prospective parents and pupils know that your school is the right choice when they can't easily visit? Communication experts Karen Dempster and Justin Robbins offer tips on virtual marketing, whether that's through word-of-mouth, online meetings or the novelty of a postcard landing on the doormat.

Thinking longer term, Andy Taylor shares his thoughts on how the pandemic has raised the bar on what can be achieved through a genuine partnership with parents. Find out more on page 10.

Finally, if you need to write or review a school policy but don't know where to start, check out page 14 for a handy guide to the process.

Top leadership and governance blogs

Cop26: 7 things schools can do
oego.co/climate_7

Pandemic permissions
oego.co/pandemic_permissions

From fear to opportunity and growth
oego.co/collective_power

See more at blog.optimus-education.com

Contributors in this issue

Andy Taylor has been a headteacher of two primary schools and is now an awards adviser for Optimus Education, as well as continuing to work with school leadership teams – and climbing mountains.

Justin Robbins has been delivering communication professionally since 2001 and is an expert in school communication. He is also a school governor and co-founded Fit2communicate. 🐦@Fit2Communicate

Karen Dempster is passionate about good communication. A co-founder of Fit2Communicate, she has led change, communication and marketing initiatives for a range of settings. 🐦@Fit2Communicate

Mike Lamb is director of staff and pupil wellbeing at Hurstpierpoint College. A previous head of year and housemaster, Mike has developed and designed whole-school wellbeing programmes. 🐦@mrmikelamb

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Maintaining the wellbeing of returning staff

The 'new normal' could mean staff returning to school after long absences. **MIKE LAMB** outlines seven ways of helping them transition smoothly back into the school community

As pupils return to the classroom across the UK, the expectation is that teachers and support staff will be returning as well. Many staff have never been away, from teachers and their colleagues providing online learning to the many staff ensuring teaching and care for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. But other staff may have been furloughed or confined to their homes for other reasons, including being vulnerable themselves. Everyone's experiences throughout lockdown has been different – some have even been positive, but many people have found it challenging.

1. Prioritise communication
It is important for school management teams to acknowledge that it has been difficult and that staff, as well as pupils, must be supported as they transition back into their workplace. Communication from school leaders has never been more important, and this includes maintaining communication with staff, despite the acute pressures to maintain effective communication with parents and pupils. If in-person gatherings are being avoided, and 'email overload' is an issue, using video and other media may make communications feel more personal.

2. Say thank you
Saying thanks to staff is also key. Whether they have thrown themselves into online teaching or been furloughed, all have contributed in their own way. This thanks should be genuine, targeted and delivered personally where possible, but small gifts

'Staff must feel empowered to speak up if they are struggling'

sent to staff members at home or videos of the community thanking each other are other tangible ways to exemplify this.

3. Listen
Ensure staff are welcomed back as part of the community, whether they are teachers, cleaners, kitchen staff or receptionists. Staff should feel listened to and their feedback heard. Regular SMT drop-ins, genuine open-door policies, visible middle leaders and making time for staff voices, such as wellbeing surveys, all help to develop a culture of listening and collegiality.

4. Connect
It is not only pupils who have missed social interaction. Most school staff report missing the 'water cooler moments' and the daily uplifts of speaking and laughing with their colleagues. Positive and regular interaction helps boosts everyone's mood and helps staff feel more connected. Social events that encourage mixing between individuals and groups help everyone to once again bond as a team. Examples of activities could include things like an online quiz, if the weather is good enough, or an outdoor picnic, depending on your local context, situation and restrictions.

5. Make them feel safe
It is obviously crucial to develop effective systems that allow staff to feel, and be, safe in their roles. For example, developing extensive facilities for testing pupils and staff, and encouraging appropriate use of PPE, sanitary practices and ventilation will help people feel better able to do their jobs.

Explain the rationale behind important procedures and ensure everyone is clear about their responsibilities. Developing an 'all in this together' attitude will lead to a desire to contribute to keeping everybody safe and in school.

Although there should be high expectations of staff in all schools, they should feel that they can get things wrong, in the same way that we encourage pupils to make mistakes and learn from them. Mental health conversations are now much more common and open in the school environment, but staff must feel empowered to speak up if they are struggling. A culture where positive mental health is celebrated and problems are openly discussed encourages staff to step forward when they need help.

6. Make support accessible
Staff not only need to feel listened to but also that they can access support if they need it. Senior and middle leaders who are well trained or experienced in managing staff, alongside clear line management models, will allow this to happen effectively. These managers should carefully oversee staff workloads to ensure too much is not being asked of individuals.

'Staff should feel listened to and their feedback heard'

School staff report missing the daily uplifts of speaking and laughing with their colleagues

Buddies, mentors and coaches within the community may also provide this support, as will groups set up to share best practice and problem solve. Those who need an extra level of support could be offered somebody to talk to, such as a counsellor or someone who can direct staff towards more professional or specialist help. Education Support is a charity dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of the entire education workforce, which offers a 24-hour helpline and an employees' assistance programme.

7. Encourage self-care
Help staff to identify when they are finding work hard and to know what they need to do about it. Encourage them to take part in physical activity, whether remotely (for example, in online sessions, using apps such as Strava or by organising online events) or in real life (for example, by joining walking, running or cycling

groups). This promotes other positive coping strategies and sends the right message to everyone. It is even better, of course, when senior management models these activities, as it gives permission for others to do the same, as and when time and circumstances allow. Linking wellbeing to CPD goals may also be a useful way to encourage staff to better look after themselves.

So, through effective listening and communication and by providing a safe, supportive, open and positive working environment to return to, we all give ourselves the best chance of success while transitioning back to our 'new normal'.

Good luck! ◼

More useful resources

How to improve self-care
Kelly Hannaghan shares her ideas on teaching self-care techniques to increase productivity and emotional harmony.
blog.optimus-education.com/how-improve-self-care

Managing anxiety in challenging times
Elizabeth Holmes looks at what to do about anxiety and stress, and where to go for help.
blog.optimus-education.com/managing-anxiety-challenging-times

Wellbeing podcast: teacher mental health
This episode explores the causes of poor teacher mental health, and what can be done to improve staff wellbeing.
blog.optimus-education.com/wellbeing-podcast-teacher-mental-health

Staff wellbeing
A self-study training course providing practical solutions and suggestions for promoting staff wellbeing.
my.optimus-education.com/training/staff-wellbeing

Video: Managing the mental health of all during challenging times
David Beeney shares ways to improve mental health and resilience, stay connected with teams and remain productive and purposeful.
my.optimus-education.com/video-managing-mental-health-all-during-challenging-time

Promote wellbeing across your school

Our *Wellbeing Award for Schools* helps promote emotional wellbeing and mental health across your school. Find out more at: **www.awardplace.co.uk/award/was**

Raising the bar on parental engagement

Award adviser **ANDY TAYLOR** spoke to Liz Worthen about how the pandemic has put parental partnerships at the forefront of schooling and removed barriers to participation

Throughout the last year I have continued to work with schools undertaking the *Leading Parent Partnership Award* (LPPA). A lot of my school visits have become virtual ones (or even conducted from my camper van on one memorable occasion!), but they've still given me the opportunity to speak directly with parents about their experience of school.

The overriding thing that's emerged for me is how parental partnerships have been strengthened because of lockdown. Parental engagement has had to become a priority – and of course it was for many schools anyway – but everyone has recognised its importance.

Communication
I've seen schools become much more adept at using a variety of communication methods. Many were doing this well already, but the pandemic and lockdowns have given that extra push. Headteachers are using blogs, or even vlogs, to keep in touch with parents, and there's been an increase in usage of social media. Schools are sharing successes in different ways, such as a virtual 'star of the week' celebrations, which is great for working parents who previously may have been unable to attend in person to see their child receive an award.

Regular wellbeing calls or check-ins with families have become common practice, often with a particular focus on vulnerable families. Schools are telling me that they want to keep the calls going post-lockdown – though maybe not so frequently – because they recognise that it's enabled the development of a very bespoke relationship with different families.

The school website has become a central point of information for parents. I encourage schools to seek feedback from parents: is your website easy to access and navigate? Are your messages clear and easy to understand?

Online learning
Some families struggled with online learning. Schools have gone over and above not only in supporting with the technical side of things, which has been greatly valued by parents, but also in upskilling parents so that they can support the children's learning (which is a key objective in the LPPA). As a result, parents have a much deeper understanding of the curriculum now. Schools have

'There is a heightened respect for the teaching profession'

made more use of instructional videos on their website, showing things like how to support with reading or how to teach phonics. Curriculum areas have been developed with suggestions around how pupils can be helped at home and website recommendations.

Family learning has strengthened, with lots of schools setting up fun challenges for families, such as a regular bake off, which has also been an opportunity to celebrate recipes from different cultures.

As online learning is rolled out, what parents have also been grateful for is that schools are reacting to their feedback. The 'we asked, you said, we did' approach is really valued.

Some schools have done a combination of live and pre-recorded online lessons. While this is a challenge (and probably not sustainable) in terms of teacher workload, it's beneficial for parents to be able to go over the lessons with their child at a different time of day. The pre-recorded lessons give a reference point, as well as modelling classroom strategies in practice so parents can keep things consistent. They're also helpful for things like pronouncing sounds with the letters in phonics, or seeing equipment being used for teaching in maths.

Parent consultations
Some schools have seen a dramatic uptake in attendance at parents' evening or for parental consultations because these are now being done online. It means that parents or carers don't have to leave the house and, for secondary schools, it means that parents don't experience lengthy waits between appointments with different teachers. They can just log back in at the appropriate time.

Of course, there are still parents who can't or won't engage, but it has removed some of the barriers, and both parents and staff have found benefits (I spoke to one teacher who has now been able to attend her own child's parents' evening for the first time!).

Will this way of working continue post pandemic? What I've suggested to a lot of the schools I've worked with is that they take
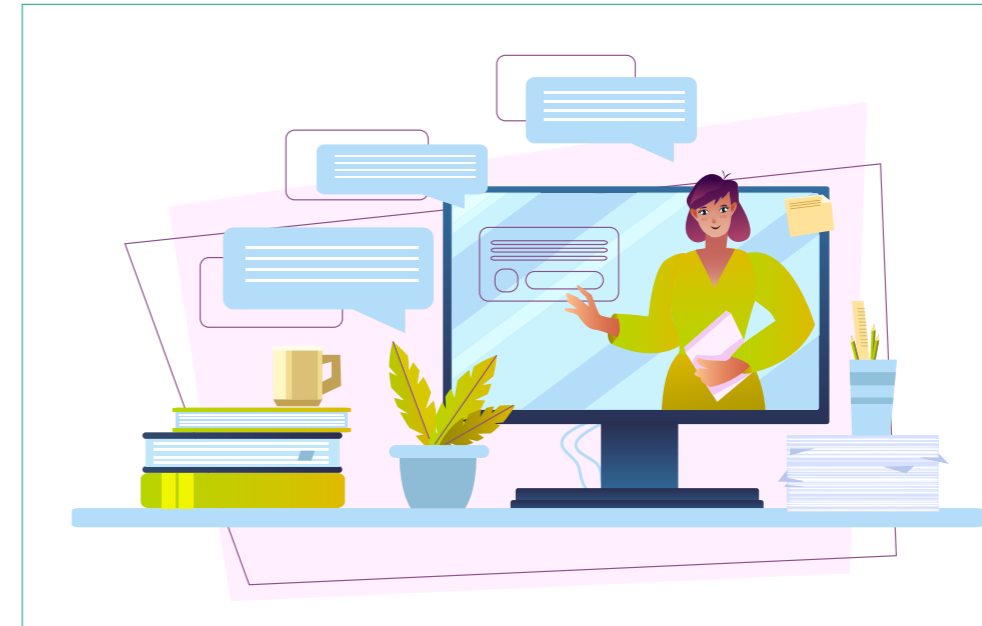
Pre-recorded lessons have provided a valuable reference point for parents

time now to reflect on the changes they've made and consider what's worth keeping, and what's not? As far as parents' evening are concerned, maybe it will be a mixture of both; face-to-face is still valued.

Virtual tours and induction events are also now well established. For parents who can't attend physically, due to work commitments for example, it means there's still a chance to take the tour and meet various members of staff. Again, I would anticipate schools returning to the face-to-face induction once that's possible, but keeping the online option available too.

A deeper respect
Many of the parents I've spoken to are very grateful for the support schools have given them. There is a heightened respect for the teaching profession, and the realisation that it's not an easy, nine-to-three job! I was really pleased to see the upsurge of support for schools when Gavin Williamson suggested that parents should complain to Ofsted if they weren't happy with the level of online learning being provided.

Whatever getting back to normal might mean, I don't think schools will be going back on the inroads they've made in terms of parental engagement. What I see now is a much more consistent approach, and a true partnership between home and school.

It's too soon to see the impact of this on pupil achievement. There are worries about learning gaps to consider, and the extent of the trauma experienced by some children and young people hasn't been revealed yet. Though they are few and far between, sadly there are some children who have barely accessed any learning during lockdown, despite

But what I think the pandemic has done is to raise the bar on what can be achieved through a genuine partnership with parents. Expectations are higher now.

Relationships have been strengthened and a real care and understanding developed. There's been a positive in terms of removing stigma around mental health. Parents have felt able to call up when they're at crisis point and need help. Schools have been running wellbeing workshops for parents and the message that 'it's ok to not be ok' is now out there.

Overall, it's been a shared experience that people won't forget. ■

Useful reading and resources

Engaging parents in their child's learning
What can you do to ensure that all families are able to engage with the school in a positive, constructive way? Use these tips to get parents and carers actively involved.
my.optimus-education.com/engaging-parents-their-childs-learning

Mental health and wellbeing: template letter for parents
Parents play a vital role in supporting what you do to improve the mental health and wellbeing of students. Use our template letter to explain your initiatives and keep parents informed.
my.optimus-education.com/mental-health-and-wellbeing-template-letter-parents

Parent/carer questionnaire
Sending an annual questionnaire to parents and carers helps track progress and engage parents in supporting their child's development. Download and adapt this example template.
my.optimus-education.com/parentcarer-questionnaire

Supporting parents in difficult circumstances
Despite parents being eager to support their child's learning, challenging circumstances can act as barriers to engagement. How can schools help parents integrate into school life?
my.optimus-education.com/supporting-parents-difficult-circumstances

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Develop positive relationships with parents

The *Leading Parent Partnership Award* supports schools to deliver outstanding engagement with all groups of parents, with a focus on aspects such as communication, transition, participation and induction. Find out more at **www.awardplace.co.uk/award/lppa**

Attracting new parents and pupils in a virtual world

Attracting prospective parents and pupils is a challenge for schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. **KAREN DEMPSTER** and **JUSTIN ROBBINS** provide their top tips for virtual communication

Ongoing travel restrictions and a common fear of mixing in larger groups drive the need for cost-effective and easy ways to engage virtually. You still need to communicate a clear message and build a belief that your school is the right match for a pupil by focusing on actions that create trust with pupils and their parents or carers.

Traditional school marketing methods, such as brochures and other paid advertising, don't resonate as well with many parents anymore. Use this opportunity to take a fresh look at your communication beyond pure marketing, to find creative approaches that ensure your school stands out from the crowd for the right reasons. Trust is critical to any relationship and particularly when choosing a school. Parents need to know their children will be safe and have the best chance of happiness and success.

Here are three ways to build trust with parents and carers by communicating in ways that will attract the best match pupils to your school.

1. Take an inside-out approach to marketing

How do you feel when you are truly listened to? You probably feel valued and appreciated; and are more likely to trust those listening to you. But listening is often the biggest gap in traditional school marketing approaches. You can learn and achieve so much when you listen to the current school community, including parents, pupils and your school team. Ask current parents and pupils:

- What made them send their children

'You can learn and achieve so much when you listen to the current school community'

to your school? Or, for pupils, why did they want to come to your school?
- Have things turned out as they thought they would – has your school lived up to expectations?
- If so, how and, if not, why and what can you do about this?

Use their answers to identify what is going well and what is not. For example, you will find out whether parents' perception of your school is the same as that of your school leadership team. This will enable you to define a clear message about what your school stands for – not simply your motto or vision – but from the perspective of parents and pupils.

Then listen to your school team. Find out if their experience as an employee matches your school's promise.

Value word of mouth

In these times of 'influencer marketing', current parents, pupils and school team members can be powerful marketing channels. If they support your school and talk positively about it to others, you will achieve a lot more positive publicity than through traditional paid advertising.

Peer-to-peer attitudes within your school community have the power to

attract potential pupils and even turn around negative perceptions, simply because people are influenced by those around them who have no underlying marketing agenda.

2. Make prospective parents and pupils feel valued

Prospective parents need to know that you care about their child and appreciate them for their uniqueness and potential. However, schools have many prospective pupils and in reality it can be challenging to demonstrate this understanding of each prospective (and current) pupil.

From our research, we found that many parents recall negative words when they think back to their own school experience. They will, therefore, approach your school with a filter built through their own experience, which will influence how they feel. Traditional open days that focus on pushing information at groups of parents, rather than listening to and learning about their children, won't address this barrier.

Ideas for direct communication

Offer to have short, one-to-one meetings, online if necessary, with prospective parents and pupils who would like to do so. Rather than pushing information at the parents and child, these should focus on you learning about the potential pupil:

Offer to have short, one-to-one meetings with prospective parents and pupils who would like to do so

for example, what they love and what they want to achieve during their time at your school. Make sure your school staff have a clear understanding of how to run these sessions to ensure the child and parents feel valued. This would include discussion guidelines and tips for understanding how to communicate effectively with different types of people.

Send a well written, empathetic message from the headteacher that includes their photo, introducing themselves. Ideally this would be accompanied by a short video message, between 60 and 120 seconds long, linked to the school website.

You can extend this to include friendly and personable videos featuring staff members and current pupils and parents. Ensure these are supportive and talk directly to prospective parents and pupils so they hear directly from those who know about the school first-hand.

Simple handwritten postcards (or something printed or electronic that looks customised) addressed to prospective pupils are a great personal way to follow up on mass communications. For example, follow up a virtual open day with

a postcard that invites them to share their thoughts. Children don't receive much physical post these days so a postcard can be exciting for them!

Ensure parents always have school contact details in case they have questions or concerns.

3. Do what you say you'll do

The positive messages shared about your school create expectations that need to be fulfilled to build trust and your school's reputation. These expectations are like making a promise, whether this is implicit (what people have understood), or explicit (what you have directly promised to prospective parents and pupils).

For example, you may say: 'We bring out the best and uniqueness in every child'. That's a promise to the ears of a prospective parent. They will be looking for evidence to back this up, both during the period when they are choosing a school and during the time their child is at your school.

Deliver on your promise

Firstly, be clear about the promise you

are making to those in your school community. Do this through talking with current and prospective parents and pupils. Identify parents who did not choose your school and find out why. This valuable information will enable you to shape the messages you share in your school community (as your most powerful marketing channel), reinforcing what your school stands for and why it is different to other schools. Before you share this promise, ask yourself:

- What do we do as a school to deliver on this promise right now?
- What could we do more of, or do differently, to deliver on the promise?
- Is there anything that stands in the way of delivering this promise?

Acting on your promise

Identify actions to ensure your school delivers on this promise every day, not just to prospective parents and pupils but also to those who are currently at your school. Importantly, when things do go wrong and you don't deliver, be transparent and honest. When you have built up a 'bank of trust' with parents, they are likely to forgive and even support you if you take timely action and demonstrate you are putting their children first.

In summary, this is an incredibly demanding time for schools to give prospective parents and pupils a sense of the intangible elements that make their school special. We believe that, by focusing on actions that build trust and create school community advocates, you can achieve better outcome than through traditional, costly marketing techniques.

Find more ideas, templates and training, including a framework for communicating with empathy and impact as a school leader, at www.fit2communicate.com. ∎

ⓘ **Download a data protection model policy from my.optimus-education.com/data-protection-model-policy.**

Keeping track of your policies

LIZ WORTHEN provides an update on some of the compliance tools available to members

Policy reviews and updates haven't been top priority in many schools this year – the administrative demands Covid-19 has placed on schools have just proven too much. If you're looking at a bumper review session this summer, don't worry: help is at hand. Our updated policy and statutory document tracker is an easily adaptable tool, with versions available for standalone schools and for MATs. Download the spreadsheet and edit as

appropriate for your setting.

Over the summer, our legal partners at Browne Jacobson will be completing their regular review of our statutory model policies (visit **oego.co/modelpolicy** to see the full suite of model policy templates). Designed to help you save time, these templates can be customised to meet the specific needs of your setting, help ensure that you are prepared for an inspection and clearly demonstrate your

compliance with statutory requirements.

This year has also seen changes in the statutory requirements for school websites. Download checklists for maintained schools and academies from **my.optimus-education.com/schools-and-academies-website-checklists**. Remember that for now at least, schools are required to publish information about their remote education provision on their websites. ■

How to write a school policy: nine top tips

School policies and procedures demonstrate your compliance with statutory requirements but how do you start to write one? These nine tips will help guide you in creating and reviewing a policy.

1. Correct content

Cover what needs to be covered in accordance with legal guidance and Ofsted requirements. Include a rationale or purpose statement at the beginning explaining why the policy is being written and referring to the appropriate guidance or legalities.

2. Be accurate and succinct

Clarity and brevity are your friends here: policies should be clear and easy to understand. They'll be read by a range of audiences, including staff, governors and parents, so some terms may need to be defined to clarify meaning.

3. Size is not important

Bigger isn't always better! it's the quality of your policy that counts, not the number of pages it takes up so keep your document focused.

4. Get the flow right

This means having the right sections of your policy in the right order. Your policies should follow a standard format to ensure consistency between them all.

5. Regular review

A policy is a working document which is open to amendments. Implement a review and evaluation cycle for your policies to ensure they remain up-to-date.

6. Disseminate to all staff

Staff should know which policies are available, where to find them, who to go to if they have questions about the content and when new policies have been created or changes made to existing ones.

7. Train staff

Staff are your most valuable asset, so make sure they receive regular training in regards to school policies and procedures. They will be implementing the processes set out in a policy and there will need to be consistency in how they go about doing this.

8. Critically assess

If you don't find a policy document an easy read, chances are your staff won't either. Make your policies digestible with clear headings and easily editable when needed.

9. Respond to a safeguarding incident

If a safeguarding issue has occurred, it's time for a review (which should be recorded). Carry out a procedural review and ask the following questions.

• Did the policies work?

• Could they have worked better?

• What changes do we need to make?

• Do we need to engage the LSCB or other agencies?

With thanks to Lisa Griffin and our experts at Browne Jacobson LLP.

ℹ️ **Download the policy tracker from my.optimus-education.com/policy-and-statutory-document-tracker**

What's in this month's School Business Management section?

School business leaders have faced many new challenges over the past 18 months, and have had to look at situations from a fresh angle and make difficult decisions. Recruitment is one area that has had to be done differently when it's not been possible to meet candidates in person. School HR consultant Gill Martindale outlines how to ensure the recruitment process remains safe and robust, on page 18.

Financial compliance is another topic that can seem intimidating. Luckily, Justine Berkeley's recent workshop provided MATs with a reassuringly robust framework for managing financial resources to the required standards. Read more about it overleaf.

Both recruitment and financial management require high levels of integrity. Nickii Messer shares her thoughts on how we can all develop our ethical leadership practice to be the leader your school needs you too be.

On a related note, Gill O'Donnell reminds us that workplace risk assessment should never just be a box-ticking exercise. Use the extract from her health and safety training course on page 22 to inform your own practice.

Top school business management blogs

Pause and prioritise the basics: lockdown, pandemic and resilience oego.co/resilience_basics

Managing anxiety in challenging times oego.co/anxiety_strategies

Six styles of leadership oego.co/styles-of-leadership

See more at blog.optimus-education.com

Contributors in this issue

Gill Martindale, a senior HR consultant at Browne Jacobson LLP, specialises in supporting senior leaders in schools, academies and MATs with all employee relations issues. She is also a director of a growing north-west based MAT.

Gill O'Donnell is a health and safety consultant. She aims to demystify health and safety issues by making the theory accessible and finding practical solutions to everyday safety problems.

Justine Berkeley is a chartered accountant, and managing director of SBM Services Ltd. She recently received an award for outstanding contributions to the professionalisation of school business leadership. 🐦**@sbmservices**

Nickii Messer was a school business manager for many years in three school phases. She now works as a consultant and is Anglia Ruskin's operational lead for their SBM programmes. 🐦**@NickiiMesser**

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CONFERENCE REPORT

Financial reporting, strategy and compliance for academies

Content lead Julia Sandford-Cooke reports back from **JUSTINE BERKELEY'S** financial masterclass for academies, offering straightforward advice on completing the school resource management self-assessment tool (SRMSA)

Whatever the size of your academy trust, financial compliance can be intimidating. Even if you're sure you're meeting the increasingly strict Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) criteria, how can you provide the necessary evidence to prove it?

Knowing where to begin is often the biggest hurdle. Justine reassured us that it does become easier once you know what you've got to do, and you have the support to do it. The workshop was intended to provide that confidence – not only by clarifying what needs to be done but also by explaining how to do it in practical terms.

Demonstrating financial stability
A key message is that trusts' internal scrutiny and risk management processes are critical to ensure their control frameworks are robust and that they are meeting regulations. Trusts must demonstrate that they are financially sustainable now and in the future. Justine reminded us that auditors will often say, 'If it's not written down, it didn't happen.' Therefore, a clear documented audit trail to demonstrate your financial compliance is essential.

The session focused on the school resource management self-assessment tool (SRMSA). While it is compulsory to complete, it can also be regarded as a useful tool for helping to assure governing bodies and boards that they are meeting the right standards to achieve a good level of financial health and resource management. It can be used to identify

areas for change and to ensure resources are used to achieve the best educational outcomes for pupils.

Such a wide remit means that completing the SRMSA is not just the responsibility of the chief financial officer. The whole team should be involved, including the trust board, senior leaders and the clerk/compliance officer. Working together makes financial transparency much easier for everyone.

Governance
Do all key personnel know the regulatory framework?
The biggest area of the SMRSA has also seen the most changes. Justine emphasised that trustees need to understand their role in ensuring compliance with both company and charity law – that is, meeting the requirements of two different groups of external stakeholders. To demonstrate this, trustees could sign a declaration that they understand their role, and that they have read the documents they have to be familiar with, and know where to find them in the future.

Do the board have the skills to fulfil their roles?
Boards must annually assess their composition in terms of skills, effective leadership and impact, and the findings must be reported in the annual accounts. Ideally every board member should complete a skills analysis self-assessment each year, not only to identify focus areas for their own continuing professional development (CPD) but also to identify skills gaps for the whole board. A

development plan should include target dates for both individuals and the board; ensure any CPD is logged.

Do the clerk, accounting officer and CFO have the required skills?
The clerk is also the company secretary and/or the compliance officer, needing not only a thorough knowledge of, for example, the articles of association and relevant company and charity law, but also strong communication and organisational skills. They need to be supported and have opportunities to develop. Boards must assess whether the CFO and others in key financial posts need to have a business or accountancy qualification.

Is the board meeting and communicating enough?
Full board meetings must take place at least three times a year but, if they meet less than six times a year, it's necessary to explain how the board can still conduct its business effectively.

There are many ways to ensure that board members are aware of trust business, from holding an AGM and sharing minutes and reports to a shared portal of governance documents and a regular 'newsletter' email containing relevant data and progress against targets.

Trust financial strategy
Can you prove the trust is a going concern?
Trust boards must carry out a going concern assessment to prove their ability

to operate for 12 months from date accounts were signed. There are a lot of things to consider here but Justine offers a useful checklist outlining the sorts of questions boards need to ask in the short and medium term. This is just one of many useful templates she and her team have developed as part of the SBM Toolkit (sbmtoolkit.co.uk) to help academies keep on top of their finances.

When to set the annual budget?
Justine advised us to set a budget planning timetable so there is sufficient time to prepare and consolidate budgets and get them approved, ready for submission to the ESFA. An annual budget planner, such as Justine's model example, contains all the key dates for completion, approval and submission. Bearing in mind the ESFA's focus on process, ensure approval of the budget and the ESFA budget forecast returns are ratified at a trust board meeting and the minutes reflect this.

What should be in monthly management accounts?
These are internal budget monitoring reports and therefore can be in a format that trustees, senior leaders and budget holders find useful. In accordance with the Academies Handbook, 12 sets have to be produced, to include such elements as the income and expenditure report (year-to-date and forecast position against budget), variances to budget with an explanatory commentary, KPIs with targets, balance sheet, a rolling 12-month cash flow and any trading accounts for areas such as catering or breakfast club.

Unfortunately, no single report can be printed from an accounting system that will accurately tell you the forecasted position to the end of the financial year,

although system reports will be your starting point. You have to proactively analyse each budget heading and apply your knowledge of the situation for each element. The accounts should be prepared on an accruals basis. Doing this monthly embeds processes and the makes year-end closure of accounts much easier.

Benchmarking
Staff performance is benchmarked against other schools and colleges, and is often a focus of an audit. Leaders should have clear expectations of required standards and be direct and firm in upholding them. Regular reviews of the staffing structure enable the trust to:
- invest in the right mix of staff
- invest in high quality professional development
- maximise pupil outcomes
- ensure value for money.

The data dashboard section of the SRMSA is where you can prepare these statistics. It will be automatically populated with your latest submitted accounts and census data to rate your trust or academy against thresholds. These can be overwritten with more current information. While a red or amber outcome looks alarming at first glance, there may be good reasons for specific issues – the important to thing is to know what these reasons are and note and report them on the action plan so it's documented with an audit trail.
Justine advised that the data is useful to inform decision making and highlight where efficiencies could be made.
Ask: What do the statistics tell you and do they mean you have to investigate or do something differently?

Benchmarking might also be a useful

What do the statistics tell you and do they mean you have to investigate or do something differently?

tool when setting executive pay, as the board of trustees must ensure its decisions follow a robust evidence-based process to ensure value for money. A simple table of, for example, headteacher salaries at similar trusts is a good way of providing this evidence.

Value for money
Of course, the overarching aim is to ensure value for money. The DfE's 'View my financial insights' (VMFI) tool is designed to support academy trusts in taking better financial management decisions by comparing them to similar trusts. Justine recommended it is used proactively, not only to gain a snapshot of how the trust compares with others but also to access commercial resources, framework contracts, financial guidance and training available via the DfE. The trust is, after all, spending public money, so the internal scrutiny process needs to be robust.

Justine finished the workshop by reminding us that everyone should be responsible for completing the SRMSA – working as a team makes the process less onerous and more efficient. ◼

Reflection on financial reporting
- How often do you prepare/receive financial reports?
- How easy are they to understand?
- What elements do you think are missing from the reports?
- How could your financial reporting be improved?
- What actions are you going to take to ensure the improvement happens?

MATs Summit 2021
This flagship event for MAT leaders is due to take place in November 2021, in London. Hear from knowledgeable speakers on a range of themes and network with fellow executives. For more information, visit: **matsummit.co.uk**

Good practice for remote recruitment

Safe recruitment remains a priority, even if it must happen remotely. **GILL MARTINDALE**, senior HR consultant at Browne Jacobson LLP, outlines ways of ensuring recruitment processes remain robust

The pandemic has meant that we need to do many things differently, and this includes how we recruit new staff to our schools and academies. We still have a duty to follow safer recruitment processes in these unprecedented times, including, as appropriate, relevant sections in Part 3 of the 'Keeping children safe in education' guidance (KCSIE).

Tips for video interviews

Most people are now used to holding meetings and speaking to family via electronic means, and it is becoming much more commonplace for recruitment processes. It is possible to carry out a thorough interview remotely, either by telephone or video call, and they can be just as valid as face-to-face ones.

An interview is still an essential element to ensure safer recruitment and should be as robust and structured as if you were conducting it face to face. For example, you should still have someone on the panel who has been suitably trained in safer recruitment, and you should still explore the candidate's suitability in terms of working with children.

However, there are a few important things to consider ahead of conducting a video interview.

- Ensure you have appropriate technology in place and that staff conducting the interviews are fully conversant with how it works. Test your technology, especially audio and camera settings and internet connection (have a trial run first).
- Ensure the interview details sent to the applicant include any link and/or passcode to access the online interview on the day. This can be sent in advance via email.
- Build in time prior to the start of the interview for all participants to log on.
- Provide the applicant with a guidance document (see below) so they understand the format of the interview and how it will be conducted.
- Find a quiet space with a plain backdrop (nothing that would distract the candidate), no background noise and plenty of natural light.

> **'Combining several selection methods increases the validity and reliability of the decision'**

- If the applicant has disclosed details of reasonable adjustment(s) they require at this stage of the recruitment process, make sure these are put in place to ensure a fair selection and interview process.
- At the start of the interview, check the applicant's DBS and right-to-work documents, explaining the purpose of this temporary change to the process.

Remember, throughout the interview, speak slowly and clearly to ensure the applicant can hear and understand you. Try to not to be put off if the connection drops in and out.

Suggested modifications to the recruitment process

The purpose of selection is to assess the skills, experience and general background of a candidate in order to decide whether they are a suitable person for a job role. Combining several selection methods increases the validity and reliability of the decision. You should therefore continue to include various selection activities.

Example for teachers

As well as an online panel interview, applicants could be asked for one or more of the following.

- A timed presentation (say 10 minutes) on a set topic to assess their presentation and communication skills. It can be either be submitted or recorded in advance of the interview or presented during the online interview. It may include a Q&A section. Another option is to ask the candidate to submit a recording in advance of the interview of them delivering an extract of a lesson.

- Responses to a case study, for example based on behaviour management, sent to them ahead of the interview, to assess their strategies for dealing with poor behaviour. (This option is an alternative to teaching a class in real time.)
- A lesson plan submitted ahead of the interview plus a Q&A during the online interview.

Example for teaching assistants

As well as an online panel interview, applicants could be asked for one or more of the following.

- Responses to a case study sent to the applicant in advance and returned ahead of the interview to assess their communication and behaviour management skills.
- During the interview, a discussion of a case study with a range of responses from which they can choose their most likely and least likely response and a explain why.

Example for support staff

As well as an online panel interview, an in-tray exercise, sent to the candidate and returned ahead of the interview, could assess their organisational, prioritisation and problem-solving skills.

Example for headteachers

As well as an online panel interview, applicants could be asked for one or more of the following.

- A timed presentation on a set topic to either be submitted or recorded in advance of the interview plus a Q&A during the online interview. This will assess the applicant's presentation and communication skills.
- A case study, for example a data and/or finance task, submitted in advance of the interview plus a Q&A about it.

Managing practical skills assessments

Some roles, for example for catering, would normally require a practical exercise to assess the applicant's suitability for the post.

If you are unable to assess these skills any other way, we recommend you state in the offer letter that a practical assessment will be arranged with the individual at the school as soon as it is safe to do so, and that any job offer is therefore subject to satisfactory completion of the practical assessment, together with pre-employment checks.

If face-to-face interviews are necessary, you should share the school's control measures in advance and make it clear that candidates must follow the system of controls that you have in place. This includes any requirements for wearing face coverings where social distancing cannot be managed safely.

Temporary changes to DBS checks

In response to Covid-19, the DBS has made temporary changes to standard and enhanced DBS ID checking to minimise the need for face-to-face contact. These changes came into effect on 24 March 2020 and enable ID documents to be viewed over the video link and scanned images can be used in advance of the DBS check being submitted.

However, the changes should only be implemented for urgent cases where it is not possible to follow the normal identity checking guidelines. The applicant will then be required to present the original versions of these documents when they first attend their employment or volunteering role.

Where you are utilising volunteers, you should continue to follow the checking and risk assessment process as set out in paragraphs 183 to 188 of KCSIE. Under no circumstances should a volunteer who has not been checked be left unsupervised or allowed to work in regulated activity.

Right to work checks

Right to work checks have also been temporarily adjusted due to Covid-19 to make it easier for employers to carry them out. On a temporary basis, checks can now be carried out over video calls or in person. However, in both cases you must be in physical possession of the original documents. For example, an individual may choose to send their documents to you by post to enable you to conduct the check with them via live video link. You may not rely on inspecting the document in their hands via a live video link or by checking a faxed or scanned copy of the document.

Probationary clauses

Social distancing causes problems for assessing suitability, so we advise that, when appointing new external staff currently, you consider changing your probationary clause to allow a longer period to assess suitability. Where a contract has already been issued, you may still want to extend the probationary period. The method by which you can extend probation will depend on whether the employee's contract of employment allows you to extend the probationary period. If the contract doesn't provide the right to extend probation, then you can still extend it but will need the individual's agreement to do so.

If the member of staff does not agree with your decision/ recommendation, take further advice before deciding on whether to terminate their contract. ■

Ethical leadership

What kind of business leader does your school need you to be? **NICKII MESSER** outlines a framework for ethical leadership in practice

Covid-19 has been a time of change and reflection, and for me at least, a time to reconsider the school business leadership role.

Especially in the early months, the lead that school business professionals (SBPs) took to ensure the wellbeing of staff, children and families was nothing short of phenomenal. The challenges were immense, but at every turn, SBPs stepped up, and I would like to think that respect for the profession grew in response.

This has not just been about school business leadership, though. This has been about ethical leadership, where SBPs have epitomised Peter Drucker's assertion that 'Leadership is not rank, privileges, title or money. It is responsibility'.

Any of us can demonstrate ethical leadership. Rather hidden away in the ISBL Professional Standards, at the end of the 'Values and ethics' section, you will find a reference to the Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles).

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership

I want to explore these principles in more detail and consider how they can be used as a framework to develop and deepen our ethical leadership practice. As with any framework for professional and personal development, it's important to start by reflecting on one's strengths, before recognising and prioritising areas for development. Using a model such as 360 degree feedback is an invaluable way to deepen your understanding and support greater objectivity.

> 'Developing school business leadership requires understanding the leader your school needs you to be'

Integrity
Integrity is choosing courage over comfort. You choose what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy. And you choose to practice your values rather than simply professing them. (Brené Brown)

Each principle is arguably as important as the next, but I believe integrity underpins all others.

When working with SBPs, I use Brené Brown's words to describe how integrity centres on making the right choices. To do this, you to understand the context in which you work, the needs of the people you work for and with, and your own values as well as those of the organisation. Integrity is about aligning your values to that of the school, reflecting on the choices you make, and having the courage and determination to be the leader the school needs you to be.

There have been so many examples of SBL integrity throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Ensuring free school meals for families in need, or supporting colleagues unable to come in to work. Covid-19 aside, for SBLs newly promoted to a leadership role, integrity may mean redefining personal and professional relationships with colleagues to consistently portray a fair, unbiased and credible approach.

Selflessness
Selfless leadership is ethically leading others in the achievement of assigned goals and the greater good for the benefit of all others before oneself. (The Selfless Leader: Dr JoAnne Lyon)

Being truly selfless means putting aside personal success to focus, instead, on the success of the organisation. The selfless leader must understand and buy into the organisation's goals, and be able to objectively motivate others, ensuring everyone works equally to accomplish them. Selfless leaders not only create the best chances for the organisation, they empower individuals leading to greater overall organisational success and sustainability.

In reality, we all want something back from the work we do. Wages, recognition, job satisfaction. Being selfless means getting the balance right. Leading colleagues with equality and fairness, unifying our teams and individuals to achieve the organisational mission.

Ironically, one way for an SBL to become more selfless is to delegate. Many of us have a degree of control freak in our SBL DNA, but being selfless requires investing time and effort to empower other colleagues to take on tasks, responsibilities – even recognition.

Objectivity
I think perfect objectivity is an unrealistic goal; fairness, however, is not. (Michael Pollan)
Being an ethical leader demands objectivity, and the Nolan Committee describes objectivity as requiring a dispassionate approach, exercising judgement for the good of children and young people.

I find a certain discord between being 'dispassionate' and working for the good of children and young people. In my years working with SBPs, I have never yet met a SBP who has not been passionate about their school and the children. The point, though, is that passion should be borne from objectivity. 'Dispassionate objectivity is itself a passion, for the real and for the truth.' (Abraham Maslow)

I suggest you consider the synergy with selflessness, since being objective means you put aside subjectivity, needs, prejudices and feelings, focusing instead on what Maslow calls the real, and the truth. To develop objectivity, wider reading, consulting and collaboration will help deepen the knowledge and understanding necessary to find 'the real and the truth'.

To develop objectivity, I advocate reading new policies, regulatory frameworks (e.g. Ofsted), guidance, even legislation in their entirety, rather than simply relying on digests and summaries. Depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding will help you place your own professional context more objectively.

Accountability
Responsibility equals accountability equals ownership. And a sense of ownership is the most powerful weapon a team or organisation can have. (Pat Summitt)

There can't be a SBP who doesn't understand the need for accountability for decisions and actions. Being willing, and able, to submit themselves for scrutiny. Take financial audits as a case in point!

But being accountable should extend across all responsibilities, actions, and inactions. Being a truly accountable leader entails a level of professional reflection – even soul searching – to not just scrutinise what we have done, but those things we choose not to do.

As with integrity, accountability means making the right choices. Not just doing things you feel comfortable doing. Accountability is about making and responding to leadership decisions, whereas responsibility is more about the tasks.

Increasingly, SBLs use mentoring and coaching to develop the necessary reflective practice to deepen their understanding of the impact of their leadership responses and behaviours – their accountability.

Openness
I find that when you open the door toward openness and transparency, a lot of people will follow you through. (Kirsten Gillibrand)

When I think about openness, trust invariably springs to mind. Being open means stakeholders are better able to trust your words and actions.

A key interpersonal skill will be communication. Colleagues need to trust you will share 'the real and the truth' fairly and openly, and that you expect the same in return from them.

Being open requires applying discretion, confidentiality and good judgement to determine the potential impact of disclosing information. During my years as a SBL, I've seen some particularly heated 'discussions' between SLT colleagues, but always in private. Whatever our differences, we only ever projected a united front to colleagues.

Honesty
Integrity is telling myself the truth. And honesty is telling the truth to other people. (Spencer Johnson)

To become a more honest leader is not simply about telling the truth, but recognising what is the truth, objectively and selflessly. It especially means resisting limiting your planning and actions to doing those things you want to do. Things you feel able to do without risk of failure.

But instead, to objectively determine what the school needs and having the integrity to be truthful with ourselves first and foremost, making 'Honesty… the cornerstone of ethical behaviour' (Garth Jestley).

360 feedback can be a great way for SBLs to develop honesty. Objectively and positively comparing feedback from a range of colleagues who know you: colleagues you interact with; those you line manage; your superiors and/or line manager against your perception of your skills and behaviours, can support you in more honestly developing your leadership role and responsibilities.

Leadership
Leading with positive ethical values builds trust and brings out the best in people, which brings out the best in the organisation, which leads to great results. (Marketing with Ethics)

We are reminded that, in this context, leadership is a behaviour and a culture. Leadership includes demonstrating accountability to activity promote and robustly support all the other principles.

The ethical leader needs to be honest about their preferred style of leadership, and sufficiently selfless and objective in developing leadership styles to robustly lead and provide the very best results for our schools, the children and young people.

When I ask SBLs to describe their leadership style/s, they tend to describe the style they feel comfortable using. Developing school business leadership requires understanding the leader your school needs you to be, the impact of your leadership behaviours, and the different styles needed for different situations. Your headteacher should be able to help you with this.

In conclusion, I return to integrity. To slightly paraphrase Zig Ziglar, 'It is true that integrity won't make you a [ethical] leader, but without integrity you will never be one'. ◼

IN-HOUSE TRAINING

Creating risk assessments and spotting hazards

In this extract from Unit 6 of the *Health and Safety in Schools* training course, **GILL O'DONNELL** guides us through the risk assessment process

Carrying out a risk assessment in the working environment is a legal requirement. When done properly it becomes a way of looking at your work practices and focusing your attention on how to improve them and keep your workforce safe. Risk assessment should be seen as a support tool. Done properly, risk assessment:

- increases awareness of workplace hazards
- provides opportunity to identify and control workplace hazards
- can lead to increased productivity in some areas
- may prevent death, injury or illness.

The aim of risk assessment should never be to ensure that boxes are ticked. It is not about creating mountains of paperwork which is not read. It is about making sure no-one dies, becomes ill or gets hurt.

When to carry out a risk assessment

Ideally risk assessments should be carried out at least once a year. The process should involve checking to see if anything has changed in terms of hazards and people at risk. Control measures should be examined to check they are still effective.

In addition to the annual review, carry out a risk assessment every time there is an incident or accident or a significant change to working practice, equipment or personnel.

Whenever someone in the school undertakes something new there should be a risk assessment to show that the activity has been examined and the hazards considered.

How to carry out a risk assessment

There is no prescribed format for presenting a risk assessment. However, the HSE do recommend following the five-step plan when creating a risk assessment as this is very easy to follow and ensures that no element is overlooked.

1. Look for and list the hazards.
2. Decide who might be harmed and how.
3. Evaluate the risks arising from the hazards and decide whether existing controls are adequate.
4. Record the findings.
5. Review the risk assessment when necessary.

Spotting hazards

The first step in creating a risk assessment is to look for and list the hazards. Take on the mindset of a stranger looking at the situation. The following hints can help create good habits for hazard spotting.

- Walk around the workplace and look at what could cause harm.
- Ignore the trivial hazards and concentrate on significant hazards.

- Ask employees what they think might represent a hazard.
- Use manufacturers' instructions or data to help identify hazards, particularly when assessing an unfamiliar task.
- Refer to accident and incident records.

Who's at risk?

The next stage is to look at who might be harmed. In a school this could typically be a mixture of staff, pupils, members of the public, contractors and visitors to the site.

In each area of the building the level of potential hazards will vary, just as they will vary with each task. In any workplace an employer is also required to pay particular attention to the risks involved for people in special risk categories, such as pregnant women, those with disabilities or trainees.

Risk assessments need to consider young people in the school. This consideration applies to risk assessments which cover activities not normally associated with the pupils themselves, such as activities related to operations in the main kitchen, cleaning and in construction areas.

Reflection: think about your usual workplace. Draw up a list of 5–10 hazards which you encounter on a daily basis. Then identify the potential harm that they could cause and who could be harmed. ■

ⓘ **Take the full training course at my.optimus-education.com/training/health-and-safety-schools**

What's in this month's Teaching and Learning section?

'Our bodies are designed to move, not just to sit.' Have you noticed a difference in your pupils' energy and activity levels since the return to full schooling? Bryn Llewellyn and Ian Holmes encourage us to get moving and make the case for physically active learning (see overleaf), with practical suggestions for incorporating movement into classroom teaching.

Academic catch-up has been a much-discussed topic this year. In Claire Gadsby's In-House Training course *Differentiation for Catch-up*, she starts by exploring the conditions required for learning to take place. Social connections need to be re-established and rooted in a supportive classroom culture. Claire was also a speaker at our recent *Curriculum Impact* digital conference. If you couldn't make it, turn to page 30 for some highlights and key takeaways.

September 2021 sees the updated early years foundation stage framework becoming statutory. Primary SLE Rochelle Cocksworth provides a useful summary of what's changing and implications for early years providers in school. There's a drive to 'reduce the burden of data and paperwork that currently encumber EYFS practitioners', which I'm sure will be welcome.

Top teaching and learning blogs

How should controversial issues be handled in the classroom? oego.co/classroom_issues

Critical reflection at the heart of CPD oego.co/reflective_CPD

From teacher to TV presenter oego.co/TV_presenter

See more at blog.optimus-education.com

Contributors in this issue

Bryn Llewellyn worked in various UK schools for over 20 years as a teacher and school leader. In 2013, he founded Tagtiv8 Ltd. He also advises the BBC and the Premier League on their education content. @brynll

Claire Gadsby is a teaching and learning consultant and trainer. Much of her work involves getting alongside teachers in classrooms to work on innovative teaching and assessment strategies. @greatergadsby

Ian Holmes is a headteacher, chair of the UK Council for ActivatEU and consults for Join Us:Move Play (JU:MP), Bradford's Sport England Local Delivery Pilot. @ianmarkholmes

Rochelle Cocksworth is a DfE Specialist Leader in Education and primary school teacher, with 11 years' teaching experience across all stages in primary education, and has developed all areas of the curriculum.

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CONFERENCE REPORT

Join the movement! The benefits of physically active learning

IAN HOLMES and **BRYN LLEWELLYN**, co-directors of Move & Learn, explain the research and reality behind physically active learning and why it is especially important right now

'**If physical activity** were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure.' It's a bold statement by the UK Chief Medical Officers (in their 2019 Physical Activity Guidelines) but we certainly want children to get hooked on activity and keep coming back for more. If education is about preparing them for the future, we can't afford to ignore the importance of prioritising physical activity.

Why is physical activity so important?
We all know that physical activity can improve health and fitness, and help us to maintain a healthy weight, but there are many other benefits:
- building confidence and social skills
- improving concentration and learning
- developing co-ordination
- improving sleep
- creating a positive mood.

It also provides a social connection by bringing people together to enjoy shared activities and build strong communities. In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, current lifestyles should value movement for its contribution to our feelings of belonging, esteem and self-actualisation, at the top of the pyramid, linking the body, mind and spirit.

Putting research into practice
As former school leaders, we have a lot

> 'Focus on playful movement that builds fun and social connections, not just fitness and exercise'

of experience of working with schools to encourage physical activity. Nine out of ten headteachers supported our NAHT conference motion to promote physically active learning solutions. The resulting *Telegraph* headline, 'Let them run around the classrooms, headteachers urged', was misleading, to say the least! In fact, in 'Physical Activity and Academic Achievement: An Umbrella Review', the World Health Organization (WHO) recently concluded that physical education and active classrooms improve academic attainment.

It's not about getting up to do star jumps in maths; our company Move & Learn connects research like this with practice. We talk to schools about how they can incorporate physical activity into their culture and ethos, and the pedagogical approaches to make physically active learning part of their curriculum. We help them to identify the environments and resources they can use to integrate movement into the learning process.

Centring movement in the curriculum
Globally, at least 50% of children are deemed insufficiently active and, in some parts of the UK, the figure is likely to be

more than 80%, exacerbated by the recent lockdowns. Data suggests that, after the age of 7 (Key Stage 1), children are less likely to get enough daily activity. This might partly be because they then follow a narrow curriculum focusing on maths and English tests, which usually involves sitting down for long periods.

But our bodies are designed to move, not just to sit. The Chief Medical Officers suggest that each child should be active for at least 30 minutes at school and 30 minutes at home every day, but many children simply don't move that much in either setting.

The good news is that there are plenty of opportunities for schools to increase their active provision, for example through active lessons and break times, play, PE and extracurricular clubs, other sport events and active travel (such as encouraging children and parents to walk or cycle to school).

When devising a broad and balanced curriculum for your school, consider putting wellbeing at its core. Physical activity can be incorporated into all aspects of wellbeing – whether nature and outdoor activities, mental health, nutrition, sleep, relationships and activities relating to identity. Remember

that wellbeing and academic achievement are not mutually exclusive – in fact, they should be closely linked. For example, think about how the school day can balance movement with calmer, mindful time.

At Move & Learn, we have two main approaches: activators and energisers.

Move & Learn activators
We call these direct purpose activities; that is, movement can be used to directly activate learning by:
- retrieval of previous knowledge
- collection of new knowledge
- modelling of new knowledge, skills and understanding
- connection of own and others' ideas
- creation of something new.

Retrieval of previous knowledge
We emphasise linking movement with pedagogy and the process of learning. For example, pupils can physically retrieve information from their learning environment, such as their classroom or hall. They could use movement to recall facts, by incorporating those facts into the movements they make. Another idea is encouraging children to move when responding to questions, for example by adopting different yoga poses to represent their multiple-choice answer of A, B, C or D.

Collection of new knowledge
At the start of a new learning process, children can physically 'collect' key concepts, such as shapes, numbers, vocabulary or ideas, to investigate and explore their understanding.

Modelling of new knowledge, skills and understanding
This is where children model what they have learned in active ways. For example, they could model the solar system together, with each child 'being' a planet and standing in the correct order.

Connection of own and others' ideas
Using group goals and individual accountability, children share their learning and resolve misconceptions. They move around, connecting with each other to link their ideas and building teamwork in the process.

Creation of something new
This is the pinnacle of the approach, where children use movement to make connections beyond the scope of the problem or question, so that they can transfer learning to new contexts. Dance is an ideal channel for this, as is creating stories with memes in drama. More tangibly, they can use construction or art materials outside to literally make their ideas real.

Move & Learn energisers
We call these indirect purpose activities: movement breaks can be used to indirectly energise and support learning by:
- reducing sedentary time
- allowing learners to refocus and therefore increase their overall time on their task
- breaking up complex learning into mini lessons, inside or outside.

Proof of impact
Of course, we need to collect evidence of how attitudes and engagement have transformed. It's obvious when the children are smiling, but we also ask them how the activities make them feel. One child told us after a session: 'I used to think I was rubbish at maths – but now I know I'm not!'. Another said that the approach didn't give them a change to get bored or zone out. It can change the attitudes of teachers too – they often say, 'I didn't know that child could do that!'.

And then there's the research, from many countries, that links more physical activity with a higher overall attainment in maths and reading, improvements for lower ability children and four extra months' worth of learning gains after two years.

Where do you start?
School leaders and teachers have a lot of additional concerns and responsibilities following the pandemic so may not see movement as a priority. We all bring our own feelings and experiences to discussions about physical activity, and some teachers may be reluctant to encourage physically active learning, both for the children and for themselves. We need to make it easy to identify opportunities to encourage movement, which can be as simple as adjusting the classroom layout to promote activity. Bear in mind that the benefits of being outside are not only fresh air but also time away from the screen.

Consider the social environment too. Are teachers encouraged to take risks with their approach to teaching and learning? Do they have opportunities to share their ideas and experiences with each other?

Motivation can come via small steps with clear outcomes. For example, it is in the classroom that a child is probably the most inactive. We've found that reducing sedentary time through light physical activity helps to keep children calm and reduces behavioural disruption. So consider breaking lessons into shorter chunks that incorporate movement, so that children can refocus. There is plenty that can be done on limited resources – focus on playful movement that builds fun and social connections, not just fitness and exercise. ∎

Adapted from the session delivered by Ian Holmes and Bryn Llewellyn of Move & Learn at Optimus Education's March 2021 Curriculum Impact conference.

Develop pupil skills that last a lifetime
Our *Excellence in Pupil Development award* focuses on pupils' personal attributes and attitudes. Find out more at **awardplace.co.uk/award/epda**

Understanding where and what achievement gaps may exist

In this extract from the *Differentiation for Catch-up* training course, **CLAIRE GADSBY** examines the conditions that need to exist in schools and classrooms for pupils to begin to catch up

Learning is complex and there are times when, for a whole variety of reasons, pupils might fall behind.

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in schools all over the world being closed for months and a potential loss of learning for many pupils. Part of the challenge for teachers in these uncertain times is to know exactly which pupils have fallen behind and where.

Research carried out by NFER in July 2020 around the challenges anticipated by schools found the following.

- Nearly all teachers estimate that their pupils are behind in their curriculum learning, with the average estimate being three months behind. Over half of teachers estimate that the learning gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has widened.

- Teachers in the most deprived schools are over three times more likely to report that their pupils are four months or more behind in their curriculum learning than teachers in the least deprived schools.

- Reasons related to the provision of remote learning include: diminishing levels of pupil and parent engagement over time and a continuing lack of interactive remote teaching approaches.

- Teachers estimate that 44 per cent of their pupils are in need of intensive catch-up support. These estimates are much higher in the most deprived schools and in schools serving the highest proportion of pupils from BAME backgrounds.

Is there anything in these findings that surprises you? What in these findings might be most relevant or interesting for you and your pupils?

Maslow before Bloom
A popular new idiom that has emerged asserts that we should 'think Maslow before Bloom' when it comes to helping pupils catch up in their learning. The point being made is that humans need their basic needs met (such as food, safety and a sense of connection) before academic learning can occur (the apply,

analyse and evaluate of Bloom's Taxonomy).

While teachers are understandably keen to accelerate the catch-up process, it is important to ensure that pupils' wellbeing and emotional needs are adequately addressed first. This needs to happen in order for optimal learning to take place.

'Emotions are the gatekeepers of cognition, motivation, and attention. Being attuned to and helping all students develop strong social and emotional skills, such as the ability to manage their emotions, be self-aware, and collaborate with others, is at the center of teaching.' ('Developing students' social and emotional skills during remote learning', Microsoft Education Blog, May 2020).

Activity
Take this opportunity to reflect on how you support the social and emotional skills and wellbeing of your pupils by completing the following statements.

- Every pupil can tell that they are welcome in my classroom because…

- I am alert to the cues that might indicate a child is in distress such as…

- I establish a calm and supportive atmosphere in my classroom by…

- I greet my pupils by name because…

- I encourage my pupils to respect and collaborate with each other by…

Friendships first
Humans are sociable animals and friendships are not just fluffy extras: they are fundamentally important when it comes to learning.

Think about what it feels like to be the pupil who is not chosen by anyone else in the class. What impact might this have on your sense of yourself and on your willingness to take risks in your learning?

Encouragingly, the work undertaken by researchers such as Robin Bannerjee, indicates a strong positive correlation between

how connected a pupil feels to their class or school and how well they achieve academically.

In other words, the more a learner feels part of a supportive learning community, the more likely they are to make progress. The challenge then is to try to develop a classroom culture of allies and not judges.

To see this in practice, watch the video of Ron Berger telling the story of Austin's butterfly on YouTube (youtu.be/hqh1MRWZjms). Make a note of the specific ways in which he creates a supportive and connected classroom ethos.

Developing supportive classroom cultures
Look at the diagram above showing the stages of mastery learning. Which stage in the process do you think might be most difficult for a learner? Why?

Now think back to a time when you learned a new skill (for example, driving a car, learning to teach online). Can you track the stages in the process? Can you recall how you felt at the various stages in the process towards mastery?

Many people consider Stage 2, 'Conscious incompetence', to be the most difficult and disheartening stage for a learner. To be aware of your own struggles while watching your peers moving ahead can be enormously demotivating and stressful.

Such negative feelings are obviously not conducive to learning. As pupils age, feelings of self-consciousness tend to increase and exacerbate the problem still further.

A key aspect of creating a healthy culture for learning is to avoid deficit thinking by actively seeking out opportunities for pupils to identify and celebrate the things that they can do well. By developing an ethos where pupils regularly talk about their proudest achievement, we remind them that they have been successful learners before and that they will succeed again.

In summary, the challenge for teachers is to create a classroom culture where pupils feel comfortable enough to admit where

they are struggling and to persevere when they are finding things most difficult.

Learning into practice
Teachers are the architects of learning, creating landscapes where their pupils can thrive. By first focusing our attention on the wider classroom culture and general conditions for learning, we make it more likely that pupils will reveal where they are struggling. We can then optimise the conditions for catch-up. So far we have considered:

- the reasons why pupils may fall behind

- the role of emotions in learning

- how struggling pupils may feel

- why classroom cultures matter so much

- how friendships and connections among peers can support progress.

Of the aspects listed above, which would you choose as the first priority for focusing on within your practice? Make a note.

Activity
Rank these components in order of importance to you.

- Everyone knows it is okay to make mistakes.

- The teacher models making – and solving – mistakes themselves.

- There is regular celebration of all the things that pupils have achieved.

- The skills of collaboration and respect are cultivated.

- The classroom is a welcoming place to be.

- Learning is enjoyable, especially when you get yourself unstuck.

- There are tools in the classroom that allow pupils to help themselves when they are struggling.

- Peer-to-peer support (for example, Austin's Butterfly) is embedded.

Your next step is to focus on your top three and try to identify ways in which you could develop these within your own classroom practice. ∎

ℹ **Study the full unit online at my.optimus-education.com/training/differentiation-catch-0**

Getting to grips with the revised EYFS framework

In September 2021, the revised EYFS Framework will become statutory. **ROCHELLE COCKSWORTH** explains how you can prepare for the changes to your current EYFS curriculum

The Department for Education (DfE) has published changes to the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework on its website. Nursery leaders and managers need to consider how to design their new curriculum around the new educational programmes, not the early learning goals.

The main principles of the revised EYFS Framework are to:

- improve outcomes at the end of the Reception school year
- advance language development for all children, but specifically those with from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or with English as an additional language
- reduce the burden of data and paperwork that currently encumber EYFS practitioners. This in turn will help to shift the focus back to high quality observations and assessments for every child.

The new framework will be accompanied by new D*evelopment Matters* guidance, released by the Department for Education, or the *Birth to 5 Matters* guidance, produced by the Early Years Coalition.

What remains the same?

The seven areas of learning and development (three prime areas and four specific areas) will not change:

- Communication and language development
- Physical development
- Personal, social and emotional development
- Literacy development
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design.

The characteristics of effective learning also remain in place – playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and thinking critically.

The EYFS will still be based upon the four key principles:

- unique child
- positive relationships
- enabling environments
- learning development.

Children's learning and teachers' planning will still be based around high-quality texts, led by children's interests. The 'good level of development' (GLD) will still be measured against the early learning goals at the end of the Reception school year.

What is different?

What you do on the ground won't change very much, but you will need to shift your approach to tracking and showing progress. As a practitioner, you will still observe individual children's progress and experiences; the new framework just encourages you to be more strategic with these observations.

There will now be two statutory assessments in one year – a baseline upon entry to Reception and then another against the early learning goals at the end of the school year.

There are seven key features of effective practice. In the three prime areas, you can find observational checkpoints at ages 2, 3 and 4.

Changes to the early learning goals

There are no more subsections within the areas of learning until you get to the early learning goals. These have been updated and changed to be clearer and more specific. The standout changes are the removal of health and self-care, and shape, space and measure. For this reason alone, it is important that schools do not use the early learning goals as a curriculum as this will not give children a broad enough learning experience.

There is clear guidance about what the early learning goals should and should not be used for. The key point is that practitioners are now simply being asked to consider: 'Have the children achieved the early learning goals or not?'

Other changes

There have been some small changes with regards to safeguarding and welfare requirements, such as oral health. It is up to individual schools and settings to decide how they will cover this within their curriculum.

Local authorities no longer have a statutory duty to moderate. This is now the responsibility of individual schools.

Curriculum guidance documents

There are now two curriculum guidance documents to choose from: *Development Matters* and *Birth to 5 Matters*. Neither of these documents are statutory but, as a

school or setting, you should look at both and decide which, if either, you would like to use.

In *Development Matters*, the age/month bands have been replaced with three age pathways:

- Birth to 3
- 3 and 4-year-olds
- Children in reception.

In *Birth to 5 Matters*, the age-month bands have been replaced with ranges. The document provides guidance from range 1 to 6. It continues to split the areas of learning into subsections and follows a similar format to the original *Development Matters* document that was released in 2012.

What should you be doing in preparation for September 2021?

The revised framework reinforces how *Development Matters* and *Birth to 5 Matters* should be used as guidance, not as a checklist. These documents should be viewed as 'the floor, not the sky', on which schools should build their own rich, ambitious curriculum.

1. Focus on the child

Consider the children and communities that you are working with. Emphasise balancing your knowledge about each child with the big learning picture. Where is a child's learning now and what are their next steps towards making progress?

Ensure that you are providing children with a personalised skills-based curriculum that allows them to progress within the seven areas of learning. Practitioners are encouraged to build on observations to focus on capturing those that show progress through a specific goal and build on next steps in learning. In principle, an EYFS curriculum based on core skills-based progression will mean

Balance your knowledge about each child with the big learning picture

that there is no need for next steps in learning because they will already be built into the curriculum.

2. Decide what works best

Practitioners need to decide what they want children in their setting to learn, and the most effective ways to teach it. You must stimulate children's interests, responding to each child's emerging needs and guiding their development through warm, positive interactions, coupled with secure routines for play and learning.

It will be up to individual schools and settings to decide how they track progress throughout the early years; however, remember that one of the main aims of these changes is reduce paperwork and needless data production and analysis.

3. Identify skills gaps

With a returned emphasis on practitioners understanding how children develop and make progress, rather than on data and percentages, ensuring that all staff have access to high quality continuing professional development (CPD) will be more important than ever. Do all your early years staff have a good

understanding of child development? Do they, for example, understand the skills and provision needed to develop an emergent writer?

In summary, the revised EYFS framework aims to provide practitioners with more room for professional judgement based on their own knowledge and experience, rather than constantly referring to the early learning goals or age bands. Its purpose is to empower teachers to understand progress, understand the children in their care and identify what they need to do to make progress. ∎

Further reading

Birth to 5 Matters:
Non-statutory guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage

DfE: Changes to the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework:
Explains what early years managers and practitioners need to consider for September.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile 2021 Handbook:
gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-handbook

Getting it right in the Early Years Foundation Stage:
A review of the evidence (September 2019) by Professors Chris Pascal, Tony Bertram & Dr Liz Rouse, at early-education.org.uk

Working with the revised Early Years Foundation Stage: Principles into Practice
(development-matters.org.uk and juliangrenier.blogspot.com) Julian Grenier, government advisor and a primary school head teacher, provides an excellent example of a starting point to building a skills-based curriculum that covers eight curricular goals which, in turn, give way to eight key observations that can run consecutively throughout a half term.

ⓘ **Download your early years planner at my.optimus-education.com/early-years-year-planner**

CONFERENCE REPORT

Reflecting on the impact of your curriculum

Did you know that all the presentations from the recent *Curriculum Impact* digital conference are available online? **JULIA SANDFORD-COOKE** identifies some highlights

A rich and diverse curriculum is on every school's wishlist, especially after such a challenging year. The speakers at our *Curriculum Impact* conference, held online in March, addressed a variety of related topics, from lessons learned from blended learning and how to narrow the achievement gap to practical strategies to promote critical thinking skills in and beyond the classroom.

Recordings, presentation slides and other resources from the conference are available to Premium Plus members at **my.optimus-education.com/conferences/curriculum-impact-digital/resources**.

Below is a summary of some of the presentations – watch them for yourself to help you reflect on your practice. ◼

Empower and equip subject leaders to bring your curriculum to life

Lekha Sharma, Vice Principal – Quality of Education, Ark Oval Primary and author of 'Curriculum to Classroom'

Lekha provided useful tools and practical strategies to facilitate leadership and support the jump from 'curriculum to classroom'. After all, a curriculum isn't just a piece of paper – it's what your school stands for, the foundations it is built upon and a pupil's learning journey, encompassing all the opportunities they are provided with.

Create a culture of constructive feedback, peer review and questioning to build learning

Claire Gadsby, educational consultant and author of *Dynamically Different Classrooms*

Claire usually asks delegates to identify three takeaways from her sessions so here are mine: focus your energy on the kind of feedback that is proven to work, empower pupils to take an active role in the feedback process and use questioning to promote engagement and to close gaps in learning.

Curriculum design: Measure what you value, don't value what you measure

Jennie Giovanelli, Headteacher, Kingsthorpe College

Jennie presented a series of provocations to encourage delegates to consider what the purpose of school actually is. It's only by asking sometimes painful questions that a school can identify its core values and find practical ways of ensuring its curriculum is aligned with them.

Key actions to narrow the achievement gap and ensure your curriculum and interventions have impact

Rob Coe, Director of Research and Development at Evidence Based Education and Senior Associate at the Education Endowment Foundation

Rob identified the quality of teaching, and the importance of teacher training, as key to success. He suggested interventions that are equalising or targeted at disadvantage as well as stressing the importance of high expectations for all pupils.

Build a diverse curriculum that prepares young people for their future

Alison Kriel, education consultant and founder, AMAYA Trust

Alison encouraged us to look beyond assessments to an enriched, inclusive curriculum. 'If children see themselves in the curriculum and know that they'll have opportunities to feel successful, high attainment will take care of itself.'

Evidence your quality of education

Tom Fay, Executive Director of Primary Education

Tom's fact-packed session asked: What are your curriculum USPs and are they fit for purpose? Curriculum comes first – how best to teach it comes second, but at all times consider the three Is: intent, implementation and impact.

What's in this month's SEN and Safeguarding section?

How has the return to full schooling been for you so far? Safeguarding lead Luke Ramsden shares some of his reflections and predictions for next academic year on page 40. Anxiety is a word we hear used increasingly; turn overleaf for the first in a two-part series from Nicola Harvey on understanding how anxiety might impact on children and young people, and what school practitioners can do to help. Kelly Hannaghan shares guidance on supporting pupils who show signs of depression, while behaviour and education specialist Adele Bates takes a closer look at how to encourage self-regulation in learners with more extreme behaviour.

To add to the challenges that managing the pandemic presents, the 'Everyone's Invited' movement has highlighted the extent to which young people experience sexual bullying, harassment and violence on a regular basis. What can (or should) schools do in response to historical allegations? Dai Durbridge provides guidance.

Finally, don't miss Natalie Packer's practical guide to classroom questioning which supports pupils with SEN – see page 38.

Top SEN and safeguarding blogs

Helping young people make sense of events
oego.co/making_sense

How the role of the DSL is set to change in 2021
oego.co/DSL_changes

'Why can't they just behave?'
oego.co/why_behave

See more at blog.optimus-education.com

Contributors in this issue

Kelly Hannaghan is a wellbeing consultant, public speaker and writer, passionately promoting positive mental health and wellbeing of all stakeholders in education.
🐦@mindworkmatters

Luke Ramsden is senior deputy headmaster and safeguarding lead at St Benedict's School in Ealing. He has wide experience of pastoral leadership in both day and boarding schools.
🐦@lukeramsden99

Natalie Packer is an independent education consultant, specialising in school improvement, SEN and teaching. She is the author of *The Perfect SENCO* and *The Teacher's Guide to SEN*.
🐦@NataliePacker

Nicola Harvey is a former senior teacher and now a digital mental health manager for a national youth charity. She is also an author and has written a book, *Mindful Little Yogis*.
🐦@HarveyHeals

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BLOG POST

Understanding anxiety in children and young people

Anxiety is a normal feeling and can help protect us from danger. But when and why does it become a problem? NICOLA HARVEY explores some common forms of anxiety

The pandemic has impacted everyone. The new norm means unexpected school closures, social distancing in public spaces, children being away from their friends for long periods of time, lateral flow testing, lockdown birthdays – and the list goes on! Understandably, all this uncertainty whilst growing up continues to impact the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

According to NHS Digital's 'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020' survey, one in six children aged 5-16 years were identified as having a mental health issue. Their findings pointed out that 'children and young people with a probable mental health disorder were more likely to say that lockdown had made their life worse (54.1% of 11-16 year olds, and 59.0% of 17-22 year olds), than those unlikely to have a mental disorder (32.2% and 37.3% respectively)'.

We all have mental health and, just like our physical health, it's something that needs to be looked after. Anxiety is one of the most common forms of mental health issues in Britain (see www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics for details) and is often a direct response to what's happening in people's lives and developmental traits.

What is anxiety?
Anxiety is a feeling of fear, worry or dread and the thought that something bad is going to happen. We all experience anxiety from time to time. Anxious thoughts and feelings can be mild and

sometimes can be overwhelming, but are natural responses to life's events.

Anxiety often presents itself with physiological symptoms in the body like sweaty palms, racing heartbeat, butterflies in the stomach and perhaps the feeling of the world speeding up or slowing down.

Think back to one of your students' first day at school (before lockdown closures). Remember how anxious they were to walk into the classroom for the first time, make eye contact, meet new friends and join in with unfamiliar activities. Anxiety provoking experiences may have prompted the student to consider:

- avoiding school altogether – flight
- resisting any new activities by challenging them – fight
- being in complete denial and look shell shocked like a rabbit in headlights – freeze.

Now fast forward a couple of months and notice how your student overcame their initial anxieties and are more settled and confident with school routines.

Anxiety is normal. It only becomes a problem when the anxious thoughts,

feelings and bodily sensations are persistently getting in the way of a child or young person living their best life. We need anxiety to work for children (for example by them reacting quickly to a fire alarm at school) rather than against them, so it's important for the adults around them to talk openly by normalising anxiety and use supportive strategies as early as possible.

Forms of anxiety
Children need consistency, boundaries and routines in order to build resilience, to develop key life skills and to grow into self-assured individuals. However, experiences such as the following all impact on what it means to grow up as a young person today:

- the uncertainty of transitioning into and out of school due to the pandemic
- children witnessing adults experience heightened levels of anxiety
- changes in societal structures and much more.

> 'Anxiety only becomes a problem when the anxious thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations are persistently getting in the way of living our best life'

Types of anxiety	Description	Example
Generalised anxiety	Exaggerated and persistent feelings getting in the way of day-to-day life.	Constantly feeling anxious about the lateral flow testing and being convinced they have Covid-19.
Separation anxiety	Afraid of being separated from a particular person, group of people or even a pet.	Returning to school and feeling anxious about being away from their family members.
Social anxiety	Being self-conscious in social situations.	Feelings of anxiety around large crowds in the classroom or lunch hall.
Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)	Repetitive thoughts (obsessions) or behaviour (compulsions).	A student keeps checking their school bag to ensure they have not left anything at home.
Panic attacks	Sudden intense feelings of fear or discomfort, with racing thoughts and physical symptoms like shortness of breath, heart palpitations and dizziness.	Hearing there will be a test at school but there's no time to study. The young person temporarily experiences a sudden rush of intense anxiety where they feel like they can't breathe, are out of control and tremble until the feelings calm down.
Phobias	Feelings of danger connected to an event, person or thing, which are not dangerous.	Being scared of heights (acrophobia) so a student avoids going to lessons in the classroom on the top floor of the school building.

Over time, these uncertainties can result in minor or temporary anxious thoughts, feelings and sensations, which may develop into the conditions shown in the 'types of anxiety' table.

Note that many children and young people with underlying developmental conditions like an ADHD diagnosis or neurodiversity have been affected even more by the pandemic, as they are susceptible to developed forms of anxiety such as those included in the table.

Supporting a young person with anxiety
Early intervention is key to children and young people's personal growth and emotional resilience. It's important for adults to normalise that it's okay to be anxious from time to time, to talk openly and model practical ways to cope with anxiety before it becomes a serious problem.

For many young people the impact of the pandemic has been incredibly overwhelming, so support from a CBT therapist, counsellor or another form of professional guidance has been a much-needed effective route in helping them process and talk through their feelings.

In my next blog, I will share some practical strategies on ways to support children and young people experiencing anxiety. This includes breathing techniques, understanding neuroscience and mindfulness-based CBT tools to support mental health and wellbeing.

If you notice any of the symptoms above in any of the young people you work with, and feel you need support, consult your school's mental health lead, school nurse or a member of the senior leadership team. See right for further reading and supportive resources. ∎

Useful reading and resources

Guidance for mental health leads
Been appointed as your school's mental health lead but unsure where to start? my.optimus-education.com/designated-mental-health-and-wellbeing-lead-guidance-and-resources

Helping pupils to manage anxiety
Adele Bates suggests strategies to help pupils manage their anxiety in school. my.optimus-education.com/helping-pupils-manage-anxiety

Supporting pupils with OCD
How can you identify the signs of OCD, and what support can be put in place? my.optimus-education.com/spotting-signs-identifying-and-supporting-pupils-ocd

Understanding anxiety poster
Put this poster up in your school to give a better understanding of anxiety. my.optimus-education.com/understanding-anxiety-poster

Being separated from friends has had an impact on children and young people

ⓘ Read Nicola's next blog post, focusing on practical strategies for overcoming anxiety, at: blog.optimus-education.com/strategies-support-anxiety

Supporting pupils with signs of depression

How do you know if a pupil is experiencing low mood or showing symptoms of depression? **KELLY HANNAGHAN** describes why language is key when talking to pupils who may be struggling with mental health issues

If we take a deep dive into the findings from the Public Health England report into the mental health of children and young people (see chapter 7 at www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillance-report), we can see the possible wide and varied impact the pandemic has had on emotional experiences.

The report highlights that loneliness has been a challenge for some children and young people, although some have reported benefits for their mental health. Some evidence suggests that young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds have experienced a higher rate of mental health and wellbeing concerns, though other studies have not found this to be the case.

Parents have reported that children and young people with SEND have been negatively affected by the pandemic, but measures of emotional and behavioural difficulties do not show a widening gap with their peers.

We can see we need to support a wide range of experiences of this pandemic.

Responding to wellbeing needs
Currently educators are navigating the new landscapes of education, while gently exploring the emotional impact that Covid-19 has had on their pupils' wellbeing and learning.

To understand these needs we need to be aware of warning signs and symptoms of decreasing mental health and wellbeing.

Possible signs and symptoms of depression

Depression affects different people in different ways. Symptoms can include:
- not wanting to do things that you previously enjoyed
- avoiding friends or social situations
- sleeping more or less than normal
- eating more or less than normal
- feeling irritable, upset, miserable or lonely
- being self-critical
- feeling hopeless
- maybe wanting to self-harm
- feeling tired and not having any energy.

'Let a child explore their feelings at their own pace and ensure they feel they are in a safe space'

These are questions to reflect on when thinking about the approach to mental health in your setting.
- Do staff receive regular high-quality mental health training?
- Do teachers know how and who to signpost concerns to regarding pupil mental health?
- Does your school have a trained counsellor onsite, or skilled staff within a pastoral team, who can effectively respond to the emotional health needs of pupils?
- Do you undertake regular wellbeing evaluations for pupils, and do you act on data collected?
- Do you involve parents/carers in understanding children and young people's mental health?
- Do you teach children and young people about mental health and wellbeing?

It is vital that school staff feel equipped and empowered to respond effectively to the emotional health needs of pupils and know where to get help if needed.

Low mood or depression?
Most lifelong mental health issues begin in childhood. Releasing the stigma around talking about mental health and feelings early on can help pupils cope better with life's challenges.

When pupils are not feeling themselves, it can be hard to differentiate between just feeling a bit low and depression. Low mood can be described as a short period of feeling tired, frustrated, or having low self-esteem. Remedies such as getting more sleep, exercising, or talking problems through can help to alleviate feelings of low mood.

It is when symptoms stay around for longer periods of time that there may be a risk of depression developing.

The language we use is key
There's never been a more important time to join up strategic thinking around emotional wellbeing. Having a whole-school approach to reach everyone across the school community, while at the same time ensuring individual needs are met, is vital.

Active listening and empathic responding are key components in helping pupils feel seen and heard. Try these suggested language scripts.
- 'I can see you are having a challenging time.'
- 'Do you know how long you have been feeling like this?'
- 'What do you need to feel better?'
- 'I wonder if there is anything we can do to help you manage these feelings?'
- 'You have been here before and you have got through this.'
- 'I am here to listen and to understand.'
- 'What may have helped you in the past?'
- 'Some of these feelings may be a normal reaction to an unnormal situation.'
- 'If you had the power to change one thing, what would that be?'
- 'Talking things through can sometimes help.'
- 'What would feeling better look like for you?'

The most important message here is to let a child explore their feelings at their own pace and ensure they feel they are in a safe space to have these delicate conversations. Listen fully and pass on any safeguarding concerns for the pupil to your designated safeguarding officers.

Relationships at the heart of education
Trust and empathy are key ingredients in having sensitive conversations. Understanding the impact of our words can also play a huge part in helping children feel comfortable. The language we use has incredible power in re-establishing safe relationships.

If you look after the wellbeing of a pupil, it takes care of the learning. I have supported many schools with strategies to grow positive cultures in education and know first-hand that placing an emphasis on wellbeing increases the positive outcomes for pupils and their families.

People often ask me how wellbeing can be measured. My reply is simple: you only have to walk into an environment to sense if the people there are happy and engaged. A key question to ask yourself is 'would your younger self thrive in your school community?'

A wellbeing curriculum for all
For schools to successfully support the wellbeing and mental health needs of pupils, it is vital that they have the right resources and materials to aid their delivery of purposeful wellbeing intervention, along with early help and preventative measures. These are some of my 'go to' resources.

The Kent Resilience Hub is a pool of resources and support to help everyone cope better with the pressures of everyday life. The website features different sections aimed at supporting young people, parents and carers, and schools and communities to understand emotional wellbeing and resilience.

MoodSpark provides a place for young people to learn how to look after their emotional and mental health and find ways to help them bounce back when life gets tough.

Wellbeing buddies primary resource is a free digital resource for primary aged pupils. Contact The Education People at www.theeducationpeople.org for details.

Bringing it all together
Children and young people need to feel safe and secure to discuss how they are feeling. Consistency with a shared language approach is key. Investing time and funding into high-quality resources, along with creating a directory of resources and conversation starters that every member of staff has access to, can help build knowledge.

Supporting children and young people to reframe their thinking and to normalise thoughts can be a great starting point in providing the social scaffolding to respond to any delicate needs.

Involving parents where appropriate and developing purposeful interventions and learning for mental health and wellbeing can be a preventative measure against developing complex emotional health issues such as depression. ■

Upcoming conference

The next *Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools* conference is due to take place in November 2021. Keep an eye out for programme details at **healthinschoolsuk.com**

ℹ **For more practical support suggestions, watch Sam Garner's workshop session on depression and low mood at my.optimus-education.com/video-supporting-young-people-affected-depression**

Self-regulation for pupils with extreme behaviour

For pupils who have experienced trauma, abuse, or have additional needs, self-regulation can be harder to achieve. **ADELE BATES** shares ways to support these pupils

A headteacher recently shared with me that one of their vulnerable pupils had a meltdown on hearing about January's lockdown announcement. Screaming, anger, violence, throwing, swearing – they were dis-regulated. The emotions they were experiencing – the fear, the unknown, the lack of control, the dread – could not be contained.

This article shares what we can do as educators to support pupils in such distressing situations, whatever the cause. It is the second part to my article 'Self-regulation for staff and pupils' (see my.optimus-education.com/self-regulation-staff-and-pupils). I implore you to start there and remind yourself that, if we cannot regulate ourselves, we cannot support our distressed young people to do so.

What is normal?

In one SEMH school I worked in, I witnessed something miraculous. All these pupils had been excluded from at least one mainstream school (one of them had got up to six) for their behaviour. Some of them had been offered counselling or therapy as an intervention, and very few took it up – it was something strange and weird for them.

However, in the SEMH school the therapist was onsite during all school hours and every pupil had an allocated therapy slot. By the second term every pupil had accessed therapy in some way, most of them in regular slots weekly – because it was normal. Therapy was no longer something for 'bad' or 'broken' people, it was part of our community.

'Resist the temptation to shout, issue out punishments or recite threats'

Our therapist, 'Miss Fred', was on the SLT and would serve the dinners on occasions that TAs were struggling. She and the concept of positive mental health and therapy had become normalised – and the pupils benefitted.

In your setting, you may not have access to such resources; however, you do have the opportunity to discuss mental health in your everyday classroom and integrate it into the lexicon of your micro community.

Some schools use frameworks and programmes that use colours or words, such as 'I'm feeling fizzy/red/in the attic today.' I heard of one school that had different colour chairs and pupils were invited to sit on the one that felt closest to how they felt. It is used by staff and pupils – modelling that everyone is affected by their emotions. You'll read in the first article of my own examples of how appropriately sharing my own vulnerabilities at times enabled pupils to step up and become more independent with their learning. The advantage to this is that, as educators, we can differentiate!

Differentiate for learning needs

It is a form of formative assessment; if we know that a pupil is 'fizzy' it may not be the best time to tell them that they've done badly in a test. How would that make us feel ourselves? How would that help their learning?

Instead, we can account for their mental health state and adapt the lesson accordingly. Maybe they start with recapping times tables if they're good at this, as it makes them feel calm and that they have the potential to achieve in your lesson.

Differentiation in action

For my forthcoming book, *Miss, I don't give a sh*t*, I interviewed Rachel W, a canine-assisted therapist with over 20 years of experience working with SEMH pupils, and a child in care herself before that.

When working in a therapy-based residential school and children's home, Rachel explained how, if a particular pupil came in without his tie, they knew it would be a bad day for him, often resulting in three to four hours of restraining to keep him and others safe.

Once they knew the pattern, however, they adapted to prevent the situation escalating. Without a tie, they would send him back to his home area. He may not return for a while, but once he did, they knew he was safe to be on the premises and ready to learn.

Their knowledge of the pupil, his patterns and challenges enabled them to differentiate for his learning needs – enabling him to regulate himself without further shame or punishment.

Helping pupils to regulate

Pupils with SEMH have a SEND, which should be differentiated accordingly. The challenge can often be that it is the behaviour we see first – and that is what we react to, often through punishment.

Instead, we must investigate what this behaviour is communicating, what's behind it, and then we can adapt the learning. That might be that taking a lesson outside, dancing out the times tables or writing an essay under the table. If it gets done, does it matter?

Another book interviewee of mine, author and founder and head of the revolutionary Hive School, Kate McAllister, advocates that helping pupils to regulate their own bodies can avoid a lot of distress or negative behaviour.

If we can teach pupils that when they are feeling anxious, breathing, stretching or moving can biologically calm their nervous system, then we are teaching them a useful tool for the rest of their lives.

Keep calm and carry on

So now the pupil is in your face, threatening to hit you. What do you do?

Find that part within yourself that doesn't need to react. Heightened emotions from anyone in our vicinity affect us, and if we are not conscious then we will heighten too. But we are the educators, we are the adults; if you can, remain calm. Resist the temptation to shout, issue punishments or recite threats. The most important thing is safety. If the pupil, you or anyone else is not safe, this is your priority.

I learnt this all too well myself when, on one memorable school trip to the public library, a pupil dangled themselves off the balcony. Respect for property was not the talk needed then; instead a calm, reassuring approach to get them out of danger was required.

Once the danger has passed the next step is to help them regulate – and this may take a while. For pupils who have had or currently have challenging, dysregulated home lives, reacting in this way may be their means to survival.

Wait until the pupil feels calm and regulated again before trying to talk about their behaviour

For a child who is often not fed, being loud and aggressive may be the strategy that prevents them from being forgotten – the strategy that enables them to eat. In your safe environment at school, this may seem an out-of-context strategy, but it is a learnt and trusted one. How can they trust you if other adults have let them down?

If a strategy has always worked for them (consciously or otherwise), how would they know it isn't appropriate, unless they're taught that and given the opportunity to get it wrong and try again?

Safety first, learning second

As Rachel shared with me, for some pupils who struggle to control their emotions, who often express them as anger and violence, sometimes the thing they need to hear to make them stop is the clear message that they can stop. Being at the height of anger is a scary place, even if it's you who is there. Rachel suggests clear, simple instructions: 'You need to stop this now, I'm worried about you.'

From there, give a pupil space and time to re-regulate. Do they need water? A blanket? A walk? To throw stones in the sea? What physical action could help their body understand they are safe?

Until you have found this, and the pupil feels regulated again, there is no point trying to reason with them or have in depth conversations about behaviour – they are on alert; their entire biological system perceives it to be in danger. When you're looking at the eye of the tiger, it's not the time to learn Pythagoras theory. Safety first, learning second.

A starting point

These tips won't stop pupils de-regulating completely, but they are a start on how to support pupils who have these additional needs.

Alongside this we return to the staff – some incidents, for whatever reason, trigger us. Sometimes you can't be that calm adult who holds the space. In the moment, don't be afraid to pass to another member of staff: we all need to at some points.

Look after yourself so that you can better support your most vulnerable pupils. ■

Reading and resources

Blogs at adelebateseducation.co.uk:
- Behaviour – it's all about context
- Caution: Proceed with thought and curiosity
- *Miss, I don't give a sh*t* – the book and the TEDx talk

www.traumainform.com

Led by Frederique Lambrakis-Haddad, aka 'Miss Fred', this is an organisation supporting schools with children who have experienced trauma.

Book recommendation:

Fear is the Mind Killer by Kate McAllister and Dr James Mannion

Effective questioning with SEND pupils

Asking questions is a vital part of teaching. NATALIE PACKER explores ways to support the process for pupils who may have cognition and learning needs, communication difficulties or anxiety

'The important thing is not to stop questioning,' said Albert Einstein. Questioning is central to developing our thinking and our capacity to learn. It is essential to enable pupils to practise their responses verbally, to check their understanding, to assess knowledge and to facilitate retrieval. Skilful questioning in the classroom is one of the most powerful tools available to you as a teacher as it makes the thinking process visible.

In his article 'Principles of instruction: research-based strategies that all teachers should know', Barak Rosenshine notes that that more effective teachers tend to ask more questions, involve more pupils, probe in more depth and take more time to explain and clarify.

Quality is key, and you will need to carefully consider your questioning as part of the planning process, as well as targeting questions towards individual pupils appropriately. Knowing a pupil well will help you to target your questioning effectively; some pupils like to think aloud and will be eager to share their responses whilst others may not understand what is being asked, find it difficult to process the information quickly or lack confidence to answer.

For those pupils who have cognition and learning needs, communication difficulties or anxiety, here are some suggested strategies to support them through the questioning process.

Create the right climate
An inclusive approach to questioning will ensure everyone in the class contributes effectively. This starts with creating a climate where pupils feel safe to make mistakes and know it's ok to have a go, even if they are unsure.

It is important that all contributions are valued by you, other adults and the rest of the class. Embedding a 'no-hands up' rule and using cold calling instead can help to make the questioning process more inclusive because all pupils are likely to be asked for a response. It also allows you to pitch your questions at an appropriate level.

Prepare pupils for questioning
To develop a pupil's confidence, prepare them in advance by telling them what the key questions will be in the lesson, so they have time to consider their response. Pre-teach the vocabulary

'All pupils, including those with cognitive needs, should have the opportunity to respond to more complex questions'

that pupils will need to respond to these key questions. If the pupil finds it difficult to hold a question in their head, provide it to them in a written form on a Post-it note or whiteboard. Alternatively, voice-record the question so the pupil can replay it several times to remind themselves.

When asking a question directly to a pupil, it is often helpful to use their name first, so their attention is drawn, helping them to focus on the question from the start. If you are unsure that the pupil will be able to answer independently, ask for responses from others first so the pupil can hear examples.

Allow wait time
A lot of research has been conducted into the impact of teachers allowing more time between posing a question and accepting an answer, with benefits including lengthier responses and a reduction in responses of 'I don't know' (search online for Melissa Kelly's article 'Wait Time in Education' for some background).

Try increasing the wait time in your class, particularly if a pupil finds processing a challenge, or if the question requires a more in-depth response.

Once you have given wait time, if a pupil is still unsure, repeat the question in the same way, unless you think the vocabulary was too difficult to understand, in which case you might try rephrasing it. Give the pupil time to talk to a partner before answering a question, perhaps using the **Think-Pair-Share** strategy where pupils talk to a peer and agree on a response before sharing it with the rest of the group.

Alternatively, try **Pose, Pause, Pounce**, **Bounce.** This is

where you ask a question to the class, give everyone thinking time, ask for a response from one pupil and then ask a second or third pupil to evaluate or add to the previous pupil's answer. Some pupils may find it easier to respond to someone else's answer during the 'bounce' phase.

Use a range of question types
Effective questioning involves using both closed and open-ended questions at the right time and with the right pupil. Closed questions are often best used for recalling taught content, whilst more open-ended questions can support pupils to express and develop their ideas, opinions and reasoning. The Education Endowment Foundation's original guidance report 'Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants' (2015) introduces a simple questioning matrix that can help you or other adults in your classroom to structure open and closed questions (see page 19 of the report).

Try allowing more time between posing a question and accepting an answer

There is a danger of questioning demonstrating low expectations, for example if simple, superficial responses are praised or if certain pupils are only asked lower order questions. All pupils, including those with cognitive needs, should have the opportunity to respond to more complex questions. To initiate deeper thinking, try using **Thunks**. These are seemingly simple questions that can encourage higher order thinking, for example 'What colour is Tuesday?', or 'Can you have a friend that you don't really like?'.

Thunks can be used to spark general thinking or can be more targeted towards specific topics. For pupils who have social communication needs, remember that it might be helpful to ask very clear questions, avoiding too many idioms and metaphors.

Scaffold your questioning
If a pupil is struggling to answer, try scaffolding your questioning to enable them to succeed with support. If a pupil lacks confidence, start by asking a question they are likely to be able to respond to positively, so they experience success before moving on to providing additional challenge with a more complex question. Using multiple-choice and providing options can make responding to questions less threatening. If the pupil is

still unable to respond, try the **Phone a friend technique**: here a pupil who is struggling to answer can nominate another pupil to suggest an answer on their behalf. The first pupil still has to contribute by building on the other pupil's response. ■

Reflect on the inclusiveness of your questioning technique

1. How do I create an effective climate for questioning in my class, so all pupils feel comfortable to contribute?
2. Do I take the time to consider key questions when planning?
3. Do I prepare pupils for questioning and allow sufficient wait time to ensure quality responses?
4. Do I and other adults in my classroom use a range of questioning types effectively and scaffold questions where needed?
5. What other strategies could I use to make questioning for pupils with SEND even more effective?

SEND award

The *SEND Inclusion Award* supports schools in improving outcomes for pupils with SEND and creating an inclusive environment where all pupils participate fully in school life. Find out more at **www.awardplace.co.uk**

ⓘ For more examples of inclusive questioning strategies, take a look at Amjad Ali's webinar at my.optimus-education.com/video-cpd-effective-questioning-strategies

BLOG POST

What next for safeguarding leads?

LUKE RAMSDEN reflects on experiences of the return to full schooling and implications for the summer term and new academic year

I imagine that school staff around the country were delighted when we realised that we could all return in person for the last few weeks of the spring term. The Easter break then brought a welcome opportunity to reflect on what we had experienced in that month after the return, and how that was likely to affect the summer term and beyond. Here are my seven key points for consideration.

1. Covid-19 security and attendance

I'm sure many of us were relieved that the expectation on schools to oversee Covid-19 testing on site only lasted for a few weeks. However, it's likely that all schools will need to factor other continuing Covid-19 precautions into their plans, not just for the summer term but for the next academic year. Most scientists agree that there will be new, hopefully smaller, resurgences in Covid-19, particularly as we come into autumn and winter.

For safeguarding and pastoral leads one of the big issues that is likely to arise is the balancing of continuing Covid-19 fears and vaccine hesitancy with school attendance. Being able to offer a Covid-secure environment in schools is likely to be an important part of reassuring nervous parents and students that it is safe for them to come into school.

2. Blended learning

It is likely that blended learning in one form or another is with us to stay. In the first place many schools will now want – or be asked by parents and carers – to still provide online learning as an option. For instance, if a student breaks a leg and cannot attend school, but is otherwise well, they could attend online. Some schools are even looking at the feasibility of having online lessons if, for instance, snow prevents school from being physically open.

It is also likely that in the 2021/22 academic year, perhaps even just at a local level, Covid resurgences mean that students have to self-isolate if they have suspected Covid-19 or are contacts. The January 2021 version of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' includes the optimistic line that Covid-related guidance 'has now been withdrawn as the government expects all settings across the nation to reopen for the new academic year in September, with full availability to all learners'.

Schools would be well advised to keep their coronavirus protocols for online learning and attendance in their policies in case they do face these problems in the new academic year.

3. Balancing catch-up and wellbeing

One of the crucial jobs of the safeguarding lead and the pastoral team will be to work with all the teaching staff to ensure that the importance of catching up academically is balanced with student wellbeing.

Increasingly, mental health experts are describing the process of recovering from

> 'Happy students will catch up better with their work'

Covid-19 as a mass recovery from trauma (see the BBC Future" article 'How to heal the "mass trauma" of Covid-19' for more on this). Clearly part of that recovery is getting children back into the classroom and getting them back on track, given the rightful concerns of the amount that many will have fallen behind. The important thing is for schools to realise that there is a balance to be struck.

Happy students will catch up better with their work, and students who feel they are doing well at their school work will be happier and less stressed – so making time for wellbeing initiatives will be time well spent.

4. Behaviour

When speaking with staff in other schools, I'm hearing again and again that pupils of all ages are having to relearn how to be in school and socialise with each other. For younger learners this even includes getting physically used to school playtime, with school nurses up and down the country dealing with far more bumps and bruises from the playground.

More serious is the psychological adjustment to being back with friends in person as well as school expectations around behaviour after months at

Adjusting to being back together with friends may take time

home. While schools need to maintain high standards and deal appropriately with bullying, there should also be an understanding that students will make mistakes as they reintegrate into school life.

5. Communication with external agencies

Along with behavioural issues come the growing number of serious issues that are requiring referral to social services, CAMHS or other external agencies. With spiralling demand for their support it is not surprising that schools are facing significant push back, with large numbers of students being referred straight back to school as the thresholds for making a referral become even higher. (To hear how these pressures are playing out in practice, check out the BBC *File on 4* episode 'Surviving Self-Harm'.)

The government is promising extra money for mental health support for students with its 'Covid-19 mental health and wellbeing recovery action plan'. In the meantime, it is very important that safeguarding leads have the confidence to re-refer students if they feel that a situation is worsening or if they feel that the external agency has got it wrong in the first place in not taking on a case. At the same time, schools need to be pragmatic and realise that more and more of the burden for pastoral care is falling on schools, even with quite serious cases.

Anything that can be done to support teachers here will be positive, for instance providing mental health first aid training (see mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/resources/for-schools/). There are many free resources out there, such as the Public Health England training course 'Psychological First Aid: Supporting Children and Young People', hosted on www.futurelearn.com.

6. Staff wellbeing

While children are at the heart of all that we do, it is important not to forget staff wellbeing at this time. The same anxieties and concerns faced by children are also faced by adults, and in many ways as we return to school it becomes clear that children are rather more flexible and happy with change than grown-ups.

Any demands from government for catch-up work and greater efforts to support students have to be balanced with realism for teachers who have been faced with online schooling, blended learning and also marking and grading school assessments in place of GCSE's and A-levels this summer.

7. Importance of PSHE

The focus on student wellbeing has been amplified by the justified anger about levels of sexist behaviour and violence towards girls in schools that has been evidenced in recent weeks. All schools should be looking carefully at their PSHE/RSE policies to ensure that what is being taught is appropriate and relevant to the students, and also is being delivered in the right way.

While Covid-19 has made it harder to bring in external speakers to schools in person, there has been an explosion in the range and quality of outstanding PSHE resources available to schools (see Annex B of the statutory RSE and health education guidance for ideas). It is also very easy now for schools to bring external experts remotely into schools to talk to their students – actually making it easier for schools to access this expertise. ∎

Support for safeguarding leads

Are you a DSL or safeguarding lead looking to build your support network? The *Leading Safeguarding* conference is taking place in June 2021. Join us for interactive digital modules designed with leading experts and a wealth of downloadable resources, including recordings of every session. Details at **my.optimus-education.com/conferences**

> For downloadable resources such as PSHE lessons and an RSE model policy template, visit my.optimus-education.com/topic/pshe-and-smsc

Managing child-on-child assault and harassment

The 'Everyone's Invited' movement has gathered thousands of testimonies of child-on-child sexual abuse, violence and harassment. Education lawyer **DAI DURBRIDGE** suggests how schools should respond

Everyone's Invited is a platform which enables survivors of sexual abuse and harassment to share their stories. Thousands of young people have contributed testimonies and detailed school-related experiences (see www.everyonesinvited.uk). Whether or not your school is named on the platform, it's important to reassure students, parents, staff and your wider community about how seriously you take this issue: from the ways in which you educate your students about their behaviour, to how you create a safe, open and inclusive environment, and the steps you have taken or will take to manage allegations of peer-on-peer abuse.

Aspects of this issue to consider include:
- managing reports relating to current students
- managing reports where the alleged perpetrator has left your setting
- previously investigated reports
- statement for press, parents, stakeholders and the wider community
- insurance considerations
- data protection issues – sharing and retaining evidence
- policy, procedure and staff training
- further help and support.

At Browne Jacobson, we've put together guidance on managing these different aspects, which you can access at **oego.co/everyones_invited_guidance**

Implications for safeguarding policies
Ofsted is carrying out a review of safeguarding policies in state and independent schools and colleges in relation to sexual abuse (see www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-review-of-sexual-abuse for detail).

Take time now to ensure your policies and procedures are up to date. Are you confident that your staff have received the appropriate safeguarding training and that you can evidence the outcomes of that training – their knowledge?

Note that it's not just your child protection and safeguarding policy that needs review, but also any relevant policies, such as

allegations of abuse against staff. The team at Browne Jacobson regularly review the Optimus Education model policies to ensure they are appropriate and up to date (visit oego.co/modelpolicy to see the full range of model policy templates).

Keep the following points in mind when reviewing your policy.
- Make sure your policy is clearly written and easy to understand – if your policy is hard to follow or poorly written, staff will disengage.
- Keep it succinct, sharp and focused – make sure you cover what's required, and remove content which is no longer relevant.
- Review the draft policy thoroughly with relevant team members, such as your safeguarding governor.
- Your policy must be disseminated to staff, read, understood, and used in staff training.

Curriculum and culture
It would not be a surprise if the Ofsted review went a little wider than just policies and started looking at how you teach students about safeguarding, healthy relationships, respectful behaviour and consent, how sexual violence and sexual harassment is always wrong, and how you promote an open, honest and respectful culture in your setting.

Again, it makes sense to consider your approach now. Review how you manage reports and how easy it is for students to make them. Cast a critical eye over your culture and engage with students about how they feel about reporting, what barriers they believe exist and what they think would make for a better approach. ◼

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