

INSPIR.ED

ADDRESSING THE THINGS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Planning a
Post C-19
Curriculum for Recovery

June
2020

Towards a (Primary) Curriculum for Recovery

Introduction:

*I am only too well aware of the tremendous pressure that schools are under to prepare safely for reopening following the imposed three-month lockdown as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Educationalists are currently performing functions never before asked of them. I can only guess at how many hours of extra work this has entailed, or the amount of paperwork and reorganisation that has been demanded of you. Safety of the school community must of course be the prime concern when schools re open and try and return to their core educational purposes over time, and that is for others to advise and guide on. I hope that this paper will draw together and signpost a number of useful and supportive **curriculum** resources that will support schools as learning communities as they strive to move forward to a position that resembles some sort of normality in the profession.*

Context:

In mid-March 2020, in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Prime Minister imposed severe restrictions on all aspects of society in an attempt to contain the spread of the disease, and to make it possible for the NHS to have the capacity to cope with managing the inevitable increased burden on their resources. The aim was to limit/slow the spread of the disease by personal contact between individuals in their daily lives.

Schools closed at the end of the week beginning 16th March but have remained open for the children of Key Workers, vulnerable children and those with Educational and health Care plans where it was not safe for them to remain at home. They were only instructed to re-open for limited numbers on June 1st and the stated aim was that all pupils would return to school before the end of the summer term for at least one month if possible. This document deals with the wider school curriculum provision.

The purpose of this document is to:

- examine the consequences of this unprecedented situation on schools as learning communities
- provide advice to school leaders, based on current research, as to best curriculum practice when reopening schools from June 1st and when planning strategically thereafter for quality teaching and learning
- help leaders prioritise actions so that, *once the safety of pupils, staff and families is assured*, a revised curriculum, designed to promote RECOVERY both *emotionally and academically*, can be implemented and so that the negative impact of the pandemic on children and young people's development can be effectively addressed according to uniquely identified needs.

NB : Its purpose is not to give advice on how to make changes to school premises to meet the demands of social distancing, nor does it to suggest routines and protocols that will be needed in order to ensure that the school is a safe place to return to and the risks of infection are minimised.

The DFE has issued extensive guidelines online at Gov.UK for these purposes in the first 9 of 12 sections <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-primary-schools> These are inevitably general, but will of necessity form the basis of individual schools' new policies and practice in terms of safeguarding.

The consequences to school communities of the Government directive on lockdown:

The closure of schools two weeks in advance of the Easter break, with no indication of when they would reopen, initially gave rise to widespread anxiety around the fact that public examinations, for both accountability and qualification purposes, would not take place in the current academic year, and subsequently to a realisation that home schooling was the new reality for all year groups. It also made child care arrangements imperative for children of all but Key Workers and those deemed vulnerable, and the advice that anyone over the age of 70 should isolate for three months limited the extent to which extended families, often hitherto relied upon for childcare, could continue to support in this way.

The physical restrictions imposed on society, and the fact that adult workers were required to now work from home wherever it was possible to do so, the only legitimate reason for anyone to leave the confines of their own home was to buy food and essential supplies, or to take daily exercise with those in the same household, resulted in family units being severely limited to their immediate living space. It also resulted in the closure of all public gatherings, clubs and activities, hitherto the norm for most adults and young people.

The situation where one or both parents or carers were working from home but were now also exclusively responsible for childcare 24 hours a day, gave opportunities for closer contact within immediate families. However, the need to provide temporary support for, and access to, educational activities in order to maintain some formal learning temporarily, was an additional burden on the majority. In situations where parents lived separately, stress and uncertainty over access arrangements can only have increased the anxiety of the children involved, and further intensified problems that already existed.

To summarise, almost without warning, life changed completely for all. Established routines and protocols for personal and professional interaction at all levels ceased to exist. A situation best described as “social disorder” quickly ensued. For adults, the lockdown was often perceived as a mixed blessing, albeit restrictive and disruptive. For young children, whose daily routines, curriculum frameworks and peer group interactions suddenly changed, it must have been at best unfathomable, and at worst, traumatic. Given that the familiar adults in their homes were increasingly experiencing stress and anxiety, often over the well-being and possible death of close friends and relatives, together with the heightened problems of caring for the elderly and the vulnerable, often from a considerable distance, meant that young people deprived of support from peers and trusted adults in the school settings, would have themselves suffered greatly from the loss of structure in their lives. All young people at such times are very vulnerable, and their mental health fragile, such that, in an increasingly fearful atmosphere, they themselves will have experienced what needs to be identified and recognised as a huge and inexplicable loss.

Young people will have become anxious over the loss of the ability to be physically close to others, including grandparents and other extended family members, absent parents and their own peer groups. The sudden loss of the familiar, the long-established routines and habits of everyday life, are likely to be traumatic and, in worst cases, may result in an increase in incidences of self-harm and panic attacks. There will be very real fears associated with the uncertainty of when things will return

to normal, if ever, and anxiety over the possibility that they, or those they love, may become ill or in fact die. Some may very well additionally experience actual bereavement within the family or close social circle.

Research has indicated that 83% of those with existing mental health problems say their anxiety and depression has worsened under lockdown; the Charity Young Minds reports that 63% of ALL parents of school age children are very anxious about the consequences of the current situation, but also of schools re-opening. The mental health and well-being of all young people will have been affected by this crisis, and planning future provision in schools cannot ignore this fact. This new reality undoubtedly contributed to the statement made on the morning of 28th May 2020 by the Children's Commissioner for England that "***ideally every school in the country should employ a mental Health Counsellor***" in order to re-establish in young people a more balanced sense of self-confidence and resilience. Whilst funding may well eventually be made available to facilitate this, how practical or immediate this will be is highly debatable.

The mental health and well-being of all pupils on their return to school will initially be equally, if not more important, than addressing any academic impairment they may have suffered during this forced period of absence from school.

At the very least the continued uncertainty will have triggered in those formerly considered to be well-adjusted young people, responses that have the potential to disrupt normal day to day behaviours, as well as previously positive learning behaviours. Many will feel confused by unfamiliar emotions such as anger; they may experience loneliness in isolation, be fearful and wary of others. They may possibly react with uncharacteristic aggression, frustration and emotional outbursts, lose motivation or suffer from a new inability to sleep soundly. Pre-existing problems in some will be intensified, and very few will be unaffected by the circumstances in which we find ourselves. A useful resource has been made available in specific response to the coronavirus situation by **The Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families**. It signposts a number of sources of help for the type of emotional stress that might occur; it can be accessed at [:https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/2035/coronavirus-dealing-with-effects-toolkit-5.pdf](https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/2035/coronavirus-dealing-with-effects-toolkit-5.pdf)

Equally the Centre has a longer Well Being document, in the form of a Toolkit, that will be invaluable as a source of support when schools seek to bring new understanding to the consequences of this trauma on young people: <https://www.annafreud.org/media/4612/mwb-toolki-final-draft-4.pdf>

The personal home circumstances prevailing within families vary considerably under normal circumstances, but differences are accentuated, and existing inequalities will be increased, when time spent in what are usually considered to be socially levelling environments in school classrooms, no longer exists.

The ability of schools to provide distance support for learning, and for parents and carers to rise to the challenges of home schooling, has varied widely. Where both parents had previously worked away from the home and are now having to work exclusively at home, the challenge of juggling work and child care with home schooling is extreme, not to mention problems of the shared access to technology, (given that it even exists), with equally needy siblings.

In a very recent, initial report, "***Education in Times of Crisis: The potential implications of school closures and international approaches to education during the Covid-19 pandemic***", May 2020, the **Chartered College of Teaching** lists, amongst its key findings, the fact that children in families of higher socio- economic groups typically spend more time with their children online learning, are

more likely to assist at times of school closures and have better access to a range of appropriate resources. These are symptomatic of the socio-economic gaps that exist in our society rather than signs of gaps in innate ability. The Chartered College researchers also comment that to be effective distanced learning requires quality teaching in the form of clear explanations, timely scaffolding and effective feedback. The very real differences between distanced learning and emergency remote teaching by parents under stress is the current reality that needs to be appreciated and taken into account on re-opening.

The same report is also very clear that both cognitive learning and behaviour are affected by grief and exposure to stress and trauma. Whilst it acknowledges that the documented evidence on the long and short-term academic effects of national disasters is very mixed, it lists the most common reactions to trauma as those of emotional and social isolation, flashbacks, avoidance and hyper-arousal. The evidence from the effective interventions provided following natural disasters, such as the earthquake in New Zealand (February 2011), indicates clearly that schools as organisations can undoubtedly play a key role in recovery from any feelings of loss and bereavement that may ensue.

The report also acknowledges the fact that, whilst teachers suffer the same challenges as others in the community during lockdown, they have the additional pressure of supporting children other than their own. It questions whether teachers returning to schools are in fact properly qualified to respond to the increased social and emotional needs of those in their care post lockdown. This will be a key consideration when planning the most appropriate CPD for staff in the immediate future.

The personal experiences of each pupil during this period of lockdown will have varied widely, and the learning opportunities each experienced may well be a far cry from that of many of their peers. Yes, there will be achievement gaps, and these will have opened up more than ever before in lockdown conditions, but anxious young people are not effective learners; ***their mental health and well being must be prioritised*** in any recovery plan if it is to work.

Advice and recommendations:

The curriculum required when schools reopen gradually in phases will be a very different one from that planned originally for the academic year. It will have to be “**a curriculum for recovery**” from the situation in which we have all found ourselves. Designing such a curriculum is down to school leaders. This recent “think piece” by Barry Carpenter (Professor of Mental Health Oxford Brookes University) is a good basis upon which schools might base their planning

<https://www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/a-recovery-curriculum-loss-and-life-for-our-children-and-schools-post-pandemic/>

Never before has the need to assess and evaluate accurately what a school community needs to do to improve provision been more important to the future of its children. Schools and their leaders are the only ones who know the school, its families and staff well enough to determine ***precisely*** and ***accurately*** what is needed to aid effective and sustainable recovery. Advice and guidelines will come, and some are already out there, but no government can give schools the answers. It is down to strong leaders and intuitive and reactive teachers to lift the mask of fear and disenfranchisement, and to engage and motivate whole communities of learners. It is only *these* people that can decide what is specifically needed, what can be achieved and what cannot without support from others. There will be an increased need to collaborate fully with families and other support professionals and to be acutely aware of mindsets and problems that develop. Only these people can truly know

what the consequences will be for their communities, if the needed matched support is not forthcoming.

Initial actions:

My immediate advice to school leaders is to determine, as soon as they can, in the simplest way possible, exactly what the impact of the period of school closure has had on the various groups within the community, and to obtain that information directly from all stakeholders.

A suggested format is included in Appendix A and might be sent as soon as possible, accompanied by an explanatory letter stating that all views, including those of the children are sought on separate sheets. These can be returned anonymously, and parents will need to talk with and support their children in formulating the most accurate responses, scribing views where necessary. Only in this way will school leaders gather accurate information upon which to plan their curriculum so that proper provision can be made to meet the wide range of needs that actually exist. These may be as anticipated, but you should not guess, or assume in your evaluations.

Responses should be analysed as soon as possible and all staff should be made aware of the implications, and involved in the planned, whole school responses, in terms of agreed interventions, to address the range of identified needs. A very simple suggestion for a planning sheet to provide a summary overview of what interventions are required is provided in Appendix B. Monitoring the outcomes and effectiveness of the interventions will be a key priority in what remains of this academic year.

The more detailed document from the Anna Freud Centre, published by Public Health England, *“Measuring and monitoring children and young people’s well-being: A Toolkit for Schools and Colleges”* <https://www.annafreud.org/media/4612/mwb-toolki-final-draft-4.pdf> has already been referenced , and it additionally provides a number of case studies to which school leaders might wish to refer.

New, changed priorities:

The DFE has made it very clear that there will be a need for schools to prioritise the support for pupils on their return to help re build strong **RELATIONSHIPS** with both their peers and with their teachers, as well as making expectations of new and unfamiliar school **ROUTINES** explicit and reassuring. They also make it explicit that for primary pupils **READING** remains a key focus for continued success.

With this in mind I like to refer to the need for schools to plan a **RECOVERY CURRICULUM, (Barry Carpenter)** refocused upon a new concept of the “3 Rs” at its core:

- Reading,
- Relationships
- Routines

The DFE Planning Guide previously referred to:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-primary-schools> has useful guidance upon **Supporting the well-being of pupils and staff** in section 10 , and **Planning what to teach, and how** in section 11.

With well-being in mind, the DFE wants *all* pupils to return to school if possible, for a month before school resumes in September. There is to be no penalty for NOT providing what would have been considered a “broad and balanced curriculum” at this time. It is up to individual schools to decide what is best for pupils.

There will be a pressing need to provide space and time for TALKING about what they have experienced during closure, and how they feel on returning. The opportunity to have those conversations, if need be in a one to one situation with a trusted adult, will be crucial to readjustment in a world striving to return to “normal” but where everything has changed. There may well be a strong need to refocus lessons on aspects of PSHE, reinforcing the notions of staying safe and with a keen awareness of the fact that increases in reports of domestic violence in the past three months have increased, and with it the need for all professionals to be aware of the signs of abuse, and be especially alert.

Re-establishing sound relationships with pupils individually, but maybe at a greater distance, will be of paramount importance to teachers, as will providing support as they re-engage with friendships and peer groups in newly established safety “bubbles”, not necessarily of their own choosing. This may well in itself prove to be a challenge, as the last thing pupils want at this time is to lose their sense of choice and agency. Now is the time to look again at the value of outdoor learning in all subjects. *(See “How outdoor learning can help with social distancing. “Natalie White in TES 23rd May 2020)*

Advice from the DFE on planning what to teach and how focuses on the need to prioritise reading, speaking and listening and physical activity in primary schools. There will be an increased need to let pupils PLAY and exercise in open spaces again.

Research by Helen Dodd at Reading University reinforces the notion that prioritising play and socialising rather than academic progress and formal lessons is essential for supporting all pupils’ mental health at this time. There is research evidence to suggest that children experiencing social isolation are five times more likely to incur mental health problems. Social distancing and isolation will make this for many, all too much of a reality.

Further information on the effects of the lockdown can be found at her series of webinars <https://emergingminds.org.uk/emerging-minds-covid-19-webinar-series/>

With the early return of **EYFS** pupils the advice is to ensure that, in the time remaining, efforts are made to ensure that wide experiences in all areas of Early Learning continue to be provided as opposed to concerted efforts in what will become the core.

Pupils in Y1 will require refocusing on their phonics with re-teaching where needed using associated reading matter a priority. Establishing where they now are and what is required before they transfer in September will be critical in terms of their READING as it is seen as key to future access to the curriculum and successful learning. Liaising with Y1 parents, helping them to understand how they might help with practise and catch up will be key to success.

Y6 pupils will need help in coming to terms with loss of part of their final year in a Primary setting. There will be a need to talk and think positively about how much they missed of what is often seen as a right of passage in Y6- the school trips and activities that follow SATS, the usual visits to Secondary schools and the inevitable sadness and anxiety that these things will give rise to. Alternatives to the usual transition visits to Secondary schools will need to be explored carefully with perhaps virtual tours and online meetings with teachers a possibility.

When **other year groups** gradually return to school, as hopefully they will for a limited time before the summer break, transitional activities for these will be **as important**. An accurate assessment of where each pupil was in March, where they might be expected to be in core subjects by July, together with an accurate assessment of **what they will not have achieved that they otherwise would have done** in their current year group, will be a key activity for class teachers.

Equally, communicating this to pupils themselves, their parents and to receiving teachers will be critical to enable a good start to be made, at the right place, in the Autumn term. Highly effective, reactive teaching with very clear analysis and understanding of what **MUST** be learned by pupils by the end of the year to assure access to learning next year will be required from **ALL TEACHERS** working collaboratively.

For **teachers**, possibly struggling with their own sense of loss, and trying to establish a new work/life balance for themselves, it will be necessary for them to, on the one hand re-integrate and reassure all those in their care, whilst on the other hand addressing the explicit needs of individuals whose responses to the crisis may well be very extreme, and require specialist help. Senior Leaders in school will need to be mindful of the need to support all staff as well as each other on their return. Their responses to the suggested questionnaire need careful consideration when formulating strategic planning for community recovery.

In conclusion:

Schools themselves have the responsibility to consider above all else, the mental well-being of all in their care and engage in the following **KEY ACTIVITIES**:

- Assess where all learners are in their learning and agree how the curriculum will be adjusted to meet the priorities for transition. Attune to specific, identified needs, and ensure these are clearly articulated and addressed openly.
- Identify the specific needs of high-level support groups and be aware that members of the groups may not be the same pupils as previously, as a result of individual circumstances and experiences in lockdown.
- Know that Primary pupils' behaviour is likely to have been affected by the lockdown. Review the policy for managing behaviour issues, rethink the responses and be calm. Be sure that all pupils know they have a fresh start every day, however bad the previous has been.
- Support positive social and emotional aspects of development through encouraging a curriculum that embraces music, play, the arts and stories. Help all members of the school community to both relax and exercise
- Support Y6 transition, but be aware that transition will be equally hard for all year groups- reassure pupils, ease their anxieties and those of their parents/carers. Develop renewed self-belief, and engage parents in your quest to do so.
- Plan **INDUCTION** activities for the new term carefully and be mindful of the need for this to be a lengthier process than in previous years.

Bear in mind the **KEY LEVERS** for a recovery- (Carpenter, B. et al (2015) 'Engaging Learners with Complex Needs', London, Routledge.)

These are not academic levers but aspects of development rooted in a humane approach that understands the uncertainties that will now prevail. The levers need to be applied systematically and be focused on POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS. There are five:

1. Restore relationships to cushion the discomfort of social isolation
2. Understand the needs of all stakeholders in the school community and engage them in supporting each other
3. Be transparent with pupils about the curriculum that you are providing so they can co-construct with you the learning that they need to move forward with confidence.
4. Make specific the skills required for effective teaching and learning- revise and revisit METACOGNITION
5. Be kind and give everyone the space they need to simply BE.

Schools on their return, along with the wider global community as lockdown eases, are entering a period of holistic recovery. They need to stay safe in a continuing period of uncertainty, and the provision needs to be, above all, therapeutic.

The best of our schools share the view of Ferre Laevers of Leuven University **that emotional well-being and involvement levels are the crucial cornerstones for learning and life.**

“When children feel at ease, act spontaneously, are open to the world and accessible, express inner rest and relaxation, show vitality and self-confidence, are in touch with their feelings and emotions and enjoy life, we know their mental health is secured.....When children are concentrated and focused, interested, motivated, fascinated, mentally active, fully experiencing sensations and meanings, enjoying the satisfaction of the exploratory drive and operating at the very limits of their capabilities, we know that deep level learning is taking place.”

Laevers, 2004

That is not only the long-term aim of a recovery curriculum but that which we want for the whole community, of which school is only a part, albeit a very important part?

Finally, revisit and re-establish the aims and values that were well established in your school community before the C-19 virus turned the world upside down. They will still apply, and no government or any paper can give you those. Remember....*it is down to strong leaders and intuitive and reactive teachers to lift the mask of fear and disenfranchisement, and to engage and motivate whole communities of learners.*

Jenny Short May 2020

Inspir.ed

07782 256 322

jennyshort@inspir-ed.net

Appendix A: Possible initial Questionnaire to determine specific needs.

Questionnaire:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to accurately establish the needs of individuals and groups to enable us to effectively plan a “Curriculum for Recovery” following the COVID Pandemic that takes full account of the concerns that now exist, and are unique to THIS community, so that the school can effectively provide targeted support for all in our attempts to return to more normal patterns of work and attendance. You may also feel it is an appropriate questionnaire for your Governors.

This response reflects the views of:

Pupil aged _____, Teacher EYFS/KS1/KS2_____, Support Staff _____, Parent or Carer of pupil____

1. Do you have additional responsibility as a carer for another family member?	Y/N
2. Are you considered to be in a vulnerable group (in terms of COVID) by virtue of either age or a pre – existing condition?	Y/N
3. During the period of Lockdown/Isolation has anyone in the household displayed symptoms that by definition required strict isolation?	Y/N
4. Have you yourself had such symptoms?	Y/N
5. Have you experienced bereavement within this period within your immediate or extended family, or social circle?	Y/N
6. From your point of view what have you felt positive about in terms of your situation during Lockdown?	
7. What three things about the Lockdown situation might you personally say have caused you most problems/ worried you most?	
8. What three things might concern you most about the school re-opening?	
9. What one thing that the school could do at this time would make you feel less anxious about the current situation?	

Please feel free to make any other relevant comment, or add details that you feel would help us ensure that the way we organise routines or design our learning programmes are best suited to your needs as they are after this difficult period of time.

NB You may submit this anonymously or sign your name to it. It is entirely your choice.