



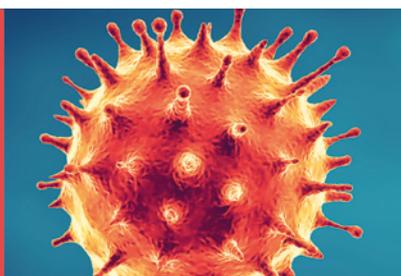
Insight

Updates, guidance and resources for your whole leadership team

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Welcome to Optimus Education Insight

Dear Reader

Six months on from the last magazine, and I'm still in my living room office, and life has not returned to normal! Covid-19 has changed our lives, and schools have been fully in the eye of the storm. Whether you've been tasked with reading and implementing the reams of government guidance, making a swift transition to online teaching, reaching out to vulnerable children and families – you are all heroes and have achieved incredible things in the face of immense challenges.

Recognising those achievements and finding the positives in this situation is so important. Nickii Messer set out to discover what lessons from lockdown school business managers would be taking forwards – turn to page 18 for an inspiring read.

Of course, the new term has seen a whole set of new challenges to grapple with. Have you considered how you might be spending your catch-up premium? See page 12 for suggestions. How are you going to continue bringing your community together, and promote mental health and wellbeing? During the summer, I was fortunate in being able to (virtually) meet with Sharon Gray OBE and understand more about her approach to creating a safe space for learning (page 8). Emotional health, ethical leadership and resilience will all be needed to move forwards together.



Liz Worthen
Head of Content
Optimus Education

School
heroes



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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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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

SEPTEMBER

Child Protection in Education

22 SEPTEMBER – 6 OCTOBER, DIGITAL
Legal guidance and vital updates on new and emerging safeguarding issues.

[SEN and Safeguarding](#)

Delivering Statutory RSE

28 SEPTEMBER – 12 OCTOBER, DIGITAL
Gain practical strategies and resources to deliver statutory RSE in an inclusive and appropriate way.

[Teaching and Learning](#)

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

DPO Foundation Training

10, 12, 17 & 19 NOVEMBER, DIGITAL
Ensure you are equipped and able to evidence training for your GDPR compliance role.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

DPO Training Update

19, 24 & 26 NOVEMBER AND 1 DECEMBER, DIGITAL
Ensure you are up to date, staying compliant and able to evidence training for your GDPR compliance role.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools

16, 24 & 30 NOVEMBER AND 8 DECEMBER, DIGITAL
Hear from and network with leading experts and practitioners and take away proven strategies and resources to make a real difference to students affected by mental health difficulties.

[SEN and Safeguarding](#)

Supporting Staff Wellbeing

17 & 25 NOVEMBER AND 1 & 9 DECEMBER, DIGITAL
Create a whole-school environment that prioritises staff wellbeing, ensuring effective teaching and support.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

Driving Sustainable Growth in Multi-Academy Trusts

26 NOVEMBER AND 2 DECEMBER, DIGITAL
Update your procurement strategy to increase productivity and encourage progression through centralised and efficient processes.

[School Business Management](#)

FEBRUARY

SEND Leadership

WEDNESDAY 3 FEBRUARY, LONDON
Develop effective SEND leadership within a mainstream environment.

[SEN and Safeguarding](#)

MENA Inclusion and Wellbeing

23 FEBRUARY – 25 FEBRUARY, DUBAI
Create a culture that promotes inclusion and wellbeing within the classroom.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

MARCH

Curriculum Impact

THURSDAY 11 MARCH, LONDON
DATE TBC, DIGITAL
Drive achievement through rich and ambitious quality of education.

[Teaching and Learning](#)

Leading Business Strategy

FRIDAY 12 MARCH, LONDON
Develop and enrich your business leadership and income generation.

[School Business Management](#)

MATs Summit

25 MARCH – 26 MARCH, BIRMINGHAM
Aiming to provoke thought and enable networking with MATs nationwide, sharing best practice to empower your executive office to move as one.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

Building Whole-School Stakeholder Engagement

DATE TBC, DIGITAL
Effective communication and collaboration with your community.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

MAY

HR and Employment Law

DATE TBC, LONDON
A comprehensive legal update, providing clarity on a range of subjects, with the opportunity to learn from interactive mock scenarios with industry professionals.

[School Business Management](#)

HR and Employment Law

DATE TBC, MANCHESTER
A comprehensive legal update, providing clarity on a range of subjects, with the opportunity to learn from interactive mock scenarios with industry professionals.

[School Business Management](#)

JUNE

Leading Safeguarding

DATE TBC, LONDON
Managing safeguarding with rigour and confidence.

[SEN and Safeguarding](#)

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.

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

'How do we know that schools are safe?' is a question we've heard a lot recently. In our interview with Sharon Gray OBE (see overleaf), the focus was very much on creating a safe space for learning – a space where staff, pupils, families and community can reconnect and thrive. It's fine not to know all the answers, says Sharon – but by working together, we can find many of the solutions.

One of the questions coming up for school leaders in the state sector is how to make the best use of the catch-up premium. Headteacher Josephine Smith shares her thinking and suggests tactics for different pupil groups. With so many pressures on school leaders this term, wellbeing must be a priority. John Dabell explores the role of governors in providing supportive challenge. And are you thinking about next year's pupil numbers? Marketing expert Emily Richards identifies three essential activities to support recruitment.

A further crucial question is posed by Nicola Harvey: what practical action can we take to promote diversity and combat racism in schools? See page 16 for ideas.

Top leadership and governance blogs

Let's move the conversation on: what's the future you want to create? oego.co/moving_on

St Bartholomew's Primary: from empty building to school of rock oego.co/making_music

Education recovery: bridging the gap of opportunity for staff and pupils post pandemic oego.co/recovery

See more at blog.optimus-education.com

Contributors in this issue



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Nicola Harvey is a SEND teacher, therapist and mindfulness practitioner. She is the author of *Mindful Little Yogis: Self-Regulation Tools to Empower Kids with Special Needs to Breathe and Relax*. [@HarveyHeals](#)



Sharon Gray OBE is a Pride of Britain award winner, a national leader of education and a consultant who puts emotional health and wellbeing at the heart of everything. [@SgraySharon](#)

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BLOG POST

How do we create a safe space for learning?

Reconnection, co-construction and courage: Liz Worthen talks to **SHARON GRAY OBE** about the importance of vulnerability, trust, collaboration and community re-building

Q You've been working with the Embark Federation on their 'Reconnection to Recovery and Resilience Pathway'. Why is the idea of reconnection so important?

My experience throughout my leadership has been about reconnecting and co-creating a psychologically safe space, which becomes a secure base from which everybody can flourish and thrive. As a headteacher, I worked in schools which had gone into special measures and entire communities had been fragmented.

I'm very interested in the neuroscience of learning. Metacognition can't take place if we're dysregulated – perhaps we're in the 'fight, flight, freeze' response that comes from our reptilian brain because we're in a state of anxiety. Then we can't access the limbic brain which gives us the emotional engagement and the curiosity which enables us to delve into learning.

If those two parts of the brain aren't connected, then that cognition – or metacognition – simply can't take place. We need to reconnect to enable a pathway through to resilience, and that ability to achieve and attain, in both the short and long term.

Q So how did the Embark Federation pathway come about?

I got to know Matthew Crawford, Chief Executive of the Embark Federation, when he was doing his NPQH. He was inspired by the idea of making a school whole

'If we dare to all come together, then we can find many of the solutions'

again and part of the community, and this became part of his own leadership vision.

When the pandemic hit and talk turned to school closures, Matthew asked me to work with his team in keeping as strong as possible for each other, and for the children, as they moved forward. It started with a Zoom meeting of 40 staff from across the trust. I was information gathering: what's going on for us? What issues are we experiencing? What might be the issues going forward? What's going well?

From there we created a map showing where we might go – a pathway with nine focus areas. Not an off the shelf curriculum, but a pathway for reconnection (for details, see my.optimus-education.com/reconnection-recovery-and-resilience-rising-strong-pathway).

Q What did this mean for staff?

Nine teams came together from across the group of schools. Our aim was to facilitate teams of highly skilled practitioners. Not experts, because none of us had been through a pandemic before! But we created a psychologically safe space, knowing that yes, we would get some things wrong, but also knowing that we needed to stand out and do something – because doing nothing would mean

getting a lot more wrong.

Workload was a big concern for everyone. But the purpose of this approach was to reduce replication and duplication. By being focused, targeted and collaborative, we would reduce workload.

One significant impact that we hadn't thought about at the beginning was how we created opportunities to facilitate connection between staff members who hadn't worked together before. Even the most vulnerable staff, such as those who were shielding, felt they were doing something proactive and productive to move forward.

Q That notion of the 'safe space' is a really important one at the moment. Can you tell me more?

I know myself that as a professional I like to come across as ok and fine, and present in a way that is as successful as can be, which sometimes means that I will mask how I'm truly feeling inside. There's an element of professionalism in that – and pride.

We all carry that. Families may fear the potential stigma in sharing for the first time that they're in financial difficulties when they've always managed before. Our teachers are desperate not to let their colleagues and the children down.

But actually, in order to be steady and



emotionally available to the staff members and children returning to school, we need to be emotionally healthy ourselves. It's that idea of putting on your own oxygen mask before helping others.

One of the teams took on responsibility for finding out what our stakeholders (including pupils and staff) were experiencing, through questionnaires – which we made sure were accessible to everyone. The information we gathered helped us work out the best way to target resources and finances, as well as enabling us to develop bespoke risk assessments for each setting.

From the outset, by doing what we were doing, we were living the values of the trust. Coming together as that collective family and trusting each other. We felt that though we weren't experts, we had the solutions within – if we could just stand by each other's side – and show up. Knowing that sometimes we're going to get it wrong, and that's what learning is. All of this resonates from an amazing woman: Brené Brown. My favourite book is *Rising Strong!*

Q Courageous leadership is something you talk about a lot too. What does that mean to you?

Look at leaders such as Jacinda Ardern. It seems to me that she spends very little time worrying about what people think of her. She shows up with authenticity and generosity of spirit. And that is really key for me. I go back to the courage to be

'We ignore the emotional needs of our children and our colleagues at our peril'

vulnerable. To say, you know what, I don't know all the answers. But if we dare to all come together, then we can find many of the solutions.

It's not driven by ego. Of course I want to be seen as someone who's doing ok at my work – but if I'm engulfed with that, or don't share an idea because I'm worried about being wrong, then I'm slipping back into that mindset of what other people think of me is more important than my contribution to this piece of work.

When I was a headteacher, I did at times get into that adrenaline junkie state, hooked on 'saving the world'. But you can't connect to real cognition and reflection – and certainly not engagement and empathy – when you're in that place. So how can you lead?

You're also putting your physical health at risk; the body holds that stress. Better to surround ourselves with a kind, compassionate, empathic crew, who will give us that safe feedback. It's ok not to be ok. If we're modelling ethical and courageous leadership, I think that's possibly the best place from which children can go on to achieve and attain.

We ignore the emotional needs of our children and our colleagues at our peril. If we don't get it as right as possible, the catch

up will go on for years and years and years.

Q Do you feel hopeful for the future?

What can come out of this for me is to rethink the system around how we support our children and our staff. And to draw from this the positives that we can weave through into how we co-create the new future. At Embark Federation, it's around a curriculum which is as rich in hope and humanity as it is in knowledge.

And knowing that to really create that sense of safety, you need all those tiny moments that add together, and enable us to enter into the vulnerable position of learning. Through adversity, with relationships: that's what facilitates resilience. ■

Developing a community that supports mental health

Sharon Gray will be a keynote speaker at the upcoming *Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools* conference, alongside Professor Barry Carpenter. For further details and booking visit healthinschoolsuk.com

Download example resources from the rising strong pathway at my.optimus-education.com/reconnection-recovery-and-resilience-rising-strong-pathway

Three essential marketing activities for schools

Schools are in a competitive environment and it is often the responsibility of non-marketers to promote schools to prospective families. **EMILY RICHARDS** explores three effective channels

Note: this article focuses on channels for primary schools, although many of the tips are applicable to secondary schools too.

School marketing plays a crucial role in boosting your school's profile and positively impacting pupil applications. However, choosing where to focus your marketing efforts can be daunting and knowing how to generate results even more so.

Use the mantra: less is more. Keep it simple. Focus on fewer marketing activities and do them well. Three essential ones for primary schools are:

1. word of mouth
2. nursery liaison
3. get visible in your community.

1. Word of mouth

Word of mouth is the number one marketing channel at many schools, with parents hearing about a school on the 'friends and family grapevine'. It is the most trusted source of information about a school in the eyes of prospective parents.

In this way, current parents hold the potential to be great ambassadors for a school and their positivity should be harnessed. This can be done in several ways.

Ask parents to refer a friend

New starter families (e.g. Reception or Year 7 parents) are a good place to start. They are excited about joining your school and are likely to be enthusiastic about spreading the word.

Take a personal approach; check in with them about their initial experience at your school. Ask them whether they know a family at their former nursery, a neighbour or family member who would be interested in the school and whether they'd be happy inviting them to do a school visit.

Ask parents to share flyers

Create a promotional flyer, for example inviting prospective parents to an open event, and send it home in book bags or via email with a note asking parents to pass it on to someone who might be interested in attending.

'Word of mouth is the number one marketing channel at many schools'

Create parent ambassadors

Identify five to 10 of your school's biggest advocates and invite them to be parent ambassadors, supporting your school in various ways such as the following.

- Parent testimonial videos: film parents talking about what they like about the school and what they feel it has done for their child. Use the videos across the school's website, social media, in promotional flyers, newsletter, admissions information etc.
- Speak to prospective families: invite parent ambassadors along to open events. Prospective families will appreciate the opportunity to get first-hand feedback about the school and will trust these parents' opinions.

2. Nursery liaison

Create a structured programme of engagement with the key nurseries in your catchment area. If your school has its own nursery, make it clear to other nurseries that you are not interested in poaching their early years children and that your focus is Reception entry.

Be selective which nurseries you approach. It's better to build stronger relationships with a handful of nurseries than sporadically engaging with a larger number.

Arrange a date for a meeting with the nursery manager. Your Early Years or Reception staff are the ideal people for this meeting. The main thing is to make it clear what the school can offer the nursery. The nursery manager will be interested in things that will benefit the nursery children's experience and/or that strengthens their engagement with parents. Make this your focus rather than a recruitment campaign for your school.

Remain compliant with the GDPR and make it clear that you are contacting the nursery because your school has previously



Offer support to feeder schools or nurseries, such as pupil readers

had children from them or that you understand their parents may consider your school for their children – this is classed as legitimate interest.

Involve your pupils

- Pupil helpers: offer regular support, such as Year 6 pupils visiting the nursery to read stories or help with craft activities.
- Past nursery pupils: ask pupils who attended the nursery to write about what they liked and how this has helped them at school. Pass these on to the nursery to use in their newsletters or pin on a board for parents to see. It's great PR for them so they should be happy to help!

Events at the nursery

- Piggyback existing nursery events e.g. the school choir singing carols at the nursery's Christmas party (ideally when nursery parents are present).
- Parent workshops: offer to run workshops at the nursery that will be useful to nursery parents such as 'Starting primary school – five ways to prepare your child'.
- Invite staff, children and parents to attend an event at your school e.g. an author visit, a concert or performance, an opportunity to use your outside space or facilities, or for parents to attend a relevant seminar such as 'How technology is used in teaching and learning at XYZ school'.

'Don't be a hidden gem – use signage on your school premises and boundaries so that families know you are there'

- Consider hosting pre-school activity providers at your school such as 'Baby Brahms' classes at the weekends or during school holidays.
- Always ensure nursery children or parents take a branded 'goodie' home with them, for example a postcard to colour in, a sticker, a balloon or a pencil.

3. Get visible!

Many schools struggle with standing out in their catchment area, yet there are lots of ways of achieving this.

Use your school premises

Don't be a hidden gem – use signage on your school premises and boundaries so that families know you are there. 'A-boards' and vinyl banners are great, low cost options.

Ensure your website is tip top

Your website is one of the first places that prospective parents will go to understand more about your school. Ensure that it communicates clearly how your school is unique, that information is accurate and that there are strong calls to action such as an invitation to register for an open event or to book a school visit.

Reach high volumes of people with a leaflet distribution

Use a specialist company to distribute leaflets through letterboxes of targeted households. This is an effective way of reaching high volumes of people at a reasonable cost.

Have a presence in high footfall venues

Posters, flyers, banners and even a personal presence from time to time at supermarkets, libraries, town centres, shopping centres and sports clubs will help build awareness of your school within your catchment area.

All these things involve a bit of time and effort but are affordable, simple and effective marketing for your school. For more ideas, visit thestickmanconsultancy.co.uk/blog ■

i Planning marketing activities across the academic year is vital to your success. Visit my.optimus-education.com/key-timings-school-marketing to find out more

Preparing to use your catch-up premium

Headteacher **JOSEPHINE SMITH** considers how to plan for different groups of pupils and ensure you get best value from government funding

In late June 2020 the Government announced its provision of £650 million to help children in primary, secondary and sixth form settings catch up on the learning they missed when schools were partially closed in March 2020.

So far the Education Endowment Foundation's 'Covid-19 support guide for schools' provides the most practical support and advice for senior staff, while you can find out about school allocations at www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-catch-up-premium. You can plan on approximately £80 for each of your pupils.

As a school, you need to decide how to get best value for your pupils. This will depend on your identification not just of pupils' engagement (or lack of it) during lockdown but of all your pupils' understanding of key skills and concepts across subjects.

Pupils are likely to fall into one of four main categories.

- Those who did not or could not engage with learning during lockdown and naturally find it hard to pick up concepts and skills quickly in class, regularly needing plenty of consolidation of learning.
- Those who did not or could not engage with learning during lockdown but are able enough to pick up concepts and skills quickly in class when they are revisited.
- Those who have engaged with learning during lockdown but naturally find it hard to pick up concepts and skills quickly in class,

'The aim here won't be to try to teach everything pupils missed but to ensure pupils are taught key skills'

needing plenty of consolidation of learning.

- Those who have engaged with learning during lockdown and are able to demonstrate a grasp of concepts and skills applying them to other learning or assessment contexts.

Group A

Pupils in group A will present the most pressing demand for catch up support. They are likely to be easily identifiable pupils who would have featured in previously established intervention programmes. Their academic needs have been exacerbated by the pandemic and so a range of catch-up, mentoring and incentivising strategies may be necessary throughout the year.

Proposed strategy: adapted curriculum, tutoring and academic mentoring

Start with a review of the curriculum for these identified pupils. If they are in an exam year it might be reasonable to look at dropping a subject (the one they are least likely to make up the learning in and one that will not affect their aspirations or destinations).

Curriculum time freed up can be

used for weekly sessions overseen by the learning support team or an identified member of teaching staff. This time could be used to deliver a structured schedule of small group, specific sessions focusing on core subject knowledge, blended with opportunities to apply their learning using online assessment, independent tasks and assignments.

These specific group sessions are about building confidence. Pupils should experience some early success; ideally the sessions will be complemented by fortnightly mentoring reviews that help to decide on the independent learning programme for each successive two weeks.

Group B

Pupils in group B will need specific gaps in specific subjects filled. Prompt identification and early specific intervention is the best strategy for them. They will need introducing to any new or more complex concepts and skills covered during lockdown. Any programme for them should target teaching at specific gaps and be relatively intense, over a short period of time rather than long lasting. Specific units or a series of targeted instructional sessions led by a specialist would be best to get them back up to speed and travelling along the same curriculum sequence as their peers in group D.

Proposed strategy: back on track

A series of subject specific sessions delivered to small, medium or class sized groups by subject specialists, followed by the chance for pupils to practice applying the knowledge they have been taught.

This 'back on track' strategy could be completed in two weeks in subject lesson time, or in another subject's time (though be careful not to solve one catch up problem at the expense of creating another!). Alternative delivery times could include lunchtimes, after school sessions, Inset days or holiday days. Use an employed tutor or teacher willing to be paid overtime.

The aim here won't be to try to teach everything pupils missed but to ensure pupils are taught key skills that will help them re-join the sequenced curriculum in the classroom with the knowledge to build on prior learning.

Group C

This group of pupils will need plenty of reassurance as well as chances to revisit learning regularly. They will benefit most from chances to apply previously learned knowledge in class. They are likely to feel most anxious as they will be the ones to tell you that they 'just don't get it' or that they 'didn't understand it the first time'. They will quickly become frustrated with themselves and others (who do 'get it') as they will feel they put in the time originally.

Proposed strategy: revisit, review and reward

This group of pupils will benefit most from smartly planned lessons with their usual teacher which regularly offer them the chance to revisit learning in the following ways.

- Working with the teacher in a small group, whilst others are working independently, to go over concepts again.

- Low stakes testing e.g. quizzes at the start of lessons with answers explained.
- Modelling of solutions/strong responses.
- Peer explanation and pair work perhaps encouraged by deliberate seating plans.
- Regular encouragement, recognition and praise when even limited progress is made.
- Homework tasks accompanied by additional guidance e.g. revision guide materials or links to online demos or instruction.
- Lunchtime or after school sessions to go through specific learning they can't quite grasp in class.
- An older student mentor (delivered socially distanced of course or perhaps later in the year).

They need reassurance that their efforts will pay off but it might just take a little longer. They are the pupils who need to be encouraged and rewarded and recognised for effort and 'small wins'.

Group D

This group of pupils will be impatient if they feel they are back pedalling in class and asked to complete activities which assume that they haven't completed or understood lock down work. Be sure to keep stretching them. Refer to revisited concepts as consolidation and show them that even the most secure knowledge needs revisiting in order to help the next learning 'stick' more easily.

Proposed strategy: consolidate and consult

Find ways of recognising these pupils' efforts and strengths without celebrating them too publicly in front of their peers.

They will not want to be held up as the shining example every lesson but will appreciate postcards or letters home recognising their progress.

Provide extra stimulus for these pupils in class by providing them with opportunities to consolidate their knowledge by sharing it with others. Make them the chairperson in group tasks, ask them to lead starter activities, get them to take the class through a maths problem on the board or to provide a summary of a text.

Don't give them extra tasks to do but do provide them with alternatives to make them feel they are doing new work, not repeating already learned work. Use all that you know about differentiation for the more able to make these pupils feel that they are building their knowledge.

Consult with these pupils. Their perception (or that of their parents) may be that they are weaker in some subjects than others and need some catch-up help. They may even feel that they should individually benefit from 'their' £80 of tutoring! If you decide that you want to be fair in your use of the funding why not offer some optional after school sessions with an experienced tutor or teacher on the most challenging aspects of the curriculum?

Consider your identification process

Identification of pupils (even if it's not into the groups suggested above) is likely to be every school's priority for early autumn. Ensure a strategic identification process based on a combination of evidence and professional judgement.

Plan a schedule of assessment. Whether that's high or low stakes assessment is for you to debate, but be mindful of pupil mental health, wellbeing and teacher workload – as well as collecting the information in a way that can be easily adapted, shared and monitored. ■

 Are you planning curriculum adjustments? See Josephine Smith's suggestions at my.optimus-education.com/planning-curriculum-adjustments-guide-senior-and-subject-leaders

BLOG POST

How governors can help school leader wellbeing

JOHN DABELL explores how support and challenge from governors can improve headteacher wellbeing and make the life of a leader easier

Headteachers and governors don't have to get on like a house on fire, but it certainly helps if they have a professional and productive working relationship that is transparent and reciprocal. The quality of leadership, supported by efficient management and perceptive governance, is central to the effectiveness and wellbeing of a school and its community.

Governors set the aims and objectives for the school (or group of schools) and set the policies and targets for achieving those aims and objectives. They monitor and evaluate the progress the school is making and act as a source of challenge and support to the headteacher.

The best governing bodies act as the school's critical friend, take difficult decisions where necessary and make a major contribution to the leadership of the school and its successes. They ensure that the school fulfils their duty to their students and their budget.

Leadership and wellbeing

For governors to be effective there must be a good working relationship with the school, especially between the headteacher and the chair of governors, with candour and mutual respect. When governance works well, governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, they are fully involved in strategic planning and formulating policies and they challenge and support the senior leadership team.

Where it doesn't work well there may be an almost total reliance on the headteacher, relationships are at best indifferent and may be hostile or acrimonious and governors' conduct presents a barrier to school improvement.

This is why one of the biggest threats to the wellbeing of a headteacher is the governing board. If governors' business is badly organised their work lacks focus, and they have a limited influence on the work of the school.

One of the reasons for this happening can sometimes be because many governors are often unqualified to carry out the tasks they have been given. Despite having enormous powers and responsibilities within schools, there is no requirement for

'The relationship between heads and governors is one that see-saws between challenge and support'

governors to have any specific training to be a governor. Where there are training gaps, these need to be filled so that governors can understand school performance data, monitoring and evaluation, financial management, and personnel issues.

The good, the bad and the indifferent

In his brilliant book *How to Survive and Succeed as a Headteacher*, Kevin Harcombe notes that a key relationship is that between a headteacher and the chair of governors. He advises that they will be a head's greatest advocate and so it's essential to be totally open and frank and kept in the loop about all major events and decisions. He says that a good chair will listen, offer advice and discuss issues.

Headteachers need to build alliances with other members of the governing body too and nurturing their talents and encouraging their support is crucial. But they aren't all the same and Harcombe identifies three main types.

1. The good

These are public spirited governors who volunteer for the right reasons, they have children at the heart of their thinking and want to give something back to the community. They are knowledgeable, they challenge and support headteachers and they act as a sounding board for their thoughts.

2. The bad

They come with axes to grind and focus on their hobby horses which are trivial issues. They blame the headteacher at the first sign of trouble and have themselves at the heart of their thinking.



Make sure governor visits have a clear purpose

Harcombe recommends that headteachers can aim to improve the bad governors, bypass or remove.

3. The indifferent

These are governors who simply can't be bothered. The last thing a school needs is a micro-political battle between governors and the headteacher as things can go unbearably awry.

Developing wellness

Outstanding governance supports school success and the wellbeing of everyone within it. The better the job governors do, the more help and support they are to the head which impacts positively on their wellbeing.

But for a partnership to work well, both sides need to support each other and keep the conversation going. Governors need to be consulted about many issues and this usually happens directly with the headteacher or is facilitated by the headteacher.

One of the most important ways heads can help their governing body take on their responsibility of acting as a critical friend is to provide them with information they need to develop a sense of what the school is about.

'Like all learners, governors need to be encouraged and valued'

Headteachers have to decide on what really counts and a starting point might be:

- what happens during an hour/morning/afternoon/day
- what happens in a range of classrooms with children of different ages
- how subjects of the curriculum are taught
- the school development plan and targets for improvement
- policy statements.

Organise focused visits with a clear purpose. Rather than look at 'how maths is taught', identify three aspects of maths teaching you want them to see, talk to the governor(s) beforehand and then invite them to look at examples of those three aspects as they move around the school.

Heads also need to provide and discuss documentation as governors have to approve most of this. Provide this in a format they can understand and encourage enquiry (as many will not have an education background) so they feel able to ask questions and be your critical friend. This is vital for building trust between the school and the board as it allows governors to challenge in a positive way and from a position of confidence.

Maintaining good relations

If a head wants to develop a relationship with their governors that will ultimately help and support the wellbeing of themselves and the school, then the main responsibility for doing so is the headteachers. A basic problem that often bedevils a relationship is the inability or refusal of the staff and headteacher to appreciate just how difficult it is being a school governor which is why it is vital there is a shared, common language about roles and responsibilities.

Like all learners, governors need to be encouraged and valued. Respecting governors is essential, so heads need to verbally thank governors individually and collectively for their help and support.

Governors can make schools better and have a vital role in establishing an aspirational and motivational collaborative culture. The relationship between heads and governors is one that see-saws between challenge and support and when both sides know what to expect of each other, there are no limits to what can be achieved. ■

Download our new governor induction checklist from my.optimus-education.com/governor-induction-checklist

BLOG POST

Promoting diversity in schools

Do you want to see change in schools and wider society in terms of challenging racist structures?

NICOLA HARVEY shares three areas for action

Many of us have used lockdown to reflect on our personal values and take a meaningful look at the structure of the society we live in. Sparked by the treatment and injustice towards George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many other black people in the UK, US and across the world, this is a time when people are saying enough is enough and are campaigning for much needed change.

So, what does this mean for schools in the UK? Research from the race equality think tank Runnymede found a chronic under-representation of BAME teachers in the UK. The government's Timpson review into school exclusions in 2019 revealed that black Caribbean pupils are round 1.7 times more likely to be permanently excluded compared to white British children.

Now more than ever, school leaders are being called to not only promote diversity and inclusion, but to take affirmative action. Here are some practical ways to create positive change.

1. Be visible and show support

Start by having open discussions and asking for feedback from BAME colleagues, students and parents to understand their experiences – even if it feels uncomfortable. Just listening with a sense of compassion is the first step to change. Be open to creating better systems for transparency and equality in your school community.

Familiarise staff with the Anti-Racism Resource List (visit [antiracismforbeginners.com](#)) – curated by diversity and inclusion leader Dr Tiffany Bowden. Use the subject areas in the reports to educate senior leaders, school staff and students on

appropriate subjects covered within the reports. To help parents talk about racial equality, share the 'Parents Guide to Black Lives Matter' (see [yoopies.co.uk/c/press-releases/blacklivesmatter](#)) which has a range of age-related resources, activities and tips.

Consider starting a committee to review policies, staff meeting subjects and school events; ensure BAME staff, parents and students feel included and are represented. In consultation with BAME colleagues and the PTA, why not write to your school community sharing the commitment to promoting diversity?

Ensure students and staff mental health is treated as a priority by getting in touch with organisations like ChildLine, Place2Be, The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network and the BiPP Psychiatry & Psychology Network for guidance during this unprecedented time.

2. Decolonise the curriculum

Using the growth mindset model, talk openly to pupils about the language surrounding racism, privilege and prejudice. And if this is not appropriate, due to their age or learning abilities, share the importance of being kind, treating others fairly and why we should celebrate our differences.

Over 300,000 people have signed Joshua Bailey's petition urging the UK government to teach school children about British imperialism and colonialism. You could show your support by signing the petition and using resources from The Black Curriculum – a social enterprise campaigning for black history to be taught in schools all year round.

Ensure the school library is stocked with

books showing ethnically diverse content from BAME authors. Create a curriculum map with positive and successful BAME inventors and role models to inspire students in their learning all year round.

3. Representation matters

Educate staff on why representation is important across the school community. Consider sharing Aisha Thomas' TedEx video 'why representation really matters'. Make every effort to employ a diverse range of teachers, governors and leadership teams through blind recruitment or purposefully targeting teachers from BAME backgrounds. When organising Inset days, look for BAME speakers to train staff in a range of subjects.

Encourage staff to connect with organisations like #BAMEEd, #DiverseEd, Runnymede and Voice4Change to network with like-minded peers, share best practice and find a sense of community. Discuss and show students videos of high-profile positive role models sharing their experiences of discrimination and how they used this as fuel to strive towards a better future.

Getting started

The suggestions above may seem extensive, but this is just the tip of the iceberg. The cultural, systemic and unconscious biases need to change. To get started, you may want to choose two or three activities from above, create a plan of action and then build upon this over time.

Either way, it is everyone's responsibility, particularly decision makers in schools, to come together and stand for equality, diversity and inclusion. Do something today to make a difference. ■

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

What a year 2020 has been for school business managers and leaders! At the time of writing, the optimism of the first days back in September has been severely tempered by the inevitable cases of Covid-19 cropping up amongst staff and pupils and the difficulty in accessing testing services. Nickii Messer took advantage of the slight lull before the storms of the autumn term to talk to school business professionals about what they had learned and gained from the lockdown experience. Turn overleaf for a much-needed reminder of the positives that have been gleaned from this situation. No doubt health, safety and risk management are still very much on your mind. See page 24 for an extract from the popular *Health and Safety in Schools* training course.

Issues such as funding remain on the agenda. Nikki Burch shares her tried and tested guide to planning a crowdfunding campaign – be ready to set aside two hours a week over a six month period for your campaign to be effective. And MAT chief executive and operating officer Stephen Mitchell gives the benefit of his experience in identifying operational pitfalls to avoid.

Top school business management blogs

Lockdown learning: have you considered an apprenticeship?
[oego.co/apprentice](#)

How to improve self-care [oego.co/improve_selfcare](#)

The new wellbeing: coping with the phases of lockdown through Covid-19 [oego.co/new_wellbeing](#)

See more at [blog.optimus-education.com](#)

Contributors in this issue



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.



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](#)



Nikki Burch is a fundraising consultant specialising in the education sector. Her crowdfunding campaign for Imberhorne School raised £6,797 for defibrillators and first aid training. [@NikkiJBurch](#)



Stephen Mitchell is CEO at Oak Multi Academy Trust and previously COO at Spencer Academies Trust. He works with schools on transformative projects through Keystone Knowledge. [@keystoneknowhow](#)

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What have we learned from Covid-19?

NICKII MESSER finds out how school business professionals have risen to the challenges of Covid-19 and learned valuable lessons in the process

COVID-19 has been a terrible, often terrifying, ordeal, not least for those working in the world of education. School business professionals, already crashing under the weight of an overwhelming workload, have been faced with unprecedented additional demands, and changes imposed with no say, control or buy in.

As Stephen Barrett, SBL at Kingsmead School and Sixth Form, rather typically put it: 'just about everything we previously considered "normal" has been completely upended.' But as he went on to say: 'we are school business professionals and are therefore practical and pragmatic folk – every situation is one to learn from and an opportunity to adapt our practice.' And that is just what you've been doing!

During the (slightly calmer) summer period, I went out and about – virtually of course – to find out how school business professionals have learned and adapted their practice in the very teeth of this terrible storm. What follows are their reflections, realisations, changes in practice and takeaways.

Qualities and behaviours

Helen Burge, deputy COO at The Priory Learning Trust and founder of Somerset SBLs, discovered that 'I'm more decisive than I thought! I'm good at crisis management, although I don't enjoy it that much, I normally prefer the planned approach.'

Helen also said that she had learned to delegate, a theme picked up by Stephen Barrett, who has had to 'fundamentally change the way I used to work. I have unpicked myself from lots of unnecessary

'We are modifying processes that have been in place for what feels like decades, overnight'

Stephen Barrett

email chains, delegated tasks to others and simply ask others to report back to me.'

Conny Brandt (@Peterhouse SBM) at Autism Initiatives, Peterhouse School, also understands the value of involving team members. 'The current challenges have given many of our staff the chance to shine. They have had to adapt working practices very quickly and responded with so much enthusiasm, with innovative ideas for how we can make things work and with a great passion for doing the very best for our young people. For some staff, this proved to be a real opportunity to come forward with new ideas and try something different.'

Jane Taylor, strategic business manager at Osborne Primary School and chair of Birmingham Association of School Business Management, concurs. 'Staff being able to "cross cover" has been fantastic as it has meant that everyone can be involved in supporting the children and school during these difficult times. This upskills the workforce, providing continuity of service provision and sharing of responsibilities.'

Using technology

Unsurprisingly, the use of technology has been one of the greatest weapons in the SBP's armoury. Jane Taylor explains:

'We have found the use of Office 365 and Teams to be invaluable during the Covid-19 lockdown. It has enabled staff to keep in contact with each other and to conduct weekly team meetings. We have even done some webinar training sessions to upskill staff in using One Drive. This is definitely something that we are going to keep.'

Nicky Gillhespy, COO at Leo Academy Trust, adds: 'I have discovered online meetings run to time better than face to face ones and generally are more efficient.'

Sue Prickett, CFOO at SENDAT, is grateful to her trust for the support they have given staff in learning these new ways of working. 'We very quickly streamlined our remote working practices and enabled lots of staff who previously thought using shared documents and Teams was beyond them. It's given staff time to concentrate on their own skills which were previously put to one side whilst they were prioritising their students in the classroom.'

An unexpected, but really satisfying, side effect of online working has come from Stephen Barrett. 'Everything from our admissions, finance, payroll, HR processes have all abruptly gone paperless out of necessity and will not be going back. As a result, I can already feel the team working

more effectively. We are modifying processes that have been in place for what feels like decades, overnight.'

Working from home

Whilst working from home became an enforced aspect of many SBPs' lives, it should be noted that a growing number had already discovered the advantages of conducting some strategic elements of their work from home, even for a day a week or fortnight. It came as no surprise that so many took working from home pretty much in their stride.

Nicky Gillhespy particularly embraced this new way of working, quickly realising that about 80% of her work can be done from home. Nicky puts much of this down to the fact that she works for a trust where 'most of my work is done centrally on behalf of the schools in the Trust, and the fact that we had already moved all of our systems to the cloud'. Among the many benefits of working from home, Nicky included the ability to work flexibly, as well as saving significant time not having to battle busy city rush hour traffic.

Working effectively from home needs careful planning. For Jane Taylor, using organisational strategies from David Allen's book *Getting Things Done* proved invaluable 'when having to decamp and work from home. I was able to put the folders and essentials into a box to act as a makeshift filing cabinet. Working in a similar mode to being in the school office has definitely helped with a smooth transition.'

Nicky Gillhespy puts her own success down to 'setting up a routine right from the start'. As well as strict start and end times for her working day, Nicky's routine included a daily 'walk to work', time to eat lunch in the garden, and being disciplined about not picking up emails in the evenings and weekends. Nicky speaks for many when she says 'I hope I can continue working from home for at least some

'Being part of a local network group has been a fantastic resource'

Jane Taylor

of my working hours. It has been good for my mental health and I feel more in control of my work patterns than before.'

A word of warning from Helen Burge though. 'I realise that I need to redecorate my "office" (aka front room!) as I really don't like my curtains anymore, and I think I've ruined the carpet with my office chair wheels!'

All about the people

One thing that has consistently stood out has been the sharp focus our SBPs have for the wellbeing and safety of the children and families. This was epitomised by their frequently superhuman drive to get free school meals sorted. But it continues to shine through in so many other ways too.

Many SBPs have actively involved themselves in community schemes to ensure that our most vulnerable families continued to be supported. In Sue Prickett's trust, SENDAT, 'school staff generously donated food and other supplies to help our families'. Perhaps most uplifting were the staff doorstep visits. As a special school, with vulnerable children across a wide catchment area, 'the families and students LOVED seeing the staff. Families felt like they had not been forgotten.'

That connection between staff and children was replicated within staff groups too. For the first few weeks, many SBPs were quite happy working alone. However, in time, it was clear just how much they were missing colleagues. Dan Rockwell (@Leadershipfreak) says that 'isolation is the enemy of success', and our SBPs were certainly feeling that pain.

'I have found carrying out this job during these times particularly difficult

– the isolation and lack of engagement with colleagues make this really hard' shared Debbie Beazer, SBL at Blackhorse Primary School. This sentiment was reflected by Conny Brandt. 'I can do most of the functional parts of my job at home. However, all the elements that make it positive and rewarding happen at school – working with colleagues, seeing the pupils and the difference we make to them. The best part of our job is the people!'

Collaboration through Twitter and local network groups has been a saviour for many. Nicky Gillhespy has managed 'to virtually meet numerous SBMs and COOs from across the country and work collaboratively', while Jane Taylor reports that 'being part of a local network group has been a fantastic resource where no question is a silly question.'

And we must never forget the ultimate SBP support – their families. Sue Prickett summed up the sentiments of many others. 'This has made me realise more than ever the value of my family. With five of us either working or studying from home, stress levels could have been much higher, but somehow being together again was such a bonus. Whilst I worked extended hours due to planning, reading government guidance, FSM, etc. they picked up shopping, cooking and pouring the wine... I'd have been existing on cereal without them!'

Looking ahead

It is hard for any of us to predict what new 'normal' we are heading towards, but there is a fierce determination among SBPs that it will be a bright new future if they have anything to do with it!

I give the last word to one of my many SBP colleagues, Stephen Barrett. 'I'm looking forward to getting back, but the way my team works, and the way I'm now working, are changed for good – and for the better.' ■

'The best part of our job is the people!'

Conny Brandt

How to plan a crowdfunding campaign

Crowdfunding offers the dual benefits of funding a project whilst raising the profile of your school.

NIKKI BURCH helps you choose the right platform and map out a successful campaign plan

Crowdfunding seeks small amounts of funding from a wide network of donors, with the added benefits of raising the profile of your school and highlighting a need to the wider community. With a ready-made database of stakeholders, who have a vested interest in seeing your project realised, crowdfunding is the perfect tool for schools.

Unlike grant funding, which is highly competitive (achieving an average success rate of 1 in 10 applications), the success of a crowdfunding campaign is much more within your power to control.

Getting started

It's vital that your first crowdfunding campaign is a success, to give donors confidence for future campaigns. Start with a relatively modest project (with a target under £5,000) and allow six months between the planning stage and the point at which you need the funds.

As with grant funding, the initial process involves gathering evidence, ascertaining full costs/quotes, and creating a case for support. Allow time to create a campaign video (if this is an option), write press releases and create a marketing strategy.

Pick the best platform for your project

Among the many crowdfunding platforms available, Rocket Fund and DonateMySchool are specifically aimed at schools. Others worth considering are Spacehive (several local authorities use this to award grants) or JustGiving, which allows you to link individual fundraising pages to a crowdfunding project page.

Research which platform suits your particular project and consider the following.

- Contact your local authority or county council to see what funding streams they have available (you may have to be a registered charity or apply through your PTA) and how to access them.
- See whether similar projects for similar amounts have been successfully funded.
- Would a video help sell your project? Not all platforms allow you to add a video.

- Some platforms enable you to add rewards – these can help encourage higher donations.
- Check whether Gift Aid can be collected at source as this is a simple way of boosting donations by 25%.
- For larger projects with a range of activities (i.e. where different year groups are raising funds), a platform like JustGiving might enable you to link these together.
- Check platform and credit card/Stripe payment fees.

Draw up a schedule

A campaign can be broken into three phases: pre-launch, live and project delivery. Allow 6-8 weeks for the pre-launch stage; 4-6 weeks for the 'live' stage – keeping it short helps to maintain momentum; 6-8 weeks (and beyond) for delivery. Allocate a minimum of two hours a week to work on your campaign.

1. Pre-launch

- Build your support base: create a mind-map of potential donors (download an example from [my.optimus-education.com/how-plan-crowdfunding-campaign](#)). For defibrillators that are available for community use you might contact local residents, local businesses, those letting your premises out of hours, as well as parents and staff – even your school cleaning company! Aim to get a promise of at least 10 donations to be made the day your project goes live – this makes your project look more credible and therefore donors are more likely to give!
- Gather evidence: what are you aiming to achieve? What research do you have to demonstrate the need for your project? (This might be specific to your school, a local issue or there may be national evidence to support your argument.) Who will the beneficiaries be and what impact will your project have?
- Compile full costings: include maintenance or running costs. You will also need to explain to donors how you will spend funds if your project is over-funded. A well-considered financial plan builds trust. See [www.spacehive.com/imberhorne-life-saving](#) for an example.

Warning: pitfalls to avoid

Don't choose too ambitious a project. Whatever resource you intend to purchase with the funds needs to be something that the crowd is likely to support and for an amount that is achievable.

Don't underestimate how much time it takes. Running a successful campaign takes thorough planning and relentless marketing. Allocate a couple of hours each week.

Don't upload your campaign collateral and expect people to just find it. You need to tell everyone (more than once) and encourage them to share the link with friends and family.

Case study example

In 2019, Nikki ran a crowdfunding campaign at Imberhorne School to raise £6,797. The project was to purchase defibrillators, to train staff to deliver first aid training to students, and buy the kit needed to deliver first aid lessons.

The potential donors were identified as: students, staff, parents, governors, organisations letting the premises, local residents and businesses. The timing of the campaign and the choice of platform were largely dictated by the West Sussex County Council funding programme. Prior to the campaign launching, Nikki met with the school's local county councillor to ensure that the project was likely to receive their backing. Staff were briefed and letters were sent home to parents.

The project was live for four weeks. Letters were hand delivered to local residents, messages posted to social media, and flyers delivered to businesses adjacent to the school. The lettings manager also sent a letter to organisations letting the premises, asking them to share the details with their databases.

As members of the East Grinstead Business Association, a digital flyer was also shared with 122 member companies. The local councillor invited Nikki to a county local committee meeting to answer questions, such as, 'How many training quotes did you obtain and why did you choose that provider?' £3,000 was pledged at the meeting, with another £2,000 allocated if it was required in order to achieve the target.

The defibrillators were installed and staff training planned, ready to deliver the first aid element of the sex, relationships and health curriculum from September 2020. Incredibly, the campaign achieved 130 backers (from all potential donor bases) – more than any other project WSCC had seen before!

- Create a narrative: what will compel your supporters to give? Campaigns with videos prove more successful than those without. Not all projects lend themselves to a video, but putting children centre stage can pay dividends. For an example, go to [youtu.be/SPjNhYSRYfs](#)
- Plan a marketing strategy: clicks from direct links are more likely to yield results, so who can you email or capture via social media? Let your supporters know that the project is coming. Prepare regular bulletins in advance to keep donors (and potential donors) updated.

- Upload your content: don't underestimate how long it takes to get everything uploaded to your chosen platform. Some operate an approval process, so allow 7-10 days for this.

2. Live

- Launch day: share the link with those donors who had already agreed to pledge. Get the message out to all potential donors – through both online and offline channels. Update your social media networks and share with relevant community groups (and ask everyone to share the campaign link with their networks, too).
- Slow and steady: don't expect donations to flood in! Keep updating your networks with messages that are personal and positive. Celebrate milestones. Have you achieved 25% of your goal? Has someone given you a juicy amount? Shout about it!
- Final push: most campaigns reach their goal in the final week, so don't panic! Review your marketing strategy – what else can you do to reach new audiences or encourage donors to give a bit more? Create a countdown and let everyone know how much else you need – could you frame it as 'just £2 from every student'?

3. Post-campaign delivery

- Thank supporters: send personal emails to particularly generous donors or those with whom you want to form stronger links.
- Fulfil rewards (if applicable): these might range from letters from pupils for donations of £10, to an invitation to an event connected to your project for donations of £100. If delivery of your rewards is delayed, let recipients know.
- Keep donors updated: post updates to your campaign page as you carry out your project. Include details of delivery/installation, photos of beneficiaries using the new resource and provide feedback on the impact this has had.
- Nurture your donor base: these people care about your school, so make sure they feel like valued members of your school community – they might well support more fundraising initiatives in the future! ■

Income generation workshop

Income generation will be one of the topics explored at the *Leading Business Strategy* conference, taking place March 2021. Look out for programme details at [my.optimus-education.com/conferences](#)

MAT operations: pitfalls to avoid

What do you need to consider when growing your multi-academy trust? **STEPHEN MITCHELL** outlines some common areas that MATs fall down on

So, you're growing your MAT? Exciting times lie ahead – the proverbial blank piece of paper with untold opportunities waiting to have the masterpiece brushed onto it.

And an awesome responsibility – you are part of a team with the privilege of providing an environment for every child in your MAT to reach their potential, to develop a love of learning, to create schools that pique interest, that inspire, and to help forge the futures of the next generation.

Where can we learn from others? What are the common pitfalls that lie ahead? Here are some of the many that have caught out other MATs before.

Forgetting the children

This one is surprisingly common – I see MATs up and down the country that are so focused on their strategy of growth that they seem to forget who they are there to serve.

The children become a secondary focus to the restructuring and business processes of managing the MAT. We'd all agree this is back to front, and it's one to keep your eye out for. If anything isn't adding value to our children, then we really must ask why we're doing it.

Homogenisation

We know that MATs take all forms from very tight, identikit schools to very loose organisations, where autonomy is left entirely with each school. Either can work, as can everything in between, if you have the right kind, and quality, of management leading the teams in the schools.

However, sometimes MATs can be led unwittingly into thinking that the inevitable path of centralisation means that everything must be the same in every school. This just simply isn't the case. Sometimes different schools must have different ways of achieving the same goal, and this can be consistent with a MAT-wide policy.

It's about having the wisdom to recognise the talents of the people you have, and the resources in the schools, and finding the right solution for them. After all, we differentiate our teaching for children, don't we?

Silo working

In a MAT we're all one team. We may work in different functions, or in different locations, but we're all here for one reason. I commonly see discord between, particularly, the education and central operations teams in multi-academy trusts.

We need each other, and together we're stronger. It is important that MATs make time to bring the different teams together. I know of MATs where the central team don't know the names of everyone else in the central team in the same office/school as them, and that's just crazy.

As leaders, we should be making sure that our colleagues feel part of one team, and that they know who they can call on for support, when they need it.

Assumptions

It is so easy to fall into this trap of assuming that everyone is on the same page and is wanting the same things for the MAT as you. As leaders of organisations, one of the key things we need to remember is that we

can't over-communicate.

Discussing your vision, talking about what the organisation is going to be, the things that can be achieved for the children in your schools, for example, is so important, and vital to do on a regular basis.

Rushing

I've seen this so many times in MATs I've visited. There are great plans about the art of the possible, which the MAT rushes to implement. However, change is hard – very hard. And it's hard on colleagues too.

Good, strong change management is necessary, as well as recognising that very rarely do MATs have capacity to devote to project management, and therefore the day job must get done as well. Be realistic in your planning assumptions.

Structural costs

Building a MAT takes resources, and sometimes you need to invest in capacity ahead of need. However, very often we see MATs doing this by hiring new people, which create structural costs, that then necessitates growth of the MAT to fund those very positions. This makes the focus of the MAT potentially misplaced; they're chasing extra revenue, rather than focusing on what the MAT can do for children. ■

Upcoming events for MATs

Stephen Mitchell will be speaking at *Driving Sustainable Growth in MATs 2020*. For dates and details as well as information about the *MATs Summit 2021*, head to my.optimus-education.com/conferences

Chief operating officer checklist

Don't fall into the pitfall of missing key deadlines. Use **STEPHEN MITCHELL'S** submissions checklist to keep track of important dates for academies and trusts

Annual tasks

Month	Deadline	Area	Task	Status
September	29	Finance	Submit completed budget forecast return to ESFA	
	30	Finance	Submit audited TPS End of Year Certificate for 2019/20 to ESFA	
October	28	Administration	Complete autumn school census	
	31	Administration	Consultation started for any changes to PAN September 2022	
November	To be advised	Estates	Registration deadline for new Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) applicants	
December	17	Estates	Submit land and buildings collection tool	
	To be advised	Estates	Deadline for CIF bids	
	4	HR	Complete school workforce census	
January	31	Finance	Submit annual accounts to DfE	
	31	Finance	Submit audit management letter to DfE	
	31	Finance	Submit internal scrutiny management letters to DfE	
February	17	Administration	Complete spring school census	
	23	Finance	Annual accounts return submission deadline	
	28	Finance	Accounts published on academy trust website	
	28	Administration	Determine admission arrangements for September 2022	
March	28	Administration	Publish admissions appeal timetable for September 2021	
	15	Administration	Publish admissions arrangements for 2022 on website	
	15	Administration	Inform local authority of admissions arrangements for 2022	
April	To be advised	Administration	School resource management self-assessment tool (SRMSAT) submission	
	Suggested	Finance	Complete reclaim form for national non-domestic rates	
May	21	Finance	Submit the budget forecast return outturn to ESFA	
	31	Finance	Audited accounts for year end 31 August 2020 filed with Companies House	
	31	Finance	Submit unaudited TPS End of Year Certificate to TPS	
June	16	Administration	Submit summer school census	
July	30th	Finance	3-year budget forecast submission	

Dates are as published by the relevant authority, August 2020 and may be subject to change.

 IN-HOUSE TRAINING

Develop risk management skills

In this extract from Unit 4 of the *Health and Safety in Schools* training course, **GILL O'DONNELL** suggests ways to help pupils develop risk management skills

If pupils are never exposed to risks, they cannot develop the skills required to deal with them. This is one area where rather than focusing solely on the outcome there needs to be consideration of the process and the 'how to' part of learning.

Wherever possible in the curriculum and in school life in general the process of recognising and evaluating risk needs to be incorporated into activities. By doing this, risk evaluation is no longer seen as a detached piece of paperwork, but becomes an expected process when planning activities.

Risk management is not seen simply as risk elimination or risk avoidance but as part of a creative, decision-making process whereby risks are recognised and evaluated and practical, proportionate control measures put in place. The aim should always be to make safe practice the norm with the emphasis on control not avoidance.

This does require consistency in approach. Safety matters must be seen to always matter, not just when it is convenient. There should never be a case of 'do as I say, not as I do'. The best way to learn good safety habits is by following examples of good practice. It is also vital to ensure that the reasoning behind safety rules is always made clear.

Encouraging safety management in pupils

The basic tenets of safety management can begin to be encouraged at any age. Some simple examples of this are detailed here.

- Rather than tell pupils the rules for

how to behave in specialist rooms, such as the science lab and technology rooms, use the first session to encourage them to develop their own code of conduct and use this as a basis for discussion of the hazards. This promotes understanding and makes them more likely to follow the rules.

- Encourage pupils to develop their own risk assessments for activities around the building, for example dividing a playground area up so that there is a quiet area and an area for more boisterous activities.
- Make a safety solutions box available and encourage pupils and staff to post notes with ideas on how to improve safety around the premises. This encourages everyone to report hazards rather than ignore them and think of them as someone else's responsibility.
- Get pupils to plan codes of conduct for safe behaviour when undertaking activities out of school. A discussion on this issue prior to a visit can often throw up issues which may have been overlooked by staff planning the visit.
- Design posters to serve as safety reminders to others for simple everyday hazards around the premises. Aim to make these positive rather than negative and encouraging people rather than banning activities!
- Encourage pupils to 'hazard spot' on entering new situations, for example for the first time in a food technology

room, stage a situation where there are a number of hazards and get pupils in pairs to identify as many as possible and then to discuss why they are hazards and what should be done to rectify them.

Encouraging practical activities of this sort is a positive way of getting pupils to be aware of what to be aware of in any new situation or venue. Even very young children can be encouraged when visiting a new place to look for emergency exit signs and to think about what they should do if a fire alarm sounds.

Key messages

The key messages to develop with young people are very simple.

- In any situation behave responsibly: your behaviour and actions can keep you safe and have an impact on the safety of others.
- Practice spotting hazards – ask yourself what is dangerous in this situation.
- Assess the harm – how might things go wrong?
- Control the risk – how can what I do make it less likely that anything will go wrong?

By encouraging resilience and a sense of responsibility pupils can begin to take more control of the situation and move from risk aversion towards a more positive and proactive approach. ■

 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?

Have you found yourself taking a different approach to CPD in the last six months? We've been re-vamping our webinar offer to suit these changing times: see page 32 for details. It looks like remote learning will be with us for a while yet, so we asked Hamish Mackenzie, founder of Digital Resilience UK and previously a digital strategy director in school, to summarise what he's learned about doing it effectively. He recommends keeping things simple, picking your tools carefully and seeking ways to build a meaningful connection.

One of the concerns members shared with us during the lockdown was around consolidating and reviewing learning – what tasks would best enable teachers to find out what pupils had learned? We asked Claire Gadsby, author of *The Perfect Assessment for Learning*, for ideas – see page 28.

Do you think that some of your pupils have benefited from the home learning experience? Elizabeth Holmes has been reflecting on the positives and drawing lessons to take back into school.

Top teaching and learning blogs

Effective remote CPD: principles, planning and lessons learned oego.co/remote_CPD

Is teaching your true calling? oego.co/teacher_transition

Reimagining learning: how Covid-19 can change our approach for good oego.co/reimagine

See more at blog.optimus-education.com

Contributors in this issue



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 BLOG POST

What did we learn from the home learning experience?

For some children and families, home learning was a positive experience. What lessons can schools learn as a result? **ELIZABETH HOLMES** poses some searching questions

The changes to our lives ushered in by SARS-CoV-2 in the early months of 2020 have been far-reaching. The new normal we had to settle into has seen shifts in just about every sector of life. A trip to the supermarket, a consultation with your GP or dentist, a visit to the library, going to work, meeting up with family and friends, or a trip to the beach – everything has been affected. Even on a walk in the countryside you're likely to see conscientious hikers grab some hand sanitiser after touching a stile or gate.

For many, the lockdown-style measures that were put in place towards the end of March were a shock to the system. The dramatic changes to our daily routines and increased demands in our working lives hit hard and fast. Schools rose to the challenges they faced and delivered, despite a sometimes hostile media. But although the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed us, it has also taught us key lessons. Here are four.

1. An unhurried pace with wellbeing at the heart

The first lesson we should fully take on board is that lockdown-style home school was great for some children. While headlines screamed out that children MUST get back to school (and there is no doubt that lockdown for some children has been excessively challenging) a fair number of families were in no rush to bring to a halt the home learning that had been thrust upon them, a situation evidenced by the relatively low numbers

'Far from slipping behind, some young people have surged forward'

of children who returned to face to face teaching when they had the option to.

Whether they were provided with home learning suggestions or not, there are many children who did not suffer academically or mentally, and some who positively thrived on the opportunity to broaden their education horizons through all that was available to them at home. Clearly this was not the case for all children, but we really do need to accept that it has been the case for some, so that we can identify what, if anything, needs to change within the system.

Educator and chartered psychologist Dr Pam Jarvis received an interesting response when she asked Twitter about the effects upon children of extended time at home. In her blog from 17 April 2020 entitled 'Exam Factory Spring? A Lockdown Reflection', she writes that 'Parents overwhelmingly replied that their children were happier at home than in school, and some further commented that they were worried that their children would be reluctant to return.'

Dr Jarvis explores why this might be and suggests that the English education system is 'transmit and test focused.' Responses to her tweet spoke of learning at home offering the chance to learn at an unhurried pace with wellbeing at the heart, having the opportunity to play

games at home, being more creative, and loving learning but not the systems around it in schools.

If we are to ensure that our schools (and colleges and universities) are serving the children and young people that they exist for, we have to take this feedback on board, don't we?

2. Careful consideration of safety measures

The second lesson is that personal protective equipment matters. Teachers and other school staff have died from Covid-19 and we need to be as sure as we can be that we are protecting staff, pupils and their families as much as possible from the ravages of this virus. What is the best way to ensure that everyone is safe in our schools?

The guidance from the Department for Education on the full opening of schools stated that: 'There is no evidence that children transmit the disease any more than adults.' Given how effective adults are at transmitting it, that will provide little reassurance for those who are at a greater risk of experiencing serious consequences of Covid-19 and those who are shielding loved ones from the disease.

An article published on July 7 2020 on www.sciencemag.org ('School openings across globe suggest ways to keep

coronavirus at bay, despite outbreaks') expressed frustration at the lack of solid data on safety around schools reopening around the world. There are, the article explained, some emerging patterns. For example, keeping students in small groups, social distancing and requiring masks/face coverings are worn help to keep school communities safe.

But one of the key factors in whether or not it is safe for a school to be open during the Covid-19 pandemic is the extent to which the virus is circulating in the wider community. Of the measures designed to mitigate the chances of infection in schools, it seems that mask wearing is an effective way to block the respiratory droplets so key in virus transmission. So we can quibble about masks or we can do what China, Vietnam, South Korea and Japan have done and make them a requirement.

3. What will you focus on, and what will you leave behind?

The third lesson is that lockdown helped us to reflect on and evaluate what really matters to us in our personal and public lives. For some, this altered working (and it should be acknowledged that teachers and lecturers continued to work throughout the period that schools were closed to most pupils) helped to cast a light into some murky corners that may have been ignored for too long.

Some have discovered from the experience of lockdown where their true interests in education lie, while others have resolved to pursue with greater alacrity what they feel will make a significantly positive difference to the learners in their care. Leaving behind what hinders, where possible, feels right. What is it we are doing? And what is it that we want to achieve?

4. The status quo isn't serving everyone well

The fourth lesson is perhaps the most challenging to take on board, and that is that the status quo in schools was



Children with SEND felt safer learning at home than they did in school

evidently not serving everyone equally well. Not by any stretch. Time and again I have heard from parents of children with SEND that their children felt safer learning at home than they did in school. Far from slipping behind, some young people have surged forward, gaining confidence and skills having had the opportunity to learn at home without having to grapple with the daily tensions they were feeling at school.

Special Needs Jungle recently published the results of their coronavirus and special needs education survey. The key findings show that most parents were not involved in risk assessments for their children, only 18% reported that their child's school or college had offered them the SEND provision they needed in order to complete their work, and many parents said that there had been no differentiation at all so their child could not complete the work set.

Crucially, while 37% of parents said their child's anxiety had increased during lockdown, 38% reported that it had reduced. The reasons offered for this were: 'a less formal learning environment, a more inclusive way of learning, less pressure, better understanding of the child's needs, and reduced sensory issues.' For some parents, this has led to them considering home schooling as a permanent option.

Reflection points

While acknowledging the phenomenal

effort of school staff throughout the pandemic so far, we can still explore whether there are lessons we can learn from these past months, given that stop/start schooling may be a possibility for the academic year ahead. These ideas may help.

- Regardless of how successfully your school and its community adapted to the challenges of the pandemic, do you still need to find solutions to lingering or emerging issues?
- Have you surveyed staff, parents and pupils on the high and low points of lockdown learning? Are there any points of contention that need to be addressed?
- Of the high points, what can be maintained once school life is restored to normal?

As one headteacher I was in contact with reflected, 'there is nothing like an experience of lockdown to demand that you see your school through the eyes of each and every member of your community.'

Given that research has revealed some important points for schools to consider, perhaps our real learning from these experiences might be encapsulated in our response to this question: what would this classroom, school, community look like if we were taking care of everyone? ■

Consolidate learning: task setting and assessment

What kind of tasks can teachers set which enable pupils to consolidate and demonstrate their learning?

CLAIRE GADSBY suggests ways to get pupils activity engaged in knowledge retrieval

At the time of writing, most pupils have been physically away from school for many weeks. When they do return, things are likely to be challenging. Aside from the obvious difficulties that will be involved in re-integrating people safely back into school life, we may need to think differently about the learning itself.

While teachers tend to have finely honed instincts about their pupils' learning, we can tailor our provision more precisely by ascertaining exactly what pupils have remembered correctly over time and what may need to be revisited. All teachers will be grappling with questions such as:

- How can we quickly assess what pupils have retained from prior learning and what needs to be readdressed?
- How can we make the best use of limited teaching time in order to create maximum progress for all learners?

In this new climate of increased anxiety, it is more important than ever to keep the 'tone' of revision and assessment tasks as light and low stakes as possible and the following strategies will work well with remote, online or classroom learning.

1. Balance the old and the new

Howard Gardner famously noted that 'coverage is the enemy of learning' (*The Development and education of the mind: The selected works of Howard Gardner, 2006*). Ensure that any tasks set for pupils to complete remotely feature both new learning (curriculum coverage) and revision of the most important elements of prior learning.

2. Not everything needs to be revisited

Try applying the Pareto (80:20) principle to your planning. This rule, named after Vilfredo Pareto, states that 80% of the effects comes from 20% of the causes.

Although it can be difficult to balance how much time and energy to devote to going back over prior learning, once you have identified the 20% of the curriculum which leads to the most progress in your subject or year group (e.g. place value in maths or correct sentence construction in writing), you can confidently focus your efforts on revisiting just those aspects.

'Challenge pupils to see if they can generate the rest of the word from memory'

3. Three step check

A quick three step check at the start of each week or day's learning could be used to challenge pupils to recall something from:

- last lesson
- last week
- last term.

4. Fill in the blanks

Robert Bjork's 'desirable difficulties' research indicates that generation is a highly effective strategy for making learning memorable. Set pupils the challenge of reviewing prior learning by 'filling' in the blanks.

Begin by pulling together a summary of the most important elements of prior learning from previous terms. This could take the form of a worksheet or online task but should feature just the first letter of each important word.

Challenge pupils to see if they can generate the rest of the word from memory. For example, p..... instead of pyramid or even photosynthesis. Use picture prompts as a support where necessary. Invite pupils to self-assess their work and to self-check and edit their answers (see below).

5. Colour of correction

Ask pupils to check their answers and to write any corrections in a different colour and/or different font. This deliberate process of recording the correct answer differently can help to increase retrieval strength.

6. Randomise

Ask retrieval questions out of context. For example, your class may be focusing on topic E this week but, mid-way through the session or week, ask them a question relating to topic B. This



The classroom itself can be an inspiration for memory challenge activities

principle of interleaving is proven to strengthen memory. The randomised nature can be used to maximise pupil engagement particularly if you use language such as 'this week's memory lucky dip!' to introduce the principle.

7. Pomodoro reflection

The pomodoro technique is a productivity tool that involves setting a timer for 25 minutes and, for the duration of that time, focusing solely on a given task or topic before moving on to something different. This short finite period could be used to frame a memory challenge for pupils to complete independently.

For example:

In the next 25 minutes, how much can you remember and demonstrate to me about topic X without looking back at your notes? Show your work in a manner of your choice.

Ask pupils to indicate how difficult they found this task and how confident they felt about their answers. Invite pupils to submit their work so that you can gain a feel for what has been remembered, in what detail and by whom.

8. Pomodoro part 2

Next, invite pupils to compare what they produced in the 25-minute memory challenge with their original notes or work on that topic. Alternatively, you could provide them with a brief synopsis that you have prepared. Ask pupils to:

- highlight any key facts or details that they had forgotten
- add additional details to their pomodoro notes using a different colour

- add symbols, pictures, abbreviations, acronyms or anything else they can think of to make the additions even more memorable.

9. Under cover

Cover an existing wall display with a large cloth or piece of paper and challenge pupils to recall and describe what they think is underneath (after a long absence from school it may be necessary to provide pupils with prompts and clues to get them started).

Next, briefly reveal the display before covering it again quickly. Ask pupils to sketch/write down what they just saw. Were their first guesses correct? What can they tell you about what they saw?

Focus your input on what was not recalled or explained correctly.

10. Turn a word...

Ask pupils to focus on a single word that appears anywhere on display in the classroom. Set one minute on the timer and challenge pupils to see if they can turn that one word into a sentence during that time (this could be done orally or even pictorially with younger learners).

Reset the clock and ask pupils if they can now turn that sentence into a paragraph before the time is up. Provide picture prompts or clues to support if necessary. Again, use the subsequent teaching to address the aspects that were omitted or incorrectly expressed. ■

For more ideas about how to use the classroom environment to support memory and retention, see 'Dynamically Different Classrooms: Create spaces that spark learning' by Claire Gadsby with Janet Evans.

More on marking and memory

Dot marking

Using a dot to indicate 'check this' is small but powerful way to encourage self-reflection and reduce teacher workload. Find out how it works in practice my.optimus-education.com/using-dot-marking-classroom

Five feedback tips

Are you teaching on the edge? Torsten Payne provides strategies and examples for effective (and time-saving) feedback my.optimus-education.com/five-tips-effective-feedback

Retrieval practice

A cognitive psychologist explains why testing can help learning, and how teachers can use retrieval practice to boost their pupils' knowledge retention my.optimus-education.com/how-retrieval-practice-can-help-pupils-remember-and-understand

Working memory

Pupils with working memory difficulties find problems harder and acquire concepts less easily. Here's how to help pupils train their memories my.optimus-education.com/developing-working-memory-what-teachers-need-know

Effective remote learning: six keys to success

Remote learning may be with us longer than expected. **HAMISH MACKENZIE** unpicks ways to make it better for both staff and learners

Schools around the world have had to pivot their traditional approach towards remote learning and are now planning for this to continue through to the autumn, with a full re-opening of schools appearing unlikely until late 2020. Hybrid approaches, where some pupils are present while others are at home, could be an additional challenge.

This article focuses on technology-enabled solutions to remote learning, in particular live lessons (synchronous). Many schools have adopted asynchronous or paper-based type approaches due to financial or technological barriers. However, it is likely that by September 2020 most UK schools will be providing some level of digital provision.

So, what can be learnt from the experiences around the world on the most effective methods for remote learning? Here are my top tips.

1. Pick the best tools for your context and keep it simple

There are many platforms, computers, tablets and software that will claim to be a 'fix-all' solution. Whether it is iPads, Chromebooks, Zoom, Teams, Twinkl, Showbie or Oak National Academy, the key to success is finding a solution that fits the context of the school, the confidence of staff and the communication with parents and children on expectations for engagement.

Once the initial excitement of change passes, which tools will be sustainable and keep pupils engaged and progressing with their learning? Teachers need to understand the logistics of running an

'Successful approaches to remote learning focus on people rather than the technology'

online lesson (e.g. where the mute button is!) and the safeguarding considerations that accompany seeing children's home contexts.

It is important that teachers can plan, deliver, assess and communicate in a manageable way using technology that the school has provided. Most of the time this will be a school laptop or tablet so quite different to a whiteboard, classroom and sets of books. Limiting the number of apps and platforms is a good way to keep it simple for staff and students. Providing ongoing remote CPD and support is also vital to success.

An example might be having a suite of apps for specific jobs. Google Classroom for setting, storing and sharing work; tools such as Kahoot! for AFL and revising policies on assessment and marking towards meaningful feedback on submitted work. This can be done via voice notes, mark-up and digital stickers to reduce the time and workload of remote teachers whilst still giving children the recognition and formative feedback they need.

2. Digitise traditional teacher pedagogies

No teacher came into the profession to manage complicated online learning systems or sit behind a screen for eight

hours per day. It's important that the professional practice teachers do every day can be digitised and brought into an online space.

Some of the most successful remote learning approaches focus on traditional pedagogies and replicate them in digital spaces. Here are some examples.

Teacher exposition and slide narration can be achieved via a Google Hangout, Teams or Zoom meeting by talking over a screen cast of the teacher laptop. Discussion can be stimulated and encouraged by tagging students in Teams or Zoom chats, or by sharing screens.

Group work can be achieved via Zoom breakout rooms or Teams channels. Resources can be distributed before the lesson to subgroups within a class to allow differentiation by grouping or by task by the teacher. Or perhaps students can be pointed towards a shared Dropbox, OneDrive, Google Drive or Showbie folders to pick up resources appropriate for different groupings.

Peer-to-peer paired learning can be achieved via structured project learning. The emphasis shifts towards the teachers providing high-quality scaffolded resources that allow for open-ended submissions. Once instructions are understood, teachers can step back and allow pupils to communicate directly and



Limiting the number of apps and platforms is a good way to keep it simple for staff and students

work together on a collaborative outcome (perhaps a shared PowerPoint, report, movie or podcast).

Assessment for learning is still just as important in a remote context. Most live platforms now come with a hands-up feature and a chat function. These can be used for instant feedback (e.g. give me a quick score from 10 for your understanding of this before I move on). There are many more advanced tools for AFL with Quizziz, Quizlet and Kahoot! probably being the most popular and easy to use.

3. Structure is everything

It is much harder to take the temperature of the room and adjust approach as teachers do in every traditional lesson. It is hard to know when learners are bored, fidgety or lost. Therefore, short structured tasks tend to work best.

Flipped and blended learning approaches were pioneered online and continue to work really well. Teachers can record or curate some stimulus material or require pre-reading or watching before the lesson. This will help generate discussion from the get-go and ensure

that students understand the context of the lesson.

Teaching new content can be difficult to a cold audience so scaffolding is important. Short tasks that hook the students in, followed by building blocks that lead towards something deeper, is a good method for progress online.

4. Keep expectations realistic

Teachers have high expectations of themselves and can be nervous about broadcasting less-than-perfect lessons. As leaders it is important to communicate that 'good enough' is ok. Many teachers are juggling care commitments and dealing with their own health, financial and family worries. A helpful maxim is 'don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good'.

5. Seek opportunities for connection

Support teachers to continue a meaningful connection with their students rather than just admin and audit trails. Encourage Zoom style tutor meetings, sports-team quizzes, competitions and topical stimuli.

Remember that learners still want to feel connected to their peers and

not just be passive recipients of tasks and homework. Tools such as Padlet for creating photo walls and live mind mapping can be great for sharing photos in a safe and curated landscape.

Encourage teachers to consider what they can do rather than what they cannot – for example plastic scavenger hunts around the house to learn about plastic pollution or counting the windows for a maths project on averages. Twitter and PLNs (professional learning networks) are incredibly rich places to magpie ideas from for remote teaching. Suggest staff follow other educators and educational hashtags to further develop their practice.

6. Look after your people

March seems like a long time ago now. A lot of teachers (and pupils) will be running out of steam, energy and enthusiasm for remote learning alongside the other balls they are juggling.

It is important to thank staff regularly and share examples of best practice through school communities. Initiatives such as 'home learning heroes' where staff nominate colleagues who they feel are doing a great job, or weekly photo competitions on a theme that pulls the whole school community together are good ways to keep colleagues going.

Allowing students to broadcast to the school on a theme and setting up virtual assemblies are all effective ways to bring people out of silos.

To sum up...

Successful approaches to remote learning focus on people rather than the technology. For many schools Covid-19 presents a clear sign that business as usual is no longer an option. Investing in appropriate digital platforms and training staff effectively will be key to education in 'new-normal' landscapes.

School leaders should apply their knowledge of their own context but not be afraid to take bold decisions to migrate to cloud systems and think differently about future provision. ■

 WEBINAR REPORT

Using video for CPD

LIZ WORTHEN highlights new additions to the webinar video library and how they can be used to enhance CPD

Working from home became a reality for many school staff from March 2020. And for some, the disruption to the classroom schedule meant time freed up for professional development. Many members updated their login details, undertook In-House Training courses and had more opportunity to make use of the website.

Refreshing the webinar offer

This seemed like a good time to revisit our webinar offering. Rather than scheduling live sessions, we pre-recorded five videos with contributors Amjad Ali and Natalie Packer. And we set them the challenge of keeping their presentations to 20 minutes (mostly they were

successful!). There's a reason that even the most inspirational speaker is limited to 18 minutes for a TED Talk: it's long enough to flesh out an idea, but short enough for a listener to take in and digest the important information.

How might you use the webinars?

1. Twilight Inset

The 20-minute format means the videos could easily feature as part of a twilight session. Most of the sessions include questions for reflection or discussion, so these could be used with the group post-viewing. The accompanying presentation

can be downloaded for reference or shared for reflection afterwards.

2. Be the presenter

You could watch the video yourself, then download the accompanying presentation to facilitate an adapted version of the session. Tweak the slides, add in your own resources or references, and maybe offer the video as a revision tool.

3. Flipped learning

Ask team members to watch the video or listen to the podcast version on their own. Then dedicate 15 minutes in your next team meeting to sharing responses, questions and actions. ■

Effective questioning strategies

Speaker: Amjad Ali

Benefits: Get 20 questioning ideas to try out in the classroom.

- Do we prepare and practice our questioning techniques enough?
- Do we plan our questions?
- Do we study different ways to question at all?
- Do we continually learn? Adapt? Change our questioning styles?

Watch here: my.optimus-education.com/video-cpd-effective-questioning-strategies

Barriers to classroom learning

Speaker: Amjad Ali

Benefits: Get practical suggestions around tackling four common barriers to learning.

- What will you try?
- What will you refine?
- What will you ditch?

Watch here: my.optimus-education.com/video-cpd-barriers-classroom-learning

Initial identification and assessment of SEND

Speaker: Natalie Packer

Benefits: Get examples of useful tools for identifying and assessing SEND.

- Do we have an effective process for initial identification of SEND?
- Do staff effectively use a range of evidence for identification?
- Do we have ways of assessing within each of the four broad areas of need?

Watch here: my.optimus-education.com/video-cpd-initial-identification-and-assessment-send

Evidence-based approaches to classroom SEND provision

Speaker: Natalie Packer

Benefits: Understand what the research suggests about effective approaches to meeting the needs of pupils with SEND.

- Promote positive relationships and active engagement.
- Focus on understanding individual pupil needs.
- Promote good teaching for pupils with SEND as good teaching for all.

Watch here: my.optimus-education.com/video-cpd-evidence-based-approaches-classroom-send-provision

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

There's been a lot of speculation around the impact of lockdown on the mental health and wellbeing of children. While pupils may be very happy to be back at school, it's possible that issues will emerge over time. Adele Bates looks at what staff can expect for learners with SEMH and how to respond. Meanwhile Natalie Packer takes recent research from the Education Endowment Foundation and uses it as the basis of a five-point plan for SEND provision over the academic year.

There's an increasing awareness of the impact of attachment needs or disorder on a child's ability to learn and their behaviour. Liz Murray outlines how staff training and a robust referral system are vital elements of a whole school approach to support. Staff training is also crucial to effective safeguarding. Luke Ramsden highlights changes to 'Keeping children safe in education' which DSLs need to share.

During these times of heightened stress and uncertainty, taking care of yourself and your colleagues is more important than ever. Read Nicola Harvey's guidance on wellbeing for teachers of SEND learners and take note!

Top SEN and safeguarding blogs

Reassuring children in an uncertain world
oego.co/reducing_anxiety

Low Arousal experiences during lockdown: learning from a family perspective
oego.co/family_learning

Beyond the tick list: the ice cream sundae approach to explaining autism
oego.co/autism_sundae

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Teacher wellbeing in a special school

When we think about teacher wellbeing, staff who work in special schools tend to get overlooked. **NICOLA HARVEY** shares strategies to support the wellbeing of SEND teachers

SEND teachers gain a lot of joy and satisfaction from the role and, in order to thrive, need to be incredibly dedicated to the profession. While taking on the same responsibilities as mainstream classroom teachers, a teacher supporting a class with complex special educational needs may also need to:

- prepare for and attend annual reviews and similar meetings
- support anxious parents, particularly if they are awaiting a diagnosis, pending a tribunal or applying for an EHCP
- set detailed individual learning plans (or equivalent) for each pupil
- keep informed of pupils' therapeutic or medical needs
- integrate therapeutic needs into the classroom e.g. sensory input, movement breaks
- differentiate the learning towards a broader range of abilities.

As rewarding as working in SEND can be, it can also take its toll on teachers' mental health and emotional wellbeing, often resulting in heightened anxiety, stress, depression and much more if they don't get the right support as early as possible.

Teacher wellbeing in special schools is rarely highlighted in research reports and within the media. The classes may be smaller, but the pressures remain high. Whilst the government may acknowledge this with the SEND allowance, research shows 71% of teachers consider leaving the profession due to workload (see Education Support's Teacher Wellbeing Index 2019 for

detail), so there needs to be more emphasis on wellbeing across the board.

Strategies for heads and senior leaders

Many of the staff wellbeing strategies used in mainstream schools are applicable to special schools, particularly when there is a whole school ethos towards positive mental health and wellbeing, as well as a formal and accountable wellbeing policy that all staff are aware of.

A multi-disciplinary team and support network needs to also be in place for teachers so they know who to talk to during a time of crisis and how to access professional organisations, such as Education Support (www.educationsupport.org.uk) and Occupational Health Services (occupationalhealthprofessionals.co.uk).

More specifically, there are many ways that leadership teams in special schools can create a clear and consistent culture of wellbeing.

1. Provide regular specialist SEND training

SEND teachers may feel overwhelmed and unskilled to fulfil the role due to lack of initial teacher training.

- As well as building in support and training into the induction of NQTs, provide regular training for all members of staff based on the key areas of need in your school.
- Organise therapy provision where educational psychologists, OTs and similar professionals provide step by step guidance on how to integrate

sensory and/or therapeutic targets into the classroom.

- Where possible, extend pupil counselling and therapy services to staff.
- For more advice on SEND training, take a look at: my.optimus-education.com/send-induction-new-staff

2. Support staff in working with parents

Teachers working in a special school will normally have more contact with parents/carers than those who work in a mainstream setting.

Although working with parents can be rewarding, it can also be very stressful. Staff need to be supported in building resilience and setting clear boundaries for themselves, particularly around anxious parents.

- Ensure staff are supported and trained in having difficult conversations with parents.
- Ensure staff know when to appropriately signpost parents onto organisations like the IASS, YoungMinds, Special Needs Jungle or their local SEND officer.
- If staff feel distressed after a conversation with a parent or carer, ensure they can debrief with a colleague before leaving school.

3. Enable easy access to the SENCO or member of SLT

SENCOs and senior leaders should make time to discuss things like the EHC plan

process, how to create and set measurable outcomes for pupils and how to prepare for annual reviews.

The STAR model

Stop

If you feel overwhelmed and experience heightened emotions, give yourself a moment to pause and take a step back from the situation. This can help you feel present and notice your surroundings to mindfully connect with your feelings.

If you feel you don't have the time, take a moment to look out the window or at a calming object to shift your focus, even if it is just for a few seconds.

Take a breath

Breathing is the core of mindfulness. When you feel calm, your mind becomes clear and your breathing is steady and relaxed. When you experience stress and overwhelm, your breathing may become shallow or be at a faster pace, potentially with a busy mind.

When a person breathes deeply it sends messages between the brain and the parasympathetic nervous system to slow down, reduces blood pressure and enhances a more balanced state of calm in the mind and body.

The best way to practise breathing is through easy to follow practical activities. There are also lots of relaxing tools on YouTube and calm down apps like Headspace for Educators or Mindshift.

And

Once you have mastered deep breathing, the next stage of the STAR model is to find ways to ground yourself in the here and now.

You may like to start with using some of the sensory activities you use with the pupils on yourself e.g. fiddly toys, star jumps, calm down jars.

Relax

It may feel strange at first, as many teachers find it difficult to switch off and relax, but try to include relaxation into your everyday routines. This can be anything that helps you slow down, including listening to music, walking the dog or reading a book.

4. Create a culture of openness

Provide regular whole staff meetings where teachers are encouraged to give their 'two stars and a wish' (work/personal), share best practice and gain support on anything on which they are unsure.

Mindfulness in the classroom

With regular practice, mindfulness can help reduce stress and anxiety, improve executive functioning, sharpen attention and focus and positively impact a person's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

With a focus on mindfulness and special needs, the book *Mindful Little Yogis* provides self-regulation tools that can be used by both teachers and children with SEND. Readers are guided through the STAR model which stands for:

Stop Take a breath And Relax.

Teachers can use the STAR model to support their own wellbeing, then adapt the tools and demonstrate this in front of their pupils so they can practise the activities together.

The five steps to wellbeing

SEND teachers can practise the five steps to wellbeing, an evidence-based tool which can bring a grounded sense of calm.

1. Connect

- Talk to friends and family about experiences and emotions and remember to connect with friends outside the teaching profession.
- Schedule more time with loved ones and build this into routines.
- Share learning experiences with trusted colleagues, including peer to peer mentoring and attending #TeachMeets.
- Network with other SEN teachers using the Senco Forum (www.sencoforum.com) and Twitter.

2. Learn new skills

- Participate in CPD and training events

including organisations like NASEN, WomenEd and BAMEEd.

- Keep up to date with industry news and current issues via resources such as the Optimus SENCOlogy blog, SEN magazine and PMLD Link.

3. Notice the present moment

- Pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surroundings and notice them mindfully.
- When faced with a difficult or stressful situation, ask yourself, 'What am I reacting to? How does this make me feel? What do I need to do now to help me resolve this situation?'
- Do a body scan to mindfully connect to yourself.

4. Give to others

- Practise self-compassion by giving yourself time to breathe and connect within before you give to others.
- Participate in charitable projects and donate items personally or as a school.
- Create a 'kindness boomerang' in your school or with friends and family.

5. Be active

- Regular physical exercise will help raise self-esteem and cause chemical changes in your brain to positively change your mood. ■

Supporting staff wellbeing

The Supporting Staff Wellbeing conference takes place in November 2020, and the focus will be on creating a whole-school environment that prioritises staff wellbeing, ensuring effective teaching and support.

The conference is scheduled to take place online; visit:

my.optimus-education.com/conferences for details.

SEND: five evidence-based recommendations

How will you ensure that all pupils are accessing a broad and balanced curriculum this autumn and beyond? **NATALIE PACKER** shows how SENCOs can build plans based in good practice.

One of the challenges school leaders face whilst managing the full return to schooling is how to ensure pupils with SEND are successfully included. The DfE guidance for full opening (see www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak) highlights the expectation that schools will 'deliver a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils, including full educational and care support for pupils with SEND'.

Whilst there will inevitably be a focus on the immediate priorities (health and safety measures, social distancing and so on), planning for the longer-term – for autumn and beyond – will also be important to support a more strategic approach.

The DfE guidance contains several references to what schools should be doing to support pupils with SEND at the beginning of the autumn term. However, it is also useful to revisit wider evidence around good practice for SEND to support longer-term planning.

The EEF SEND report

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) publication *Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* is a great starting point. The guidance report is based on a focused review of the best available evidence on improving outcomes for pupils with SEND in mainstream schools. It provides five recommendations to support schools in reviewing their current approach and gives an overview of some 'best bets' for improving special educational provision.

So how can leaders use the EEF report to inform and support their planning for September and beyond? The five key recommendations of the report are highlighted below, along with some practical points for leaders to consider.

1. Create a positive and supportive environment for all pupils without exception

A positive and supportive environment for all pupils means placing SEND policy and practice at the heart of school priorities.

When establishing behaviour expectations from September, leaders will need to consider individual needs and keep in mind the importance of creating a positive and supportive environment for all. More children may exhibit challenging behaviours as they struggle to come to terms with the changes to the school environment and might require additional support.

'High quality teaching is the starting point for meeting the needs of pupils with SEND'

Remember the following.

- Promote positive relationships: focus on developing or re-establishing relationships between pupils, their peers and adults. Plan to support pupils who may find social communication difficult or who have difficulty trusting others.
- Promote active engagement: plan how you will support pupils who struggle to come back to school. Encourage metacognition and self-regulated learning so pupils become less reliant on others.
- Promote positive behaviour for learning: don't assume pupils will automatically understand or be able to follow new rules and routines. Teach them explicitly and support their understanding with the use of visuals or social stories.
- Promote positive wellbeing: consider how you will prioritise positive wellbeing through a whole school approach and provide specific support for any pupils who return with increased levels of anxiety or emotional stress.

2. Build an ongoing holistic understanding of your pupils and their needs

Understanding pupils and their needs through early and accurate identification and assessment is essential for pupils with SEND to make progress. Consider the following.

- Focus on understanding individual pupil's needs: high quality diagnostic assessment will be more crucial than ever in September, not only to identify gaps in learning, but also to establish a more holistic picture of pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

- Implement the graduated approach: use additional diagnostic assessments to support the process, for example to assess social, emotional or mental health needs.
- Ensure assessment is regular, purposeful and involves input from parents, pupils and professionals. Gather pupil and parent views on their experiences during lockdown: what did they struggle with? What worked well? What were the child's successes?
- Empower teachers to use the information to plan next steps in teaching and learning. Share all relevant transition and assessment information with staff so they are well informed about pupils' needs.

3. Ensure all pupils have access to high quality teaching

High quality teaching (HQT) is the starting point for meeting the needs of pupils with SEND and is based on strategies that should be in the repertoire of every mainstream teacher. These strategies should be used for all pupils and then applied flexibly in response to individual needs. Weaving inclusive approaches into everyday, high-quality classroom teaching supports SEND to become part of the fabric of the whole school, rather than being seen as a 'bolt-on'.

The EEF guidance suggests the following strategies can be particularly useful for pupils with SEND:

- flexible grouping
- cognitive and metacognitive strategies
- explicit instruction
- using technology
- scaffolding.

Leaders should consider how to provide professional learning opportunities to staff to support the implementation of inclusive, HQT strategies in the classroom.

4. Complement high quality teaching with carefully selected small-group and one-to-one interventions

In addition to high quality teaching, some pupils will require additional support in the form of high quality, structured interventions to make progress.

Over the next year, the government is providing additional funding for schools in the form of a catch-up premium. Headteachers will have flexibility over how to spend the funding. The DfE guidance for full opening states: 'For pupils with complex needs, we strongly encourage schools to spend this funding on catch-up support to address their individual needs.'

- Consider the use of structured, evidence-based interventions – see the Whole School SEND What Works

website (www.sendgateway.org.uk/whole-school-send/what-works) for suggestions.

- Carefully target interventions through identification and assessment of need – use catch-up premium to provide speech and language therapy, educational psychology time or other specialist support where appropriate. Consider any new processes or protocols needed for visiting specialists from September onwards.
- Consider implementing universal, targeted and specialist interventions – use a tiered approach to include HQT, catch-up and more personalised support. Update your SEN information report to reflect changes in provision as a result of the Covid-19 situation.

5. Work effectively with teaching assistants

When well-trained and properly supported, teaching assistants (TAs) can have a positive impact on pupil progress. Effective deployment of TAs by leaders is therefore crucial. The DfE guidance states that where leaders are planning to use TAs in different ways to support the return in September, this 'should not be at the expense of supporting pupils with SEND'.

Leaders will need to consider which model(s) of TA deployment will be most effective for their school to ensure the needs of all pupils continue to be met. For example:

- assigning TAs to one 'bubble' to help minimise movement and contact
- assigning TAs to work across two bubbles e.g. to deliver specialist provisions or interventions
- assigning TAs to work across more than two bubbles remotely e.g. to deliver live online sessions to a group of pupils from different bubbles
- assigning TAs as keyworkers for individual pupils with complex needs e.g. for those pupils who find self-regulation a challenge.

The principles of effective TA deployment remain as relevant as ever and are highlighted in the EEF report *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants*. Leaders should carefully consider preparing TAs for their role. If TAs are working in bubbles with unfamiliar pupils or within new subject areas, ongoing training and support will be essential as part of the preparation. ■

SEND Leadership

Join us in February 2021 for this new event, focused on developing effective SEND leadership within a mainstream environment. Look out for details at: my.optimus-education.com/conferences

Attachment disorder: a whole school approach

An awareness of attachment disorder and how it presents is essential for educators. **LIZ MURRAY'S** step by step guide will ensure pupils are identified and supported

John Bowlby originally developed the theory of 'attachment' describing it as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (1988). Bowlby said that the secure attachment with their main caregiver in the early years was of paramount importance to healthy development. This theory has since been developed to acknowledge that multiple attachments can occur with other adults throughout life, although early experiences continue to have an impact.

'Secure attachments' support mental processes that enable a person to:

- regulate emotions
- reduce fear
- attune to others
- have self-understanding and insight
- have empathy for others and appropriate moral reasoning.

'Insecure attachments' can mean that a child is unable to learn how to soothe themselves, manage their emotions and engage in positive reciprocal relationships. The skills needed to enable positive engagement with learning such as managing frustrations, developing self-esteem and good interactions with others may not develop as a result of a lack of a positive attachment in early life.

Impact on behaviour and communication

Research has inextricably linked attachment to school readiness and school success (Commodari 2013, Geddes 2006). Children who have had a poor start in

life and have been unable to form secure attachments with adults can exhibit certain behaviours. These behaviours can become more extreme during their teenage years. If left unidentified, often these children and young people are misunderstood and can become disenfranchised through exclusion and underachievement.

It is important for schools to not only be 'attachment aware' but to develop a pro-active whole school approach. This is not an easy task; an attachment-friendly school needs to be agile in its responses and this poses challenges for school settings with strict systems and behaviour policies that are often at odds with a flexible approach.

Step 1: Provide meaningful CPD

Awareness is the first step to developing a practical, whole school approach and a series of training opportunities for staff across the academic year is preferable. Professionally delivered, low-cost training from the local Virtual School team can be a good first step.

If resources are not available, Bath Spa University has some excellent resources and trainer recommendations on how to create an attachment aware school (see www.bathspa.ac.uk/schools/education/research/attachment-aware-schools).

Making staff aware of different categories of pupils who have or may have attachment issues is important. A system for communicating the following categories could be developed:

- those who are known due to being in care or adopted

- those who are unknown due to a lack of information but have consistent presenting behaviours/communication
- those who may be known due to another issue (underachievement or SEN) but are unrecognised as having attachment issues.

Any training on presenting behaviours needs to be developed alongside protocols for an early and integrated response from staff responsible for coordinating support and provision.

Step 2: Develop a robust referral system

As a result of SEND Code of Practice guidance, many schools have developed referral systems for suspected SEND and a 'graduated approach'. However, this relies on teachers having a clear awareness of how SEND presents. A more robust system allows teachers to refer pupils with any presenting difficulties, including behaviour, where the usual strategies haven't worked. There are two important aspects to this.

- Teachers discuss concerns with their subject or year team leader and try strategies prior to referral.
- The subject or pastoral leader makes the referral to senior leaders with accountability across the areas of SEND, pastoral support and teaching and learning, who together form a panel with other relevant stakeholders to discuss the child and take relevant action. This ensures

that no information is missing from important discussions leading to decision making.

Step 3: Implement whole school support systems

Research tells us that although a child's start in life is important it is never too late to support them in developing healthy reciprocal relationships (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). These relationships can and often do develop naturally with members of staff.

We know that providing consistent key people who support a child or young person throughout their school career can have a positive impact, which is one of the reasons why the role of the form tutor or pastoral lead has traditionally been a consistent person who has taken a group of students through their secondary career. Teachers in these pastoral roles would benefit from formal training to understand how the subtleties of their own behaviours can positively or negatively impact a young person with attachment issues.

Targeted whole school systems such as

the following can be helpful.

- CPD for pastoral staff developing an understanding of attachment and how consistent support from a few key members of staff can make a positive impact. Emotion coaching training for all staff would demonstrate a clear whole school commitment and would equip pastoral staff for their role.
- A more formal approach to the 'key worker' system by identifying children who need key worker support and allocating members of staff to it. Every staff member in a school, including support staff, can be involved in this.
- Recognise that safe spaces in school are important. Some schools create a wellbeing room or a nurture space, but it is important that people staffing these areas have knowledge of how to facilitate helpful interventions to calm a child that may be in crisis due to attachment difficulties.

Working in collaboration with the Virtual School

For those young people who are known to be LAC, the local Virtual School will oversee statutory review processes including monitoring spend on funding to support students. A positive and proactive working relationship with Virtual School headteacher, teacher adviser or social worker can make a difference to whether a young person accesses meaningful targeted provision or not.

- Consider the school context and empower key school staff in LAC and PEP meetings for the young person. For example, a head of year may be a better person to lead the process instead of the SENCO. The form tutor or other key teacher or TA may attend. The goal is for key adults to work together and with the young person to identify what will really make a difference.
- If previous communication has been difficult, reach out to the Virtual School headteacher and ask for a meeting to re-establish protocols of working together. Ask for clear processes to be put in place in case of issues with associated staff.
- Ask for all and any training that can be provided to groups of school staff from the senior leadership team to the teaching assistant team. Use Virtual School expertise and demonstrate that as a school there is a clear focus on developing attachment-friendly protocols. ■

Case study example

Jenny is a Year 7 student who started secondary school with reports of behaviour issues from her primary school. She was underachieving, but her primary school did not identify an SEN. Very quickly Jenny became known as a child with behaviour difficulties.

What happens next?

At many schools Jenny would receive excellent pastoral support and might even have some positive short-term outcomes as a result of interventions, but over the long term she may not improve. She could be labelled as a 'naughty' child and her behaviour might escalate as she gets older. In Year 9 she could get to a point where a significant incident might lead to exclusion. She could finish her school career in a PRU and leave school with few formal qualifications and rock-bottom self-esteem.

What might happen in a school with an integrated whole school attachment policy?

Following limited success with interventions from teachers and the pastoral team, Jenny is discussed in an early Team Around the Child meeting. Jenny is referred to an educational psychologist for a full cognitive assessment which includes a complete family history. The subsequent report reveals that her early life was traumatic. Her single mother had significant post-natal depression and did not recover fully for a period of years. It is likely that Jenny has insecure attachments. Jenny is also diagnosed with a verbal processing SEN. Recommendations are for consistent adult 'key worker' support to enable Jenny to feel safe and comfortable in the school environment and targeted strategies for teachers to support her. Teachers are supported to work with Jenny, a key person is identified to support her, and specialist interventions are organised. The school carefully monitors support in case further funding is required to support her in the future.

References and further reading

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SEMH: lockdown, transition and return

For pupils with SEMH, the return to 'normal' school life could be challenging. **ADELE BATES** considers what staff can expect and how to prepare

Since lockdown I have continued to work with pupils with social, emotional, mental health needs – it has been a completely mixed bag of fun! Some have loved all the one-to-one attention and thrived academically, some have enjoyed the online aspects of teaching, some have revelled in the power of being able to put the phone down on me, some have metamorphosed into nocturnal beings and some have, worryingly, not been seen or heard.

The very nature of SEMH needs means that these pupils need supporting with their mental health, behaviour and emotions in the best of times (see my previous piece at my.optimus-education.com/supporting-pupils-semh-needs). Add a pandemic and lockdown – often in home lives that are less than ideal, and we have a whole other set of safeguarding, child protection and health concerns.

Transitioning back into school

What can you expect and how can you prepare for those pupils who are making the transition back into the school building?

Some of your SEMH pupils may be classed as the government's 'vulnerable' and may have already been in schools in some way. I have heard of many who have enjoyed the higher teacher-pupil ratio, space, calm and less rigid learning styles that schools have been able to provide in these settings. When other pupils return, those who have been in school may well feel upset, over stimulated or frustrated as well as over excited and rebellious.

For pupils who haven't been in the school building at all there will be a mixture of school and pupil expectations to manage. Some pupils may very much need everything to go back, as far as possible, to 'normal.' For some pupils, school is the safer, preferred space and so if there is too much change that will be challenging to handle.

All of this will have to be balanced with health restrictions and guidelines from the government. Remember that they are only guidelines, not law, and may not suit your setting or pupils. We don't know how it will work, and so there's only one sensible approach: make time and space to deal with change. Safety and wellbeing first, learning second.

If we attempt to rush everything back to how it was before, and don't take account of SEMH pupils' needs, then there will be a

'Make time and space to deal with change. Safety and wellbeing first, learning second'

reaction. None of us know how a pandemic will affect our society or mental health in the long term.

First weeks of return

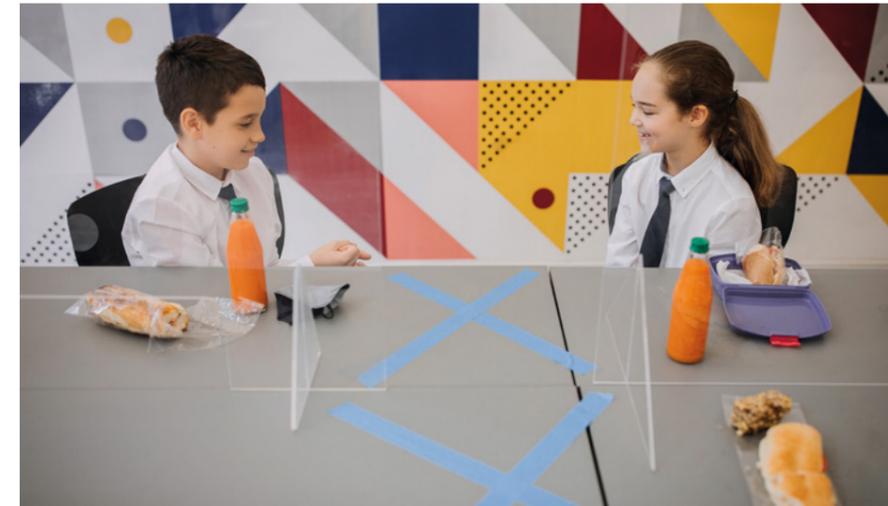
What will we need to do in the first weeks or month of return? Firstly, welcome pupils back. It is important that pupils know they belong. They (as well as some staff) may have felt isolated during lockdown, and unconfident now about being in social situations. A friendly, open welcome is the best place to start.

Account for this time in your planning, whether it's assemblies, extra circle time, daily mood monitors – this will be the check in of all check ins. SEMH pupils often display challenging behaviour on return from holiday periods. The change of routine and expectations can be difficult for them to navigate; in addition, they have been dealing with uncertainty.

Be understanding. Discuss expectations. Some pupils may need reminders of expectations in school, and they may need

Practical steps to help prepare

- Ensure all staff have access to mental health and wellbeing support – including SLT and headteachers – to help themselves and to help them support pupils.
- Communicate, communicate and listen – we are all learning with this.
- Have explicit learning about stress, mental health and self-care.
- Discuss expectations.
- Capture the positives from remote learning.
- Ensure all staff have up-to-date training on safeguarding – there may be disclosures about challenging experiences experienced during lockdown.
- Keep in regular contact with parents and carers.
- Be human.



For some pupils, school is their safer, preferred space

telling more than once. This doesn't need to be in a punitive style – it is important they know that they haven't done anything wrong by being in lockdown. It can be open, age appropriate conversations about change.

A useful resource of knowledge will also be parents and carers. Many of us working with SEMH pupils have found ourselves speaking with adults a lot more during lockdown and have formed strong connections that ultimately help the pupil. Find a way in your school to continue (or create) these links. Finding out that the pupil's cousin passed away due to coronavirus might explain why they are struggling at school now and are unable to articulate upset themselves.

The next six months

How should we prepare for the next 3-6 months? As we plan for the next academic year, the question will be regarding how we re-introduce an academic focus, especially for those Year 11 students whose two year focus on exams came to an abrupt, and in some cases unfair, result.

Remote teaching has given us some new ways of approaching learning. I have seen many colleagues easily navigate more individualised timetables for SEMH pupils, and in general it is these pupils who have thrived. How could you capture the positives from remote learning for your SEMH pupils?

Find out how pupils have been learning during lockdown – do they have new skills? Can they now cook a three-course meal independently? Tie their shoelaces or mend a car? Use any new skills as a foundation from which to build the more formal academic learning focus.

For other pupils, who have not been able to follow any form of recognisable learning (past playing an Xbox for a record number of hours), consider additional support in helping them transition. Their concentration spans may have decreased, or their ability to communicate their needs or socialise with others.

'How could you capture the positives from remote learning for your SEMH pupils?'

We have a precious opportunity here to question the very nature of education. What is it for? How does it work best and for whom?

After spending time being forced to do things differently, now we can ask what we would like to do differently. This should be at a systemic level. For example, do all staff have to be in school at all times? We have seen many benefits of children and young people spending more time at home with parents and carers; how could this be integrated into more formal school learning? What is actually helpful to our wellbeing and focus?

The schools that dare to ask these questions and experiment with answers will be the ones that can thrive other unknown changes we may have in the future.

What about the other pupils?

As well as the pupils you have identified as having SEMH, behaviour needs or being particularly vulnerable, it is important that we remember that every single pupil will have been through something unknown and uncertain. We don't know how this may play out. What we do know, is that when humans go through unforeseen change without control, there is usually a fall out in behaviour in some way.

So, expect the unexpected from all pupils (and staff), and make space and room for adaptation. And most importantly: be kind. ■

Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools

This annual event is your chance to network with leading experts and practitioners and take away proven strategies and resources to make a real difference to students affected by mental health issues. The conference is scheduled to take place online in November 2020; for details visit: healthinschoolsuk.com

KCSIE 2020: important changes to note

There are some significant changes to KCSIE 2020 which DSLs need to understand and incorporate in training for staff. **LUKE RAMSDEN** highlights four areas for attention

The ongoing Covid-19 crisis means that the government limited the updates made to 'Keeping children safe in education' (KCSIE) 2020 which need to be incorporated into safeguarding policies.

Some of the updates are just clarifications (see Annex H for a list of substantive changes). However, there are several significant changes to KCSIE that should inform safeguarding practice and staff safeguarding training.

1. Mental health and safeguarding

Probably the most significant change is that the definition of safeguarding is now explicitly 'preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health'.

Paragraphs 113-116 on 'children requiring mental health support' are new to KCSIE 2020. They place an onus on schools to provide support for the mental health and wellbeing of their students, and for staff to be aware that mental health problems 'can be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation'.

Safeguarding training in schools should emphasise that abuse and neglect are not just manifested physically, and that if a child is demonstrating a mental health concern, particularly if this seems to be newly developed, staff should be vigilant for potential safeguarding issues.

Particularly with the heightened concern for the mental health of young people during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, the lead DSL should work with the rest of the school leadership team to see what resources and curriculum time can

be channelled to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all students.

2. Contextual safeguarding

KCSIE has previously emphasised that 'all staff should be aware of indicators of abuse and neglect'. KCSIE 2020, in the same paragraph, now also explicitly states that: 'All staff, but especially the designated safeguarding lead (and deputies) should consider whether children are at risk of abuse or exploitation in situations outside their families.'

This is termed contextual safeguarding. Based on research over the last four or five years this highlights the potential danger of abusive or exploitative relationships that children might have with other people in their neighbourhoods and/or online who are neither in school nor in their family.

Young people will often hide exploitative relationships from their own parents or carers, particularly as they become older and more independent, and sometimes school staff might find out about these issues before anyone else.

Even if parents are aware of potentially concerning relationships outside the family, a fear of school sanctions or expulsion can lead to reluctance in raising this with school. For DSLs it is very important to explain to children and their parents that support rather than sanctions will be the first reaction if safeguarding issues like this arise outside school.

Make it clear to all staff that if they hear about concerning friendships or activities of children outside school then they should make sure to report this, as with any other safeguarding concern.

3. Domestic abuse and Operation Encompass

KCSIE 2020 makes it explicit that if a child has witnessed domestic abuse (that is abuse between those aged 16 or over), this can be seen as a safeguarding issue in its own right due to its psychological impact.

It also mentions Operation Encompass. This system ensures that when police are called to an incident of domestic abuse the police will inform the key adult (usually the DSL) in school before the child/children arrive in school the following day.

4. PSHE and safeguarding

KCSIE 2020 (paragraph 94) states clearly that PSHE should teach 'safeguarding' among other things.

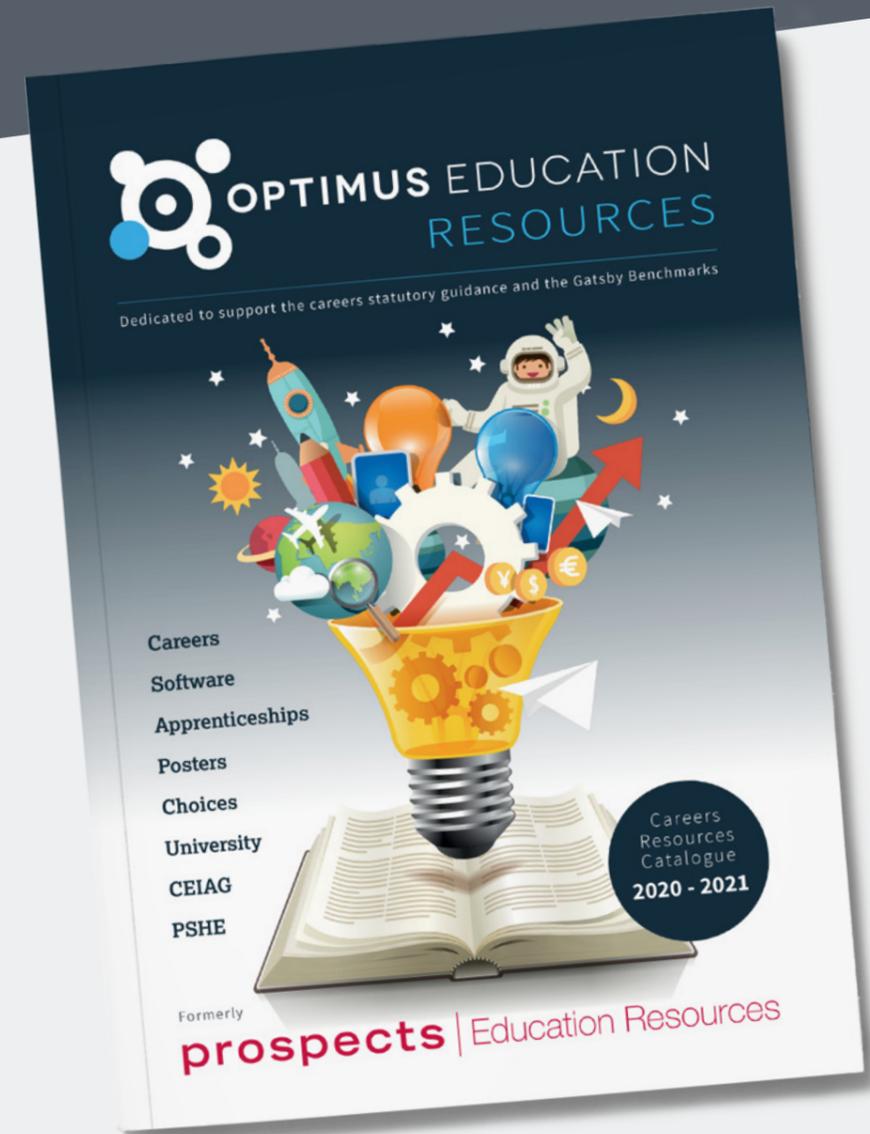
It is good to see a clear statement that all students should be taught explicitly about how safeguarding works in schools, and are aware of potential safeguarding issues for themselves and their peers as part of PSHE.

It's important that we teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, for example:

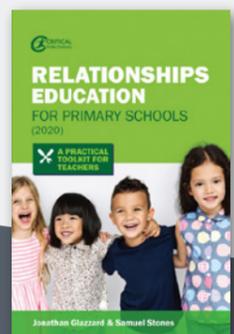
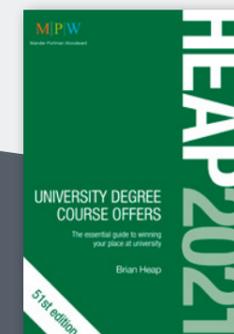
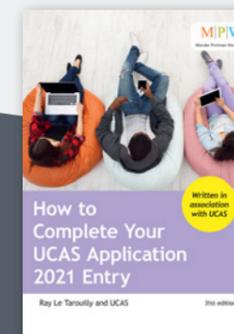
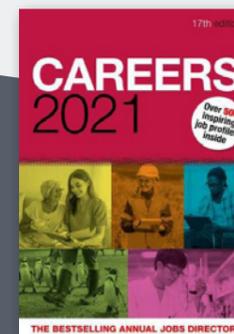
- being able to recognise inappropriate behaviour towards them or others by adults or peers, and how to get help
- how to have healthy relationships and recognise and avoid unhealthy relationships
- improving learners' understanding of concepts such as consent, equality, discrimination, and exploitation.

DSLs should work with the head of PSHE to ensure that these key safeguarding lessons are incorporated into the school-wide PSHE programme. ■

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