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From the editor



I hope everyone had a relaxing time over Christmas and you were able to recharge your batteries after a very challenging year. Although we now have a vaccine rolling out in the battle against the coronavirus it will still be many months before things get back to a semblance of normality. School leaders will still have to be dealing with bubbles, tiering and even possible lockdowns as we move forward into 2021.

Despite the challenges presented by Covid-19, school leaders rose to meet it head on with innovative approaches to the new way of learning. And many aspects of the way things changed can now be incorporated into the future of education. The use of technology has seen a huge rise and this can only be beneficial to the way we teach in the future. It may help to reduce the attainment gap and also the workloads of teachers. In this issue we look at the ways EdTech can help school leaders, teachers and pupils in all aspects of education.

It has been a very stressful time for everyone and we take a look at ways that these stress levels can be managed and reduced. As well as finding ways school leaders can reduce the workload of their staff so they can spend more time with their pupils.

Air quality is also an issue, not only in the spread of the coronavirus, but as a factor in learning. We take a look at steps you can take to improve and monitor the situation in your schools. Being outside is also a good way to help reduce the spread of Covid-19 and outdoor learning has increasingly come under the spotlight. We look at ways to plan and manage outdoor learning and the questions you should be asking on how to implement it. I hope everyone has a happy, prosperous and less stressful new year.

Enjoy the issue,

Mark Hayhurst
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Our experts this issue



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From the makers
of **Teach Primary**

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The school leadership lessons learnt in lockdown

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PUBLISHER: Helen Tudor

PUBLISHED BY: Maze Media (2000) Ltd,
25 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Rd, Colchester,
Essex, CO2 8JY.
01206 505900

aceville

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School libraries are vitally important

Richard Gerver, president of the School Library Association, renowned international speaker and former award-winning headteacher, tells us about his career

What attracted you to go into education?

I was at university studying performance arts, theatre and writing and met a young woman who was trying to be a teacher. She introduced me to teaching. She was a couple of years ahead of me because I took some time out between school and university. So as she began her career, because she knew I love drama and writing, she used to get me to go into her school and work with her children. And as my relationship with her grew, so did the relationship with education. It was one of those epiphany moments. I suddenly thought 'My God, how did I never think this was the job for me'. So, I finished my degree and enrolled on a PGCE. That's how I got into teaching. And just as the real happy ending to the story, I'm still with that stunning woman. She's a head teacher and we've been married for nearly 30 years.

You came to prominence for turning around failing Grange Primary School. How challenging was that?

It wasn't an intended move. I had been seconded by the local authority to develop a programme to remotivate unmotivated boys in reading and writing. And one of the schools they wanted me to try and persuade to get on board was Grange Primary School

in Long Eaton. It was in real trouble and had been struggling for pretty much a decade. But, I fell in love with the place. I went away and told the Director of Education that as and when the job came up, I wanted to apply for it, which I did and got it. There was a clear passion for the school in its community. People loved the place and it was generational. And really the key was to climb underneath why they were struggling, and find out where the problems were.

And I think so much of it had come from what I've seen as familiar traits since in failing schools and failing organisations, which is people just felt disenfranchised. They've had tier upon tier of people coming in telling them they were rubbish, and telling them what to do and how to do it. The passion had just bled out of the school. For me, it was about starting again, with a blank slate, by asking how do we make the learning matter, not just some abstract in the future, but for now?

And you believe that the school library was a fundamental part of making learning matter?

Yes, one of the first things I did to turn around Grange Primary from a failing school to one of the most successful, was to build a

state of the art purpose-built library with staff receiving full school library CPD training; the result proved my belief in the transformative power of libraries.

Back in 2001-2 although there was a digital revolution, it wasn't quite the digital revolution as we know it now. So many of the children there had no access to the internet or to digital technologies. A lot of the kids in our community not only didn't have access to books, they also had no experiences to fire their imagination. A summer holiday for them might be to sit on their front step. So the library has to be a real core part of that, because if you want kids to engage in learning, you have to fire their imagination and build their aspirations. And in so many ways, a library is such a powerful resource for that.

Is that why you accepted the role of president of the School Library Association?

I've always believed that school libraries are vitally important. I believe that the current perspective on school libraries is too narrow. As we focus on the 'levelling up agenda' I will be spending my time at the SLA bringing school libraries back to the heart of the debate around education. Teaching all children, from all socio-economic backgrounds, how to access valid, trusted information from books and online and to interrogate what they are being told, has never been more important. Democracy only works if you have informed citizens to make informed decisions.

What do you see as the future for primary education looking forward?

We have to give primary schools a huge amount of leeway right now. I think the rest

“Democracy only works if you have informed citizens to make informed decisions.”





of this school year will be about ensuring that the children are safe, happy and emotionally stable, as well as the staff, and that the school is physically safe. I think the rest of the year is about survival and damage repair as far as possible. My instinct is that September 2021 will be the time to which schools can return to some semblance of normality, real normality and stability.

How did you find yourself on the global stage as an award-winning speaker?

The turnaround at Grange became very well known very quickly and we were doing some very innovative things. I was increasingly asked to talk at education

conferences about the Grange story. And also, at the same time, I met my dear mentor and friend, who, sadly we lost a couple of months ago, the British author, speaker and international advisor on education in the arts to government, Sir Ken Robinson. He was fascinated by Grange. And because of his profile, he would tell people about what we were doing and it would bring extra interest. And, eventually, the demands of running a school and speaking became too much. And Ken was the one who said, 'You've got really significant things to say and my advice would be to come out with me and I'll help you'. So, initially, I went out and

most of my work was talking around education. But what was really interesting was the timing because I came out of school just around the time of the global financial crisis. And organisations outside of education started to tap into my story around change, transformation and dealing with adversity. I got an agent through Ken's support and wrote books, and it's just really exponentially grown from there. Given the events of the last year, my work and research over the last decade into change in human development, which has always had education at its heart, has become much broader and that has been really significant for people. I hope so anyway.

CAREER TIMELINE

1992
Begins teaching career, having previously been an actor and copywriter

2001
Appointed headteacher of Grange Primary School, Long Eaton

2005
Wins 'School Head Teacher of the Year' at the British National Teaching Awards

2008
Begins his career as a speaker and author

2018
Works with President Barack Obama on the Advanced Leadership Foundation

2020
Becomes the president of the School Library Association

Picture this...



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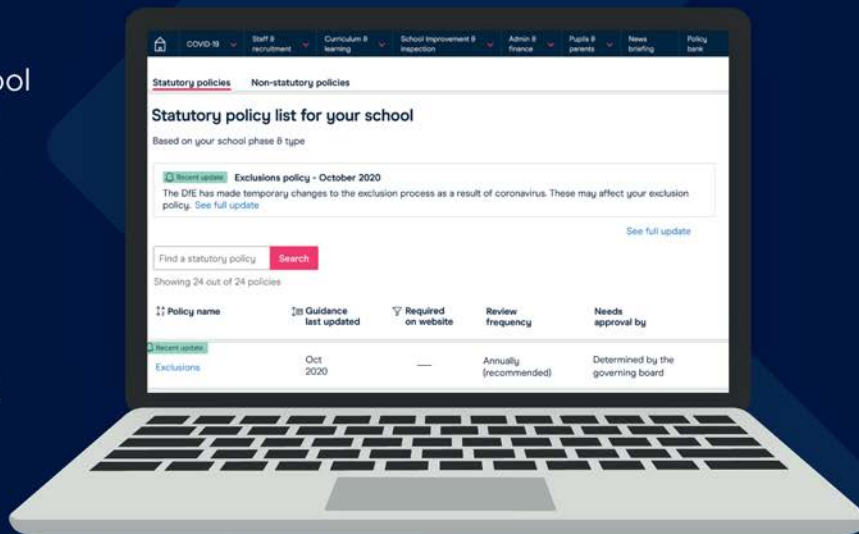
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THE **PSM** GUIDE TO... School Improvement

ENGAGEMENT IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Olivia Bartlet explains why reading is so important and how to encourage it

The last year has been challenging for all schools and the sector as a whole has been forced to navigate ongoing disruption from local and national lockdowns, to Covid-19 cases in the classroom, to track and trace responsibilities.

Keeping pupils, especially those in the early stages of their educational development, engaged and motivated has been particularly important. At Tor Bridge Primary School we know a child's reading skills impacts all of their other learning.

Reading helps a child build their own vocabulary and improve their understanding, but it also helps them to develop their creativity, imagination and empathy.

ENCOURAGEMENT

For the very young children in Early Years and Key Stage 1 we wanted to ensure they had the opportunity to continue learning their phonics whether they were at home or in school. We also found that children really benefited from seeing the familiar face of their teacher, it allowed them to stay connected to the school.

Our Early Reading Leader and Key Stage 1 team filmed lessons covering the entirety of the Phonics programme for the children to watch at home or in school. This meant each child was able to view daily phonic lessons suited to their individual stage of development, delivered by a familiar adult wherever they were learning.

Staff from across the school got involved, including the catering team, the admin staff, teachers, Teaching and Learning Assistants (TLAs) and the senior leadership team also filmed themselves reading their favourite 'Bedtime Story'. We found that our youngest pupils really benefited from being able to see the faces of their teachers and hear their voices reading stories. This helped them stay engaged with the reading process and maintained their love of reading.

Our slightly older pupils in Key Stage 2 also benefited from this, they could

“We found that our youngest pupils really benefited from being able to see the faces of their teachers and hear their voices reading stories.”

that term either online by listening to the teacher recording, or they were delivered hard copies of each chapter so they could read along. Children were then provided with a Bitmoji of their teacher, designed to look like their class teacher, which they enjoyed reading to and even using as a bookmark.

VARIETY IS KEY

We know from using edtech programmes Accelerated Reader and Star Reading by Renaissance that providing children with a wide range of books to choose from, at their appropriate reading level, is so important for maintaining their confidence and enjoyment of reading. Accelerated Reader calculates each child's 'Zone of Proximal Development' and recommends books that will challenge the child as they read them but not to the extent that they feel demotivated.

With social distancing continuing and Covid-19 still impacting the school day, our 'Book Vending Machine' Project has been a great way to keep our pupils reading. During lockdown our English Leader took it upon herself to reach out to local councillors and local companies to see if they would be willing to support the Book Vending Machine so that all our children could have access to a wide variety of high-quality texts. She was successful and the project is now utilised as part of our reading reward system. The books come at no cost to the children or their families but add excitement and give each child a sense of achievement on their reading journey.

As a school we pride ourselves on holding reading at the heart of everything that we do and our staff remain dedicated to this mission during this unpredictable term. We were delighted to be recognised at Renaissance's Lockdown Learning Awards for this.

Olivia Bartlett, Assistant Headteacher at Tor Bridge Primary School, Plymouth.



BATTLING THE BULLIES

Andrew Chadwick explains the importance of a proactive and inclusive school environment

All teachers strive to create a school environment in which children feel safe, empowered, and included. It is a fundamental part of ensuring that they have the confidence and capability to learn successfully.

Yet managing the conduct of several hundred children and nipping any playground antics and unkindness in the bud can seem like a daunting task. Furthermore, differentiating between the schoolyard squabbles and serious bullying behaviour can also prove challenging.

PIVOTAL ROLE

A recent survey carried out by the Anti-Bullying Alliance found that 34 per cent of 2,000 children aged between 11 and 16 in England had reported that they had been a victim of bullying in the past six months, with a big increase in online bullying.

With such worrying statistics front of mind, it's evident that primary schools in particular play a pivotal role in educating younger children and equipping them with the tools needed to deal with conflict.

At the Focus Trust, a charitable multi-academy trust consisting of 15 schools based in the North West, we are tackling the issue head on, with a proactive approach that involves not only pupils, but also parents and governors.

The approach has recently resulted in our Bradford-based Wilsden Primary School being awarded the ABQM-UK Bronze Award after successfully establishing effective and sustainable anti-bullying policies and strategies which has become a part of the school's everyday life through a range of procedures including a peer support scheme.

The bronze level shows that the school has a clear understanding about how to prevent all forms of bullying including cyber-bullying and that the safety, mental health and wellbeing of its pupils is of the highest importance.

The school is now working towards achieving the ABQM-UK Silver Award.

CURRICULUM

One of the most important parts of ensuring that any policy within the school is successful is that everyone agrees on the approach, so it is essential that we involve all of our stakeholders in the decisions we make.

Our 'pupil voice' is strong, and we actively involve parents, staff, and our governors. We have also introduced 'Challenge Time' to our curriculum, which provides learning opportunities for other cultures, as well as clear displays so that children know what to do if they are being bullied.

We're also very switched on to the particular threat of online bullying, so we have regular sessions within the school including visits from the police who come in to speak to pupils and parents. We also have comprehensive plans in place to provide additional support for vulnerable groups.

Our motto is start small, dream and achieve big, and we plan on continuing to work to embed our community ethos of anti-bullying and emotional wellbeing.

Find out more about the ABQM at <http://www.abqm-uk.com/>

Andrew Chadwick, Head of School, Wilsden Primary School

“Our ‘pupil voice’ is strong, and we actively involve parents, staff, and our governors.”

How to free up more time for teaching

Graham Cooper offers four tips for helping teachers spend less time in admin and more time with children

Teaching has been officially recognised by the Health and Safety Executive as high on the list of the most stressful jobs.

But, despite this, the number of teachers who say they would leave the profession if they could find an alternative, suitably paid job appears to be falling – and that's against the backdrop of Covid-19.

This is mostly down to the precious time teachers spend with the children they support – it's why most teachers enter the profession and also what makes the job so rewarding.

But with so many responsibilities eating up teachers' time, what can senior leaders do to free up more time for teaching?

Lesson planning, marking, pupil assessment and administration are important tasks so the aim is not to eliminate them completely. Rather to make a few adjustments so that they can be managed in a more effective and less time heavy way.

Take a look at these four steps to help you free up more child time for teachers in your school.

1. Find out which tasks are swallowing up teachers' time

Ask your staff to write down six administrative tasks they do every day and rank these tasks from high to low in terms of the time and effort they take to complete. Then ask your teachers to rank the six tasks according to their impact on teaching and learning.

You can get additional insight from this exercise by encouraging teachers to share their thoughts on what the consequences might be if they were to stop doing each of the tasks.

This is a great way to highlight the key priorities and move the tasks that tend to eat up time but have less of a positive impact on pupils' achievement further down the list.

2. Put existing processes under the spotlight

Cast a critical eye over the way your school currently does things and ask the question why? If the answer is 'because we have always done it like that' or 'because that's

how the SLT wants it', it may be time for a change.

So, one thing you could do is invite your teachers to a workshop and ask them to bring details of the six tasks they have identified as most laborious with them. This will help to spark discussion about which tasks you should keep doing, which could be adjusted to cut administration and which you should abandon all together because they simply don't benefit pupils.

3. Look at ways to work smarter not harder

Look at the different ways of helping teachers to work more efficiently and effectively to support pupils' learning progress across your school. For example, some pupil trackers and MIS make it easier for teachers to assess children against key objectives during lessons. This helps to avoid the double-handling of information, such as ticking success criteria in exercise books and then having to record details of pupils' progress again electronically.

You could even give teachers the option to link photos and videos to statements as evidence of pupil attainment while in lessons to cut time spent filling this

information in after school.

Giving pupils visual feedback on their progress towards learning targets can be quicker and more engaging too, so take a closer look at your systems to see whether you could use progress charts or graphs to replace more time consuming reports.

4. Monitor the impact of change on workloads

Plan a regular review at least once a year and encourage your staff to continue bringing their own specific workload issues directly to you. You can take the opportunity to share details of the areas where workload savings have been achieved too. If staff can see that sharing lesson resources has freed up three hours of time two teachers previously spent planning, they will be encouraged to embrace other changes you're making across the school.



Graham Cooper is a former school leader and now chief marketing officer at Juniper Education.



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Help children get more active while they learn

Jon Smedley offers some fresh ideas to help teachers incorporate more physical activity into the school day



Many families have faced new challenges as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. With issues such as job losses and health problems potentially having a negative impact on children's mental health, teachers will naturally be looking for effective ways to support their pupils' wellbeing.

Schools will need to find ways to encourage their pupils to get at least an hour of sport or activity every day, in accordance with new government guidelines.

So how can schools help teachers to address all of these issues? One approach might be to make lessons more physically active. The good news is, there are some very simple ways to do this that fit within the social distancing guidelines.

A NEW TAKE ON LITERACY

How about changing the way pupils learn English? You could ask the children to stand in a circle, each with a different word on the ground in front of them. They then take turns to throw a ball and form a sentence using the word in front of the child who catches it, helping to develop their vocabulary. Introducing chair aerobics, where pupils do shoulder rolls, knee taps and finger scrunching at their desks, helps to strengthen the arm and hand muscles they need in handwriting.

There are plenty of ways to make maths lessons more active too.

JUMPING JACK MATHS

Rather than asking the children to sit inside writing or calling out the answers to maths questions, get them out into the playground where they can have fun, get some exercise and learn at the same time.

How about an imaginary table tennis match? Split the pupils into pairs and ask them to choose a card with an instruction on it – count up to 200 in fives or recite the three times table backwards. They then take turns to shout out the answers while pretending to hit a fast-moving imaginary ball across the table to their partner, using their palm as the bat.

Another option might be to set up a relay race where pupils in teams compete by running to the other end of the playground to collect different number statements. This could be a multiplication or division question – ‘what is 15 divided by three?’ – or a simple maths problem they need to solve. They then race back to their teammates to answer the question before anyone else, then it's the next child's turn.

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

Steve Tindall, headteacher at Holy Family Catholic School in Addlestone, Surrey, is a firm believer in active learning to help improve mental wellbeing. ‘Active learning changes the psychology of learning as children forget that it's maths or English. They are just learning while they run

GET YOUR CLASS MORE ACTIVE IN LESSON TIME

- **START SMALL** – you don't need to overhaul the entire curriculum to introduce more active learning in your school. Start by bringing more physical activity into one maths or English lesson each week, then take it from there.
- **MIX IT UP** – try a variety of different activities to find out what active lessons work best for your class. This will help to keep everyone engaged in getting more physically active.
- **MONITOR THE IMPACT** – being able to see the positive impact active learning can have on children's health, wellbeing and achievement will help you to encourage pupils, teachers and parents to embrace this new way to learn.

around having fun with their friends.”

The impact on children's enjoyment of the subject is palpable too. ‘Maths used to be our pupils' ninth favourite subject, but since we introduced active learning in lessons, it had risen up the ranks to take third place after art and PE. We're delighted about that.’

With a new approach and more physical activity built in to lessons, schools can provide their pupils with exciting and engaging learning opportunities that will support their continued progress in the weeks and months ahead.



Jon Smedley is a former teacher and founder of Teach Active. Any teacher can access up to 50

active lesson plans in English and Maths for free for a trial period at www.teachactive.org, many of which are social distance friendly.

SHOULD SATS GO AHEAD IN 2021?

Matthew Kleiner-Mann explains why scaled back SATs will allow the tests to achieve their purpose and give pupils the normality they need

As schools waited to find out whether SATs would be going ahead in 2021, the debate about the tests raged on – in the teaching community, in the media, and in my email inbox.

On one hand I was being urged to sign an open letter to the Schools Minister and Secretary of State for Education, urging them to cancel SATs. On the other, a parent was telling me that her Year 6 daughter had cried when she found out that they might not be going ahead. For her, the parent explained, she just wanted life to go back to normal again.

So, it was no surprise that when the long-awaited announcement finally came in December, the decision continued to divide opinion. While some people breathed a sigh of relief that the tests are going to be scaled back, others took to social media to express their rage that they were still going ahead at all, calling the decision “morally wrong”.

To understand this ongoing disagreement about SATs, it's important to consider both the purpose of these assessments and the impact of Covid on schools and pupils.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF SATS?

SATs can play an important role in understanding pupils' progress, readiness for secondary school and where we need to focus resources. They provide a useful indicator of pupil's progress, benchmarked nationally. This data makes schools accountable, highlights areas they need to focus on and enables Ofsted to pose questions about a school's performance on behalf of the children.

SATs help parents to understand how their children are progressing and if they need any additional support, and they provide secondary schools with a more accurate picture of

what potential gaps children have when they arrive.

Some teachers argue that SATs make pupils feel anxious, but the fact is that whether we love them or hate them, most children simply accept them as part of



school life. To them, SATs are a rite of passage – like the class photo, school play or end of year disco.

THE IMPACT OF COVID

It's important to remember that children are delighted to be back at school. They want to crack on with their learning and for the majority of them, SATs aren't a concern. Children don't – or at least they shouldn't – care about the results. SATs are simply something they do and if they are feeling under pressure then their school is not doing it right.

This has been echoed by many of the Year 6 pupils at our schools, who felt that if they were cancelled, it would be another example of how far from normal life is for them right now. There are children who have had difficult experiences during lockdown and need support, but this can and should be dealt with individually, not by cancelling SATs altogether.

So, if the majority of pupils aren't concerned about SATs, then what about the

schools themselves? An important concern about holding the tests in 2021 was that the same level of accountability would be applied to all schools, when they have had very different experiences during lockdown based on factors beyond their control.

There has been a huge disparity for schools across the country because of things like the communities they serve, digital poverty and local outbreaks. If punitive accountability is attached to results, they may feel unfairly judged and schools shouldn't be punished if, because of Covid, children are not at the expected level. What's more important is how they have progressed since returning to school.

There is also the risk of potential further lost learning. We're still living in uncertain times and future local outbreaks in schools could mean that some children have more time away from the classroom than others. This could make it difficult to ensure a level playing field.

FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

The scaled-back SATs offer a good compromise between the two. They will provide schools with an important indicator of progress, without the high-stakes accountability usually attached to these assessments. Schools can worry less about league tables and more about using the information to inform and improve children's learning.

Even if schools or bubbles do need to be sent home, national requirements for good home learning following a sequential curriculum delivery, coupled with laptops for those who need it, should minimise the disruption of any periods away from school.

The risk that local outbreaks mean that some children don't get to take their SATs at all has been reduced by giving schools more flexibility around when children can sit the tests.

There's no doubt that 2020 has been one of the toughest years the teaching community has faced and that schools are still dealing with ongoing uncertainty. But fundamentally, children need – and want – to get back to normal learning and normal life. Our world has been turned upside down but children still grow up and life still goes on. Primary schools still need to know where to focus resources and secondary schools still need

FIVE TIPS TO PREPARE CHILDREN FOR SATS

- 1. Go slowly. Carefully build preparation up throughout the year, with teachers using the same language and style of SATs papers within the normal delivery of the curriculum. Weave extra support to those who need it into the daily curriculum input, little and often.**
- 2. Provide regular, low stakes testing across the curriculum, where children mark their own work. Google Classroom is useful for this. Set daily quick, low stakes tests in maths and SPAG.**
- 3. Review topics covered every three weeks to commit learning to long-term memory.**
- 4. Increase exposure to rich language through whole class texts. Children need to be excited about what they are reading, we want them to fall in love with the books.**
- 5. Make mental health and wellbeing part of the school's culture, a regular classroom topic not a taboo subject. Provide counselling onsite for those who need it.**

to understand where their new intake is at.

There is still a place for SATs in 2021 as long as future judgements of the school take into account the experiences of children during lockdown, including safeguarding consideration and digital poverty, what the schools did to support their communities with home learning, and the progress made in closing any gaps since schools have reopened fully.



Matthew Kleiner-Mann is Leader of the Ivy Learning Trust, a family of eight primary schools in Enfield and Hertfordshire.

“The scaled-back SATs offer a good compromise between the two.”



WELLBEING: A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

Dr Ben Powell explains how to increase the wellbeing of pupils, staff and the broader school community

The importance of our wellbeing continues to be a significant topic, in which a vast array of information is available. Academic research, government programmes, social media commentary and commercial lifestyle periodicals, are just some information sources that can potentially help us understand: 1) why our well-being is important and 2) what we can do or access to help us enhance our well-being.

From an educational perspective, a key strategic issue for school leaders is, 'what factors need to be considered and implemented that enable effective well-being provision for pupils, staff and the broader school community?'. Arguably, the COVID 19 pandemic has further highlighted this key area of school development.

WHY A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH?

Before answering the above question, it's useful to acknowledge the broader systemic benefits that

effective wellbeing provision can deliver within school contexts. Peer-reviewed research has evidenced that robust wellbeing programmes can impact on, but not limited to:

- Pupil motivation.
- Reduction in pupil mental health issues.
- Reduction in pupil exclusion rates and absence.
- Improved teaching performance and reduced staff absence.

Not only does enhanced wellbeing have clear and obvious benefits at the individual level, the systemic importance of this area for school leaders cannot be stressed enough. Therefore, if a school can develop, implement and sustain a strong system that enables positive wellbeing across the organisation, over time, the staff and pupil outcomes that it can potentially achieve is significant.

WHAT ARE THE KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES?

Whether a school organisation wishes to fundamentally change its current wellbeing provision or review the impact of current practices, there

are a number of key strategic issues that senior leaders may wish to consider as part of the process. These strategic issues have been informed by a document commissioned by Public Health England and produced by the Children and Young People's Mental Health Commission - 'Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing a whole school and college approach' (2015).

Firstly, and perhaps obviously, clarity and drive from leadership teams is critical. Therefore, questions such as, to what extent is wellbeing a key strategic priority? To what extent is whole school wellbeing integrated into policy, school improvement planning and practice? What leadership models will best achieve your vision? Fundamentally, there must be clarity of thought in relation to these questions, it is the foundation that enables everything else to grow.

Secondly, thought with regard to developing the right culture within the school system is a key strategic issue. A question such as, 'what are the whole school values pertaining to wellbeing and are they reflected in provision, practice and behaviour?', is relevant. Understanding the extent to which value positions and associated behaviours are positively linked is key. Driving a shared value base across the school further enriches the strong foundation needed to build upon.

Thirdly, the extent to how embedded the teaching and promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing is in the curriculum,



“Firstly, and perhaps obviously, clarity and drive from leadership teams is critical.”

is a further strategic consideration. Strong and consistent teaching, positive pupil engagement and positive messages that children and young people can take away, are all salient outcomes for schools to achieve when building a whole school approach to wellbeing.

Fourthly, pupil and parent/carer voice and participation in the process of designing and implementing whole school wellbeing provision across the school is an important feature. Arguably, the more empowered and involved pupils and parents/carers can be, the greater the level of commitment and ‘by in’ can be generated which supports the culture that is being cultivated or sustained. Providing pupils with a platform in which their voice can be heard, in which they feel listened to and crucially feel understood, is a key facet for leaders to carefully think through.

The penultimate consideration focuses on the importance of staff development and their own wellbeing. It is of key significance that staff are well informed about issues relating to children’s mental health and broader well-being; which can be built into their own appraisals and part of broader school training programmes. However, focusing on their knowledge base to support effective teaching practices is just a part of the whole. As crucial as it is for pupils to have access to robust well-being provision, school staff must also have access to support when required. It’s vitally important to have effective systems in place that enable staff to feel connected, valued, motivated and supported. If this can be

achieved, as we all know, the knock-on impacts can potentially mean more effective teaching and greater staff retention. Finally, clarity of processes by which: 1) needs are identified 2) provision is coordinated and 3) impact is evidenced and monitored, is required. Key questions are, how are needs identified across the school? How does the assessment of need inform the provision provided for pupils and staff at both universal and targeted levels? How clear is the connection between vision, strategy, operational implementation and impact? How is impact being measured and what outcomes are being sought?

LINKING EVERYTHING TOGETHER

School leadership teams working collaboratively, bringing together the above strategic issues into a coherent plan is arguably the main aim. Whatever framework or methodology that is used to connect the issues outlined in the previous section, a very useful starting point is having a leadership team that is: 1) passionate about well-being 2) can truly appreciate the significant benefits it can potentially have on the broader school community and 3) aware that effective resource planning is aligned to plans that are to be developed.

POTENTIAL NEXT STEP

OneWellbeing is a newly designed service that can help you explore in more depth the issues outlined in this article. If you would value some support and assistance in embedding a whole school approach to well-being which in turn can impact on teaching practices and pupil engagement then please don’t hesitate to make an initial enquiry. We would be glad to have an initial discussion with you to determine how best to offer support through set or more tailored offers.

WHAT TO CONSIDER



- **Vision & Culture - Aligning these together will allow you to implement your wellbeing strategy more effectively, ensure everyone knows what your aims are. Consistency in approach is key.**

- **Review current practice - Assessing what your school already does well and not so well in relation to whole school wellbeing is a good starting point to set your action plan.**



- **Wellbeing must be modelled from the top, management must be equipped with the tools to support staff fully.**

- **Create a wellbeing working group for staff and students to meet termly to assess practices and keep wellbeing high on the school agenda. They could create a wellbeing newsletter.**



- **Remember your own well-being - You cannot help others if you do not help yourself. Dedicate time in the day just for you, set something each morning you will look forward to during that day.**



Dr Ben Powell, Lead Educational Psychologist at One Education Ltd

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Parties with a purpose

Leanne Bridgwood explains how birthdays can introduce normality and support wellbeing

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a real struggle and changed life as we know it. Adapting to national lockdowns, restrictions (and now tiers!) has reduced interaction with our friends and family and had a real impact on wellbeing.

As headteacher of a primary school with over 450 children, I wanted to look at ways of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our children and introduce some normality into their lives.

Not only had there been changes and restrictions in the children's school day but also in their lives at home. With social gatherings and parties not allowed and several other rules and regulations for families to get used to, I knew that we would need to manage mental health alongside academic attainment.

Our children's education is paramount, but their emotional wellbeing is just as important to us; even more so in current times. The wellbeing of our school family is always at the forefront of our minds, and, throughout lockdown, we have tried to provide experiences to lift the children's spirits as well as continue developing them academically.

CELEBRATE

We know that our children love to celebrate their birthdays in school with their friends by bringing in things from home. Parents had begun to question whether they were still allowed to bring in the usual goodies for their children to share with their friends on their birthdays. This added to the movement for bringing in a 'School Birthday Party' to Goldsmith Primary Academy.

I knew it would be a massive benefit to introduce this exciting initiative. I had seen celebration ideas in other schools and used this as inspiration for our parties. I made sure that we covered all the costs and hoped that the parties would be a gift to our families — we would be able to provide an experience that our parents and carers simply couldn't.

EXCITED

Unlocking academic and personal potential is a goal both Windsor Academy Trust, the trust we are part of, and our school share. The birthday parties fitted perfectly with this, and the Trust was equally excited about the idea!

I am fortunate to lead a very enthusiastic team at Goldsmith, especially when it comes to additional care for our children and 'thinking outside the box' exciting, creative ideas. Staff go above and beyond in enhancing the children's learning and wellbeing.

I knew that the parties would be something that the staff would love to get involved in, and the response received was just as I thought, incredible! Lots of wonderful ideas came flooding in immediately about how to complete this safely within the school, with everyone so willing to get involved.

The ideas were put together in a letter and sent out to our parents via email and social media. We soon received a huge amount of positive and heart-warming replies, and the initiative just took off! We reached

thousands of people outside of our school and were so proud.

SPECIAL OCCASION

We hold birthday parties on the last Friday of every month in the afternoon. The first party was after October half term and celebrated all September and October birthdays - 65 birthdays in total.

We supply all the decorations, homemade cakes from our canteen and everything you would have at a usual birthday party! The children love to take part in party games, and the staff even created Covid-19 friendly pass the parcel and pin the tail on the donkey. This takes place with party music in the background, socially distanced dancing and the sound of a wonderful atmosphere around the school.

The birthday parties emphasise how special and important it is to be able to offer these afternoons, purely for emotional wellbeing.

IMPACT

To see the children's faces of pure enjoyment and happiness every month as they celebrate their birthdays with their teachers and friends is truly special.

The parties have had a considerable impact. They have brought back the wonderful atmosphere to the school, developed friendships and finally introduced some normality into children's lives. Long may this continue!

**Leanne Bridgwood, headteacher,
Goldsmith Primary Academy**



OVERCOMING COVID

Sue Birchall examines the effects lockdown has had on SEND education

All schools have felt the effects of the enforced lockdown both in terms of wellbeing and the interruption to their school year. The disruption to our normal daily lives will continue to impact in ways that we won't even be aware of yet and this is mirrored in education.

Schools were directed and have strived to continue their operational duties, paying all staff including those with casual contracts and paying for external contracts and commitments. Some of what we have been asked to do has been challenging, ensuring our vulnerable student's welfare, making sure that free school meal students have food and offering online learning to name but a few.

In the SEN sector, this has been particularly challenging, all students are classed as vulnerable and many are unable to access their

education and have their needs met by traditional means.

CHALLENGES

The summer period saw many of us welcoming back some of our students, for special school and special resource provisions, this meant offering the chance to come back into school to the majority of students. This meant immediately facing the challenges that the mainstream sector are now dealing with in putting in place protocols and systems to ensure students and staff safety. However, some of the systems that mainstream schools have used to be 'covid safe' tend not to work so well within our SEN sector.

The SRP in my own school is large, up to 120 plus students and the needs are often

complex and varied. The difficulties of having our SRP students back into the school was a closely managed and planned process. The staff were very aware of the fragility of many of our students who were suffering from losing the structure to their day. This created feelings ranging from frustration to fear and a sense of isolation for many. At the start of the lockdown it was the responsibility of the staff to keep in contact with their allocated students, making sure they spoke most days and checking in on families as well.

PROTOCOLS

This was a huge task, meaning that these staff were often working long hours and through the



“The gaps in learning that the lockdown has caused have been impactful for our more vulnerable students.”

holidays to ensure our pupils' wellbeing. In addition, a lot of work went into planning to bring them back into the building, something that our most vulnerable students were desperate to do. As School Business Leader, myself and my team were involved in this, looking at the plans for the main school and adapting them for the SRP. Colleagues who work in Special Schools have additional challenges. The protocols for them cannot be based entirely on social distancing and bubbles in the same way as the rest of the school community due to the complexities of the needs of their students. Introducing the new normal and making it the new school practice requires constant confirmation and reiteration of the new processes.

The inability for some students to adapt to new routines has in some cases impacted negatively on their mental wellbeing as well as behaviour. The lack of understanding of the

enforced situation manifesting itself in the return of some of the behaviours that the schools have worked so hard to transform. Colleagues in these settings have had to very quickly establish new norms and consistent practices to once again bring back that stability and structure.

MASKS

Most of the students that attend our provisions are 'delivered' every day by taxi. This has proven challenging with students needing to understand that they need to wear masks and enduring changes to start and end times to allow staggered arrival and departure so that hubs don't mix. At our SRP it has required a complicated plan to ensure that students don't cross paths and get to the correct area in school for their bubble. The special school which shares the site in my other school has shorter days just to allow this to work effectively.

The gaps in learning that the lockdown has caused have been impactful for our more vulnerable students. Their ability to access online learning has often been limited and the isolation from both their peers and staff as well as the loss of their routines will have had an impact that may not yet be apparent. Lots of research has been carried out on the effects of lockdown and the ongoing situation on our most vulnerable students and their families.

Research from the Sutton Trust has shown that students who come from disadvantaged families have been the least able to access the online learning and for our school's this is compounded by the ability of our students. This has meant that more innovative ways of providing education scaffolding to go alongside the pastoral support is needed. A key piece of advice has been around expectation by schools on students around completing work at home. The normal

DIFFICULT TIMES

Our SEND communities have faced unprecedented obstacles during the past year and continue to do so moving forward. The impact on our students and their families has been significant both in terms of fall back in their education and on a pastoral level.

Staff in our SEND settings have worked tirelessly to make sure that both students and parents have the support they need. The loss of structure to their everyday lives, disruption to routines for students who rely on this and the impact on families who have had no respite or help with care will have outcomes that have yet to become apparent.

The challenge in the times ahead is to reinstate what was lost and find a new way of working in our new normal.

expectation of the amount of work achieved is reduced and more emphasis to be placed upon contact with the students and families. The DfE has provided resources for families recognizing that parents and carers have had to take on all of the responsibilities of looking after their students, everything from education to physical care on a full-time basis.

ATTENDANCE

Looking forward, attendance has started to improve as parents and students become more confident in their school's ability to keep their students safe. We will always suffer from the fact that physically, our students are more vulnerable and the likelihood of them having to self-isolate is more likely. This is compounded by the natural concerns that their parents and families will have over their safety and physical vulnerability.

Change is hard for our SEND students and the need to maintain some consistency is important, a key concern for our sector during these difficult times.



Sue Birchall is a consultant, speaker, writer, trainer and business manager at The Malling School, Kent.





BEING OUTSIDE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Juliet Mickelburgh explains how to plan and manage outdoor learning

The benefits of being outside to both physical and mental health have been much discussed during the pandemic. As a result, outdoor learning has been in the limelight. Of course, the benefits of being outside to children's minds and bodies, as well as to their knowledge and understanding is an age-old piece of education wisdom. But how can schools plan and manage an increase in outdoor learning while coping with bubbles, one-way systems and the vagaries of the British winter weather?

START WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

Every school has a different outdoor area. Yours is unique to your school and will have its own quirks and bonuses. Set up an Outdoor Learning Team to focus on the learning that can happen outside at your school – be sure that this team, however small, represents teaching and support staff.

The team will need to reflect on the space you have available. Questions to ask:

- How muddy do grassy spaces get in winter?
- How can a concrete play area be used to support nature-based learning?
- How do different outside zones need to be organised?
- How will the number and movement of 'bubbles' influence the way we manage our outdoor learning opportunities?
- What resources do we already have that can be adapted for use to enhance learning outside?

Ask the Outdoor Learning Team to carry out an audit of the available equipment and how it can be used for learning in different subjects: for example, how can the slide or climbing frame be used beyond sliding and climbing? Can it be a help teach a lesson about measurement or gravity or provide inspiration for creative writing?

TRANSITIONS

Movement from inside to outside and back again can involve a lot of faffing, particularly in the winter. All those damp coats, the escaping hats and gloves, the muddy shoes, the steamy corridors.

However, transitions between places inside and outside the school are likely to be tightly managed under pandemic conditions. Children may now store their outdoor

clothing in their classrooms or have been encouraged to become more independent at putting on coats, hats and gloves. This increased focus on transition spaces and times can make it easier to manage groups of children as they move in and out.

However, it's important that new rules and processes are introduced to teachers and children with care.

Does everyone know how it works? Perhaps children from different classes could make a short video about how to move around the school and where things go – because the staff team needs some help remembering!

TIMETABLING

Good transitions and a successful use of available space requires careful timetabling. Depending on the layout and size of your school, both inside and outside, it may not be appropriate to have multiple classes all having outdoor learning experiences at the same time. If you have created an Outdoor Learning

Team, ask them to liaise with class teachers to find a time for outdoor learning for every class.

Can they build in flexibility to cater for unpredictable situations? Or for those spontaneous moments when a teacher notices the learning that is happening inside could be explored at greater depth using opportunities only offered by being outside? This will require some give and take!

WHAT DOES OUTDOOR LEARNING MEAN TO YOUR SCHOOL?

Outdoor learning is not about doing what you do inside and just relocating it outside. It is about recognising and utilising the unique learning opportunities the outside offers and building those into your curriculum.

This requires commitment and understanding from the whole school community. Does outdoor learning feature on the School Development Plan? What stage are the staff team at with their



“Outdoor learning is not about doing what you do inside and just relocating it outside.”

understanding, knowledge, and feelings about outdoor learning? Some adults just don't like being outside. And lots of us use 'bad weather' language: stormy days are 'grim', rain is 'wet and miserable'. Have fun as a team turning this around and talking more positively about different kinds of weather – especially with the children.

Make time for the Outdoor Learning Team to run staff meetings to share experiences and training and for everyone to contribute thoughts and ideas. Remember to make these inclusive of teachers and support staff so that everyone is on board.

BRING IN THE EARLY YEARS TEAM

Whether you have Reception and Nursery

classes, or Reception only, you will have Early Years staff who know about outdoor learning. They understand the logistics and can help with the practical considerations as you develop a wider provision for all children. They can also share their experience of using outdoor learning to make links between aspects of the curriculum with teachers in other key stages.

COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES

As always, communication with parents and carers is key. From a purely practical point of view, in the winter children are going to need access to waterproofs, wellies and warm clothes to be able to spend periods of time learning outside. Are there

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Use what you have:** at a time when there is even more to think about, and funding is tight, take small steps. Consider the space you do have and resources that can be used in different ways.
- **Gather a team:** set up a small representative team to coordinate outdoor learning in your school. Look for expertise that is already there and bring in your Early Years staff who know about outdoor learning.
- **Organise:** any pandemic-related focus you have had on daily transitions will already be supporting the movement of children between indoors and outdoors. Build in a timetable so classes know when they can be outside.
- **There's no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothes:** make sure children and staff have warm and waterproof clothing. Communicate with families so they understand about the value of outdoor learning and look for ways to have appropriate clothing available in school for those who need it.

funds to purchase waterproof trousers and to keep spare items for children who may struggle to have these things? How can you share with parents what outdoor learning is going to look like at your school and why it is important for their children?

Current pandemic restrictions may mean you are already finding different ways to reach parents, and so a video clip (made by children with help from the Outdoor Learning Team?) or a blog post, letter or email home can be a start. Follow ups of pictures or short clips of children learning outside will keep the momentum going.

Enhancing the outdoor learning in your school could be a positive way to turn current challenges into future opportunities.



Juliet Mickelburgh is Education Adviser at Tapestry and a former primary school teacher.

Ideas for this article are also viewable on Tapestry's outdoor learning activity infographic <https://tapestry.info/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/Outdoor-Learning-1-green.pdf>

LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE FIRST LOCKDOWN

Christopher Dryer describes the unique challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the process that are here to stay

Like so many others, St Bartholomew's CE Multi-Academy Trust were forced to take swift action back in March to ensure pupil learning could continue and staff remained safe throughout the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

Back in March, staff, pupils and parents across the country were forced to adapt to new ways of working as a nationwide lockdown was announced and the majority of our pupils were sent home. Of course, no two families are the same and it was important we carefully managed the transition to home learning, taking into account different learning environments and the technology pupils could access.

These first few months were certainly a learning curve and we were mindful that parents were being asked to navigate a system of unfamiliar learning tools and content. A study (<https://bit.ly/36qJ9yN>) published by the Institute of Fiscal Studies back in May found that almost 60 per cent of the parents of primary school children and almost half of the parents of secondary school children were finding it quite or very hard to support their children's learning at home.

To help combat this we quickly set up communication channels between teachers and pupils, and between teachers and parents, to ensure the children could continue making progress on the core curriculum and access any support required.

BOOST

Unlike secondary schools, which could relatively easily shift their curriculum online we had to consider the age of our pupils. As our Trust is entirely made up of primary schools, we concluded that digital learning wasn't a feasible option, so we instead arranged regular catch-up phone and video calls, and kept in close contact with parents via email.

Chatting to their teachers and their friends either in conference calls or over the phone gave some of our pupils a real boost, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and remind them that we're still part of the same community. Despite schools

reopening to all year groups back in September, local closures and the second national lockdown has led to many children feeling anxious or concerned about the impact this might have. We're confident that many of the practices we implemented at the start of the pandemic can be rolled out again, either on a smaller scale if a class or year group is asked to self-isolate or to the same extent — ensuring that no pupil is left behind academically.

UNREALISTIC

Across the UK, experts (<https://bit.ly/3kfAoMH>) predict that around nine per cent of families don't have a laptop, desktop or tablet at home, so we were keen to assess the individual needs and requirements of each of our pupils. We looked to put together home learning packs which included information, worksheets and activity packs for children to work through. It was unrealistic to expect our pupils — some as young as four, to follow the curriculum word for word, and we acknowledged that many parents were having to manage a careful balancing act between remote working and homeschooling, as well as cope with the pressures of lockdown.

While digital alternatives will never replace a teacher, we're looking to embed technology into the classroom over the next few years, having proven itself as a valuable tool in helping pupils learn and develop. The primary school curriculum is far less progressive than in secondary schools, with a much slower uptake of online learning platforms, however, lockdown has certainly opened our eyes to the benefits of digitalisation and I'd say we're now far more effective in our use of technology.

With the goal of ensuring every school was getting the support it needed, we formed our central services team approximately two years ago. The fact we already had such a well established team in place stood us in good stead when the pandemic hit. Throughout the spring and summer term, we really did rely on this additional support to

manage internal and external communication, and ensure all staff and parents were contacted with updates as and when necessary.

SUPPLIERS

In the early days, the advice from the government and the DfE changed on a daily basis, and it was vital everyone was kept informed. Looking ahead, we're keen to move more of our communications online, with email and text messages proving popular with parents.

Despite our schools being closed to pupils, the financial management of the Trust had to continue as normal. In such challenging times we were keen to ensure our suppliers continued to be paid on time.



Also, keeping our finances in good check gave us a clear picture of where we'd lost or saved, and allowed us to put plans in place to deal with these changes.

Finance teams who were unable to access their central system from home will have had to play a serious game of catch-up to ensure they completed their annual audit on time. Luckily, our staff could access the necessary information and reports via the Access Education software (<https://bit.ly/2JMMgsY>) remotely, ensuring that many of the day-to-day financial processes continued as normal - even during the height of lockdown.

Via the system staff could also scan and attach PDF versions of invoices, receipts

and proof of funding, ensuring that when it came to the annual audit we weren't tasked with uploading and inputting a huge amount of crucial data. This has prompted us to review some of our other legacy systems, as we're keen to invest in additional cloud-based software to help mitigate any future challenges.

It's definitely been a strange and challenging time for pupils, parents and staff all coping with the impact of the pandemic in slightly different ways. As a Trust, we were keen to ensure we put the best measures in place to minimise disruption and ensure some level of learning could continue. As we look ahead I'm confident that we're in a better position to manage any challenges thrown our way.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Five top tips on how to tackle some of the unique challenges faced by primary schools:

- Carefully manage the transition to home learning, as no two families are the same.
- Remember, many parents are being asked to navigate a system of unfamiliar learning tools and content that isn't necessarily straightforward to understand.
- Set up communication channels between teachers and pupils, and between teachers and parents, to ensure the children can continue making progress on the core curriculum and access any support required.
- Reduce feelings of isolation and remind everyone that they're still part of the same community by implementing video calls – these helped give our pupils and staff a real boost.
- Assess the individual needs and requirements of every pupil as some families don't have a laptop, desktop or tablet at home.

“Unlike secondary schools, which could relatively easily shift their curriculum online we had to consider the age of our pupils.”



Christopher Dryer, Director of Finance and Operations at St Bartholomew's CE Multi-Academy Trust



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MONEY IS NEEDED TO BATTLE THE PANDEMIC

Paul Whiteman explains why schools must be fully reimbursed for Covid-19

The government's refusal to fully reimburse schools for the additional costs they have faced this year because of Covid-19 is putting both schools and children's education at risk.

No one knew Covid was going to happen when school budgets were set for this year. That might seem obvious to say, but it is important to remember, and is something we wish the government would wake up to. School budgets were already incredibly tight for the operational costs they knew they had coming, and none of the additional costs that have become necessary this year due to Covid-19 were anticipated.

SCRAMBLE

Schools have had to scramble to find extra money for all the measures the government has required them to take to keep children safe and learning. This includes additional cleaning costs, extra hand washing stations and hand sanitiser, ventilation systems in classrooms, the provision of PPE including face coverings, and the costs associated with setting up

remote learning for pupils at home.

Schools are also facing huge supply staff costs as they are forced to hire temporary staff to provide cover to keep schools open as teachers get sick, have to wait for covid test results, or self-isolate due to vulnerability. A recent NAHT survey found that, in just the first few weeks of term, schools spent an average £8,017 implementing the safety measures required by government guidance. None of these costs are optional for schools. They are all necessary to remain open and to keep children, families and staff safe during this pandemic. Indeed, these measures have all been made mandatory by government.

But the government has not given schools any additional funding or reimbursement to cover the costs incurred since term started in September. Given the support they have laid out for other businesses, we can't understand why they are treating schools so differently and are refusing to step in to help schools with the financial impact of the pandemic. Schools should be valued at least as highly as pubs and restaurants.

WORRY

The government says keeping children in school and safeguarding their education is their priority. But it has not put any money where its mouth is. By refusing to recognise the financial difficulties schools are facing due to Covid-19 the government is risking the very education they say they value so highly.

The worry is that every pound that has to be diverted to pay for safety measures and the costs of just keeping schools open is a pound that can't be spent on pupils' education and wellbeing. And this comes just as children really need every possible boost to make up for the disruption they've faced this year. They are being short-changed by the government.

A petition calling for the government to reimburse schools for the costs they have incurred due to Covid-19 has garnered nearly 30,000

"Schools have had to scramble to find extra money for all the measures the government has required them to take to keep children safe and learning."



signatures, meaning the government must formally respond. The petition calls for government to “fully fund schools for Covid-19 costs and provide relief for loss of income.” It also points out that, in a double whammy of financial hardship, schools have simultaneously lost income this year as they have been unable to let premises as they usually would.

The same NAHT survey found that schools lost an average £9,755 in income in the first few weeks of term, on top of an average £15,915 over the summer. Jim Nicholson, head teacher of Mellor Primary School in Stockport, who started the petition, said: “Schools have lost income this year which in many cases we rely on for sustainability. Wrap around care and school lettings are such facilities that have been affected. In my own small school, our staffing cost increase has been several thousand pounds already (approximately £9,000) and our costs for soap, hand sanitiser and paper towels has increased six fold, in the same time scale for the first half term compared to autumn 2019-20. We have also lost approximately £29,000 in income streams. These costs and losses are unsustainable without additional financial support.”

HOPE

In December, the government offered a glimmer of hope for some schools, promising some financial assistance, but only for staffing costs and only if they have exhausted their financial reserves. There is still no additional money to help schools pay for essentials like sanitiser, masks, soap and other cleaning products. It is bad business management to expect schools to hit rock bottom before they get a penny to help them with their overheads.

The government must go further, and NAHT will continue to push them on this in the coming months. With disruption set to continue into the New Year, the costs schools are facing to make schools Covid-safe are likely to continue indefinitely. The government needs to ensure that all schools are reimbursed for their covid costs, not just a select few. The petition remains open and continues to gain signatures at a rapid rate.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT



HYGIENE ON THE MOVE

Sandy Gardner explains the benefits of portable sinks to battle Covid-19

Government guidelines on hand washing were clear on how crucial it would be for hygiene and the safety of pupils and staff.

An effective and simple way to help combat Covid-19. But what if you have to increase your facilities to make sure everyone can wash their hands safely and quickly. We trialled a new cost-effective portable handwashing station launched by Alderman Tooling.

Branded Jengu, the portable sink was originally developed for humanitarian use by the major engineering consultancy Arup, working in conjunction with the British Red Cross and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Aldermans worked with Arup to adapt the design and create a cost-effective handwashing unit to help schools respond to the challenges of COVID-19.

The portable sinks require no plumbing as water is supplied from a container, and wastewater is also piped into a separate canister or direct into a drain where available. This flexibility means that the sinks can be deployed indoors or outdoors, wherever needed.

Indoors, students can wash their hands near their classrooms, without needing to leave their designated areas or bubbles. Outdoors, students can wash their hands in the playground as soon as they arrive, or before returning to classrooms after break times.

Operated with an easy-to-use foot pump, and accommodating soap and a mirror, handwashing becomes a fun experience for all ages, with minimal supervision needed.

The sinks are robust yet lightweight and can easily be moved by one person. They can also be secured to the ground, if required.

We were delighted to trial the Alderman's portable sinks in our Junior School when pupils returned during the Summer Term. With schools becoming one of the first places to reopen after lockdown, it was incredibly important to maintain hygiene levels in all the year group 'bubbles' and being able to easily install additional handwashing stations around the buildings and external areas was a vital factor in protecting our school community.

Our students quickly got to grips with using the foot pump and having a hands-free solution was extremely beneficial by reducing the risk of infection at a crucial time for the school. In fact, for many of our students washing their hands became a socially fun experience and they really enjoyed using the sinks! Equally, to have portable devices allowed us to quickly and relatively effortlessly relocate them should the need arise.

Sandy Gardner, School Business Manager, The Maynard School, Exeter

“Equally, to have portable devices allowed us to quickly and relatively effortlessly relocate them should the need arise.”

Planning plumbing work? Inform your water supplier

Julie Spinks explains why owners and managers of schools should be aware of their legal duties to protect public health when it comes to plumbing

Are you planning a pool for your school, upgrading the water system to more eco-friendly rainwater harvesting, installing drinking fountains for your students or extending your buildings?

By law there are some types of plumbing work on both new and existing plumbing systems which must be notified to your local water company before work starts. This is to ensure the work complies with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations, or Byelaws in Scotland, which are designed to keep the UK's drinking water supplies fresh, safe and free from contamination.

The regulations apply to all premises, including schools, which receive water supplied by a licensed water supplier. This includes requiring that every plumbing system is protected against 'backflow' – which occurs when contaminated water is 'siphoned' back into the drinking water supply due to faulty plumbing. If the water supply in a school were to be contaminated, it would potentially pose a risk to the health of the students and staff on site. It could also, if it entered the public water supply, affect public health in the wider community.

You'll need to notify plumbing work to your water supplier at least ten days in advance of work starting – it is free to do and an essential part of the planning process for any plumbing project. By notifying you're also benefiting from advice from your water supplier about meeting the regulations and building a relationship with them for future projects. This in turn provides peace-of-mind that your plans comply with the strict regulations required to install pipes and fittings to supply drinking water.

What happens if you don't notify?

Failure to notify can result in delays, extra costs to put poor plumbing right in your



school, contamination of water supplies, a threat to public health and, in the worst cases, a court prosecution.

What work do you need to notify?

The majority of changes to a plumbing system in a school need to be notified. Types of plumbing work include:

- Building a house or other property/structure
- Extending or altering the water system on any non-household building
- A reduced pressure zone (RPZ) valve assembly or similar
- A water treatment unit which produces wastewater
- A bidet with an upward spray or flexible hose
- A bath which holds more than 230 litres of water
- A pump or booster delivering more than 12 litres of water per minute connected directly or indirectly to a supply pipe
- A reverse osmosis unit (for purifying water)
- Any water system outside a building which is either less than 750mm or more than 1,350mm below ground
- A garden watering system (unless operated by hand)
- Installing a swimming pool or pond over 10,000 litres
- Changing the use of a building or installing systems such as rainwater harvesting
- Any drinking water fountain.

What does your supplier need to know?

In most cases, the water supplier will need a description, diagram and plan of the work to be carried out, a list of fittings proposed, the location, and the contact details of the installer undertaking the work. Contact the Water Regulations team for your local supplier to find out more: www.watersafe.org.uk/contact_us/water_company_contacts.

What happens next?

The Water Fittings Regulations allow ten working days for water suppliers to grant their consent, and it's important not to start work until consent has been granted. A water supplier may not withhold consent unreasonably but they may grant consent subject to conditions, which must be followed. If consent is not given within the ten working days, then the water suppliers' consent is deemed to have been granted. However, it's essential that any work must still comply with the Water Fittings Regulations.

Using an Approved Contractor

At WaterSafe, we advise that schools employ an approved plumber listed on our online register, which is backed by local water companies and the drinking water regulators.

Plumbers on the WaterSafe register are audited by your local water supplier, have specific training in the Water Fittings Regulations and Byelaws, carry agreed levels of public liability insurance and are also trusted to undertake certain works without prior notification. WaterSafe plumbers can also issue a certificate to state their work complies with the water regulations, which offers you a legal defence if something is later found to be wrong. You'll find an approved plumber at watersafe.org.uk

Julie Spinks, director at WaterSafe, the UK register of approved plumbers

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A successful project

Professor Stephen Heppell discusses how changes in the classroom can aid learning



Back in the summer of 2019, we joined with Essex County council to examine how the conditions in the classroom can have a huge impact on children's ability to learn.

I was a schoolteacher for more than a decade, and have been a professor since 1989, working with schools and governments around the world to improve learning spaces. My colleagues and I explained to them the link between CO2 levels, lighting and acoustics on learning, and we were invited into Fingringhoe Primary School, in Essex, to test our theories with the aid of a compact device we've developed called the Learnometer, which contains a series of internet-connected ambient sensors and onboard software to help us measure and analyse environmental data.

Research carried out by ourselves and others confirms that poor light levels, variable temperatures, inappropriate sound volumes, humidity, excessive

amounts of CO2, and air pressure can all impair learning. The Learnometer is able to automatically sample a classroom environment and make suggestions via a unique algorithm as to what could be changed so that students can learn and perform at their best.

Over the 2019 summer holidays, along with Essex County Council's key suppliers, we gave the room a makeover. An old floating ceiling was pulled down, the room was repainted, acoustic panels were installed and tiered seating and writable surfaces were put in. We carried out acoustic modelling to examine the impact of bass resonance on the kids, particularly those struggling with attention issues.

The room itself is a Victorian classroom, with a lovely high vaulted ceiling that turned out to have skylights. And, I have to say the project has gone incredibly well and had a great effect on the children. They fidgeted less, they stayed later and had a great school focus.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DESIGN

I met the children and the teacher, just before lockdown in March, along with my director, Paul, who has been very supportive. That meeting left us both feeling the project had been a real success. It showed how a number of small changes (affordable to schools in bite size chunks) could make a real difference. The children were keen to say what they liked. They noticed the difference in the acoustics as well as the lighting, the bright walls, etc.! They were proud of their new environment and furniture and they were enjoying learning in different and collaborative ways. I noticed that the children had taken off their shoes when sitting on the Heppell bench – the teacher said they had done that without asking and it was clear that they really appreciated and valued the changes and furniture.

The teacher was equally very positive and made it clear she would not wish to revert to her former classroom!

It also made me think that as an industry we really should spend more time with schools explaining about the importance of design, why things are done, how spaces can be used better to help deliver lessons and what to avoid doing (e.g. covering windows with artwork for example which reduces the daylight levels, not investing in better designed furniture, etc.).

Greg Keeling, Engineering & Technical Manager, Infrastructure Delivery, Essex County Council.

The tiered seating and writable surfaces were also a big hit. The acoustics also worked out extremely well. When you stand at the front of the class you can really hear the difference.

For a report on the classroom changes from headteacher Suzy Ryan turn to page 32.

Professor Stephen Heppell is Felipe Segovia Chair in Learning Innovation at Universidad Camilo José Cela, Madrid.

SMALL CHANGES HAVE A BIG IMPACT

Suzy Ryan, headteacher of Fingringhoe CE Primary School, gives her report on a classroom makeover

Three years ago, the staff at Fingringhoe Primary School wanted to take action to address demotivated and disengaged older pupils. Seeing children start school in the early years — motivated, excited and curious — staff were keen to harness this love of learning and instil it further up the school.

Between 2016 and 2018, a school ethos underpinned by a growth mindset was introduced and embedded. Many people may have heard of a 'growth mindset', many schools may say they 'do it'; however, at Fingringhoe we have ensured that it permeates everything we do. We, the staff, believe in it. It is part of our core values: Courage. It is taught explicitly through assemblies and the curriculum. It is modelled by staff. Behaviours for Learning skills (based on a growth mindset) are assessed. Pupils are encouraged and praised for demonstrating it.

IMPROVING LEARNING SPACES

Although situated in an idyllic setting, next to a village pond and historic oak tree, we have our fair share of challenges. Ensuring we are as inclusive as possible, within a 150-year-old building, requires a good deal of creativity — particularly when there are no spare spaces for supporting children who find classroom environments cognitively overloading. So, when Professor Heppell and Essex County Council approached us with an exciting project to

improve learning spaces, we were intrigued. We had spent time developing pupils' attitudes to learning but we hadn't given much thought to the physical learning environment.

Fingringhoe School was built in 1863 and is perhaps the smallest premises in Essex accommodating four classes. The primary schools I had taught in for over 22 years had barely changed their classroom designs, layouts, way of working or displays — let alone given thought to acoustics, lighting, air quality and classroom management. We were sure this could have a positive impact, not only on pupils' attitudes to learning, but also for pupils with more complex needs. Professor Heppell was a schoolteacher for more than a decade, and a professor since 1989. He works with schools and governments around the world to improve learning spaces.

The project focuses on the improvement of learning environments so that they are innovative and stimulating, with the aim of inspiring children to achieve more. Professor Heppell has also been working with elite coaches in Olympic teams.

Marginal gains, the professor says, are as vital in schools as they are in sport. If learning was the Olympics, this is what it would look like.

KEY FACTORS

For us, in the classroom, these marginal gains may focus on a wide range of environmental details for improving pupil concentration and motivation including:

“In our Year 6 classroom, carbon dioxide levels were high, lighting was poor, the false ceiling was brown and ladybird infested.”

- air quality (oxygen/CO2 levels)
- temperature
- light and brightness (colour of walls and ceiling can affect this)
- sound/acoustics
- room layout
- stimulating and different ways to test out new skills within the classroom
- ownership by pupils (if pupils feel they belong, they learn better)
- displays and colour (lively but not chaotic or too busy)
- pupils' diet and sleep habits

Together with the Professor, Essex County Council, pupils, parents and many generous volunteers, we decided to start a journey of making our Year 6 classroom a better learning space

PHYSICAL CHANGES TO THE CLASSROOM

In our Year 6 classroom, carbon dioxide levels were high, lighting was poor, the false ceiling was brown and ladybird infested. Even the best lessons had pupils yawning! We were nervous about pulling down the brown, false, hessian ceiling to see what lay above, so, after checking things weren't too serious with a selfie stick and phone camera, we pulled down a small section. Fortunately, I wasn't the one standing underneath when we pulled it down. Years' worth of dust and insect skeletons rained down. The false ceiling and roof trusses were dismantled, along with anything else that appeared unnecessary. Disused, trailing cabling and trunking were removed.

Next, the classroom was painted a bright white, from top to bottom, to reflect light around the space. Followed by lighting and





acoustics. Before our 'sound absorbing technology' (acoustic panels) were fitted, I was adamant that they would not replace our display boards until I read the Essex Study on classroom acoustic levels. Problems caused by noise and poor acoustic design in educational settings have been recognised for over 100 years. If noise levels are too high or rooms are too reverberant, pupils find it difficult to hear and understand their teachers, while teachers find it difficult to speak and often suffer from voice disorders as a result of continually raising their voice.

If reverberation times are reduced within a classroom, there is evidence to suggest that pupils' behaviour and attentiveness increases. This is because pupils' brains are able to concentrate on the teacher and the learning rather than having to work hard to filter out reverberations. I was sold – reverberation time won over displays. Self-adjusting LED lighting was installed. Pupils and teachers are able to set 'moods' according to lesson type. On initial observations, teachers and pupils agree that brighter and whiter lighting appears to encourage chat or discussion while dimmer and yellower hues enable better focus on written or problem-solving tasks.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT, LAYOUT AND AIR QUALITY

Thought was given to the layout and design of the classroom and furniture. Over term one 2019, the room was fitted with a folding writable wall, and the latest ergonomic furniture. There is even a special wall of plants – each one owned by individual pupils – to increase oxygen levels. The change from tables

to tiered benches has enabled teachers to think more creatively in how they allow pupils to make appropriate choices about how they complete learning tasks.

Professor Heppell asked us to try out a prototype of a Learnometer device he had developed with an education business. The white box sits in the classroom and measures key environmental factors proven to affect learning, including temperature, humidity, CO₂, air pollution, light, sound levels and rhythms. The idea is that once teachers, schools and pupils see real data on their classrooms it will motivate them to make changes that will improve learning. "The pupils themselves could see that the pupils in the dark corner were the ones who weren't concentrating coming up to lunch... They could see that the ones in the lighter bit by the window were still sharp by the end of the day... They thought this was purely down to them," said Professor Heppell. Year 6 teachers have used data gathered by the Learnometer to show pupils how CO₂ levels in the room rise and fall over the course of a day. They have printed off graphs and can see that the graphs change according to times of day and how many pupils are in the room: overnight, playtimes, etc. This has fascinated the pupils. Pupils are now preparing to start monitoring environmental factors in other classrooms that have not yet had a makeover. They will be able to compare data readings for the different spaces, helping them learn vital lessons in science and maths. Children in the class also say that using the Learnometer has greatly raised their awareness of how they are affected by their learning spaces.

We would like to thank the following who gave their time and resources so generously:

- Barnes Construction
- Beardwell Construction
- Essex County Council Infrastructure Delivery and Education Directorate Teams
- Gratnells Educational Supplies Learniture (for next generation learning spaces furniture) Professor Heppell and Team
- Thorlux Lighting

IMPACT

Pupils are starting to understand how environmental factors can affect their learning: they seem to be more aware of when they are focused and when they are not and the factors that may contribute to this. Staff have developed an assessment tool to track pupils' behaviours for learning: they carried out a teacher assessment and pupils audit to monitor impact. Case studies have been collated in order to show the effect on individual pupils.

To find out more visit: www.heppell.net, http://www.acousticbulletin.com/EN/Ecophone_Essex_6ppA4_v8_LO_Singles.pdf, www.fingringhoeprimaryschool.co.uk, <http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/35221/>.

BREATHE DEEPLY TO AID LEARNING

Naeem Walji asks could clean indoor air reduce the attainment gap?

The disadvantage gap is well-documented, with the coronavirus lockdown having exacerbated this further. Air pollution perpetuates the disadvantage gap, prioritising clean air within schools can increase academic attainment and mitigate the spread of coronavirus.

The harms of air pollution have gained recognition as a public health emergency in recent years, causing more deaths than smoking each year in the UK. Alongside the health risks associated with exposure to toxic air, poor air quality also has a severe detrimental impact on academic attainment. With the coronavirus lockdown having exacerbated the attainment gap, particularly in primary age pupils, and disadvantaged pupils already more likely to live in highly polluted areas, prioritising clean air in schools is more important than ever. This not only stands to promote equality of opportunity in the long term, but can also safeguard against coronavirus transmission, helping to keep schools open.

THE IMPACT OF AIR POLLUTION

Research conducted by Queen Mary University of London shows that reducing air pollution around schools could halve the number of children suffering from poor lung function and decrease medical absences. This research has aided Global Action Plan in calling for nationwide action to improve air quality in and around schools – a campaign supported by the likes of the National Education Union and the National Association of Head Teachers.

As well as posing risks to the physical health of pupils, exposure to air pollution also stands to hinder academic attainment. In 2018, researchers from the Yale School of Public Health showed that the impact of exposure to high levels of toxic air “is equivalent to having lost a year of education”.



An increasing body of research that followed this pioneering study has raised the profile of the harms of outdoor air pollution, but there remains a dangerous lack of popular concern for the risks associated with indoor air pollution levels. The Environmental Protection Agency has demonstrated that the levels of indoor air pollutants can be two to five times higher than outdoors, with research conducted by UCL and the University of Cambridge showing that air quality inside classrooms in London is worse than the air quality outside. This is caused by several factors, such as building characteristics causing dust to settle inside and the building envelope 'trapping' outdoor air pollutants.

This has significant consequences even in the short term, with an economist at the London School of Economics finding that simply sitting an exam in a room with higher levels of air pollution causes students to perform badly. Looking at longer-term effects, a recent study from the University of Manchester shows that cutting nitrogen dioxide levels by 20 per cent below the legal limit could improve the development of a child's working memory by six per cent – the equivalent of three to four weeks of extra learning.

With economically disadvantaged pupils disproportionately attending schools in highly-polluted regions, one could argue that the

detrimental impact of air pollution on both physical health and cognitive function plays a considerable role in perpetuating the disadvantage gap.

NARROWING THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their counterparts is well-documented, and through a variety of schemes and endeavours, this gap started to narrow between 2011 and 2019 in both primary and secondary pupils.

However, a report published in July 2020 by the Data Evaluation and Learning for Viral Epidemics (DELVE) group shows that the attainment gap has widened during the coronavirus lockdown, with larger gaps emerging among primary school age pupils. Indeed, analysis on school closures conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation in June suggests that the attainment gap at the end of primary school could have widened by up to 75 per cent between March and September. This is likely due to a number of factors, such as disadvantaged pupils being less likely to have good access to online learning resources and their parents being less available to assist them with schoolwork.

Disadvantaged pupils are already likely to live in inner-city polluted areas, detrimentally impacting both their physical health and academic attainment, and analysis now shows that they have also suffered from an imbalance of learning opportunities throughout the coronavirus lockdown. It is therefore more important than ever to take advantage of opportunities to reduce the attainment gap wherever possible.

With clean indoor air standing to bestow the same benefits as almost a month of extra lessons, reducing the level of air pollution in learning environments is a key place to start.

PROVIDING A HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

There are a number of ways in which schools can endeavour to improve the air quality within classrooms, such as through ventilation remediation or school reconstruction projects. However, it has been found that targeting air quality more directly is a much more cost-effective method of reducing air pollution. The installation of air purifiers in schools, for example, has seen an increase in academic attainment equivalent to that observed following ventilation remediation projects, but at a fraction of the cost.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **Increase ventilation in classrooms as much as possible, either through remediation projects or by allowing a constant airflow through indoor spaces.**
- **Invest in clean air technology, to remove existing pollutants, bacteria and viruses from classroom air.**
- **Contact your local authority about creating a Clean Air Zone around your school, including measures such as anti-idling approaches to control vehicle emissions and relocating drop-off/pick-up points away from school entrances.**
- **Incorporate education on the impact of air pollution into your school curriculum, to promote understanding of the causes and harms of air pollution among teachers, pupils and families.**

Alongside the aforementioned benefits of clean indoor air, reducing indoor air pollutants also protects against commonly found viruses and bacteria – an area of concern that is becoming increasingly important to slow down the spread of coronavirus. Research carried out in Italy in early 2020 shows that viruses travel further by air because they attach to particles of air pollution, with heavily polluted areas subsequently having a higher rate of disease infection. Reducing levels of indoor air pollution therefore stands to safeguard against airborne disease transmission routes, helping to safeguard the health of both pupils and teachers, and keep schools open in a sustainable way.

Reducing air pollution levels within schools, either through clean air technology or via other means, is therefore key to improving health outcomes, increasing academic attainment, reducing the disadvantage gap, and mitigating the spread of coronavirus. At 4th Wave Technology, we recognise that while technology is not a one-stop answer, clean air technology can play an integral role in accelerating these outcomes and increasing equality of opportunity both in the short and long term.



Naeem Walji, Principal at 4th Wave Technology, leading distributors of clean air technology.

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COVID - reducing risk in classrooms

Jane Warburton explains the benefits of CO₂ monitors to help battle the spread of the coronavirus

With some schools closing, and despite varying levels of lockdown in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the spread of Covid-19 remains a real threat, especially in classrooms.

A report produced by Sage's Environmental and Modelling Group (EMG) suggested that fresh air plays a significant role in keeping the virus at bay indoors, and that poor air quality could be highlighted with the use of a CO₂ monitor.

The report, which is backed by the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE), demonstrates the correlation between poor ventilation and an increase in the relative risk of the airborne transmission of Covid-19, and recommends that ventilation be increased wherever possible to ensure that lower levels of CO₂ are maintained.

CONTINUOUS MONITORING

The guidance advises to increase "air changes", however, the majority of classrooms are naturally ventilated and rely on opening windows, so without the use of a CO₂ monitor there is no means to verify that the required rates are being achieved.

Scientists stated that continuous CO₂ monitoring is likely to be a reliable proxy for transmission risk in most environments. Preliminary research suggested that in spaces where the same group of people regularly attend, for example schools and universities, continuous monitoring would be possible as a transmission risk indicator.

The report suggests that multi-occupancy spaces with 20 or more people would see a significant increase in relative risk when carbon dioxide levels exceed 1,500ppm (parts per million).

However, low occupancy spaces or spaces with singing, loud speech or aerobic activity will require far greater

ventilation rates and should aim to maintain a CO₂ level of less than 800ppm, the report states.

OPENING OF DOORS AND WINDOWS

Current guidance to schools is to 'open windows and doors' and that thermal comfort is secondary to ventilation. However, during winter, in most cases, this will not be feasible.

Despite the science, budget constraints in schools have held back the installation of CO₂ monitors in classrooms to date, as requests in many instances to local governments have failed to produce any action.

Universities are addressing the problem as funding is less of an issue, and Local Authorities in Scotland are responding following the release of their own guidance from CERG as most of the schools still fall under LA control, unlike the rest of the UK where schools have been left to fend for themselves.



"Scientists stated that continuous CO₂ monitoring is likely to be a reliable proxy for transmission risk in most environments."

As winter deepens, conversations with teachers have supported the argument, with complaints that children are less inclined, or able, to work in the lower temperatures. In many cases pupils are subsequently asked to wear extra jumpers and coats. However, it is yet to be seen how effective, sustainable, or enforceable this is.

TRAFFIC LIGHT INDICATOR

CO₂ monitors, with an easy-to-follow traffic light indicator, are already widely used in universities, schools and offices, and while they do not necessarily solve the ventilation problem, they remove the uncertainty and provide the occupants with the information to safely manage their environment.

Opening windows and doors in schools, will reduce the risk of Covid transmission. However, it may also increase heating bills significantly. While it is recommended that some windows

are always open during occupation, it is not always necessary to open all of the windows all of the time. This strategy helps reduce the relative risk of transmission, but also heat loss, thereby reducing heating bills, which may provide a proportion of the cost of the installation of a CO₂ Monitor.

By creating a better working environment, it is already well documented that there is an increase in learning ability. In conclusion, although relatively inexpensive, CO₂ Monitors should be seen as a long-term investment to benefit everyone, as well as a short-term solution to ventilation issues, as opposed to an unnecessary expense.

For more information visit <https://www.flamefast-gas-safety.co.uk/covid>



Jane Warburton,
MD Flamefast

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Are you protected?

Matthew Blakey explains the changing nature of school security

Schools come in all shapes and sizes. While one security solution will never meet the needs of all, there are common shared threats and therefore similar requirements. These threats have changed over recent years, and security technology has adapted to meet them. But have you? Is your school security providing the protection required to keep staff and students safe?

The changing nature of security risks

Less than five or so years ago, the main perceived threats to schools came from vandalism and arson. The focus was therefore very much on preventing unwanted visitors accessing the site who might cause damage to property. Intruder alarm systems, with some CCTV cameras, were therefore a good 'off the shelf' solution.

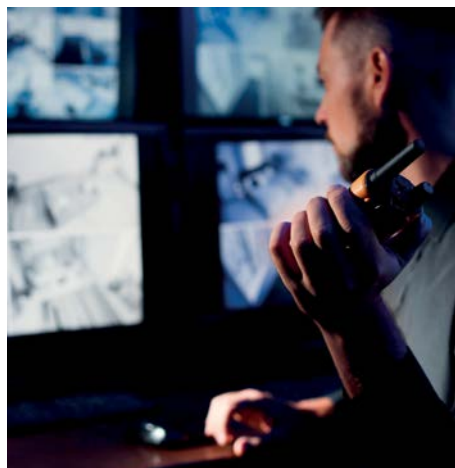
But in the last five years, requirements turned from this relatively basic security measure to schools looking at emergency lockdown procedures and integrating their security systems for improved protection. A person with a lighter or a spray can is one thing, but now schools have to take into account the dangers posed by a person entering the premises with a weapon and even bomb threats, real or otherwise. It's saddening that nowadays schools actually face the same risks as what we, as a company, used to profile as high risk, high security sites.

Getting the most out of your existing security

The most popular types of security systems within schools are access control, CCTV and emergency life safety systems such as fire alarms and emergency lockdown solutions.

Most schools will have one or more of these systems in place. However, they have frequently been added to over time, sometimes as the school grows, with new systems added that are not compatible with what's already on site.

A key area for improvement therefore is to try to bring all the technology into one integrated system to make it easy to manage and provide greater resilience. So, for example, your access control system can give notifications to the camera that covers a door that has just been opened, enabling you to identify the person who their tag says they are. Integrating the systems onto one platform is the key here.



“Is your school security providing the protection required to keep staff and students safe?”

Keeping an eye on things

With many criminal acts directed at schools, especially arson, being conducted out of school hours, the use of professional Security Monitoring Centres to remotely monitor schools' security systems is becoming increasingly popular.

Schools have been using such services to monitor the intruder alarm system, and sometimes the fire detection system, for a while. But remote monitoring is becoming more and more important and schools are upping the ante with the addition of video alarm verification. Video Alarm Verification is the process of confirming an actual intrusion using video clips and, where available, live video. When police emergency services consider an alarm to be 'verified' they treat it as an in-progress intrusion and will dispatch quickly.

Investing in the future

Of course, not all schools will have the security systems in place that they need to meet the changing landscape we face now and in the future. Here, new systems need to be considered.

One development in security technology that stands out as being ideal for education-based sites, especially in the current pandemic, comes in the form of new access control systems. Some of the latest touch free systems now incorporate facial recognition technology in place of keypads, swipe cards or tags, along with temperature measurement and even facemask detection, denying entry to those who have an elevated temperature or are not wearing a mask where they are required to do so. Post COVID-19, many schools will want to maintain the ability to check the temperatures of students as it's good practice for health and safety.

Matthew Blakey, General Manager- SME, STANLEY Security. STANLEY Security designs, installs, maintains and upgrades a wide range of security solutions to meet organisations' specific needs and budgets and has extensive experience in the education sector.
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5 REASONS TO TRY... Five Minute Literacy Box

Discover how to support literacy and discover signs of dyslexia



30 SECOND BRIEFING

Five Minute Literacy Box is a multi-sensory intervention providing early support or catch up for English, while highlighting potential signs of dyslexia and specific learning needs. For over 15 years Five Minute Boxes have been raising attainment in schools. Related resources include The Number Box (for mathematics) and The Five Minute Literacy Box 2.

1 STRENGTHENS FOUNDATIONS OF LITERACY

The Five Minute Literacy Box is a multi-sensory phonics programme which not only provides resources to develop key skills for reading, spelling and writing but also to enable the early identification of potential specific learning needs. The high-quality resources are particularly useful for teaching early phonics skills and the activities are designed to stretch children to encourage them to learn more sounds, blends and key words through regular sessions. Suitable from school entry onwards, Five Minute Literacy Box equally serves as a catch up intervention for children with EAL or extended school absence.

2 PERSONALISED INTERVENTION

Self-help strategies are built into every session so children develop the tools for confident, independent learning which they can take into any situation. The child controls the pace of the session so has a sense of taking charge of their own learning and have a chance to overlearn elements they find more challenging. This way, skills are cemented and gaps in learning are avoided. Crucially, children build self-esteem by growing their skills and feeling empowered by their progress.

3 REAL PROGRESS AND CATCH-UP

Children using the Five Minute Literacy Box make measurable



progress with their grapheme/ phoneme correspondence and their spelling. For example, monitoring the lowest performing 20 per cent of learners in one school, 100 per cent made progress in reading, while 95 per cent improved spelling accuracy by a year or more. All learners improved self-esteem and confidence in learning (Neilston & Madras

Campus Pupil Equity Fund Report, 2018-19).

4 MANAGEABLE SUPPORT

Five Minute Literacy Box can be used

Contact:

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5 TRAINING AVAILABLE

Our new 2020 version of the Five Minute Literacy Box introductory video helps teaching professionals get started with using the intervention. Each Box also contains a Resource Book to give background detail and teaching scripts to facilitate confident use of the intervention. Specific training is available to schools who require more in-depth CPD. In partnership with Understanding & Supporting Learning, Five Minute Box offers new virtual training, as well as face-to-face training, as required. Further details are on our website www.fiveminutebox.co.uk.

KEY POINTS

High-quality resources particularly useful for catch up in phonics skills, and activities to encourage children to learn more sounds, blends and key words through regular sessions.

Individualised sessions that motivate even reluctant learners. Children love managing the resources themselves and working at their own pace of learning.

Self-esteem develops through strategies that are built into the activities and transfer across the curriculum, thereby avoiding learned helplessness.

Progress is accelerated particularly amongst children with EAL, those with gaps in education, communication needs and the 20 per cent lowest performing learners.

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IS GAMING THE FUTURE OF LEARNING?

Gary Spracklen wonders whether next gen consoles will be an aid to education

The global pandemic has seen an exponential growth in the use of technology to support teaching and learning in our schools and in our homes. Meanwhile, two generation-defining entertainment consoles (the Playstation 5 and Xbox Series X) have been launched in the past few months to great worldwide appeal.

Teachers and researchers have been interested in the use of game-based applications in schools for many years now (see, for example, Facer, 2003; McFarlane, Sparrowhawk & Heald, 2002; Randel, Morris, Wetzel & Whitehill, 1992). Many games are specifically written for education purposes, (educational software or e-learning games), but there has also been increased interest in the potential of commercial off-the-shelf computer games (COTS) in the classroom (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004).

The arguments for computer games rest on beliefs about enhanced knowledge and skills, and associated improvements in attitudinal factors and engagement (Passey et al, 2004; Sandford, Ulicsak, Facer & Rudd, 2006). I have long been an advocate for Minecraft in the classroom, seeing the attitudinal factors and engagement for myself with children across the primary-age range and above. Where used effectively, I've also seen how Minecraft can develop and enhance knowledge and skills across a range of curriculum areas.

Here are some great ways to use Minecraft in the classroom:

MAKE HISTORY COME ALIVE

There are many already-created

three-dimensional replica structures, like the Empire State Building and the Globe Theatre in London, that you can import into the game and have students explore. Many teachers have pupils create experiences (an update on dioramas) to show their knowledge of historical places and times. Students can also use Minecraft to create stage performances.

FOCUS ON DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Minecraft is a collaborative game, and students actively work in competitive ways, but they can also work together to solve problems and challenges. Teachers can use this as an opportunity to build digital citizenship skills. As pupils play, teachers should observe and give feedback with checklists and rubrics. Teachers can also facilitate discussions and reflections to support each pupil in effectively communicating and collaborating.

ADD A TOOL FOR WRITING

Minecraft can be used to tell stories with characters, locations,

“I have long been an advocate for Minecraft in the classroom.”



choices, motivations, and plots. Teachers can use Minecraft as a tool for pupils to write and create stories based on their character. Perhaps students might create a backstory for the world they create, as well as for their character. Pupils can also create a story with different plot elements using the game they play and add more creative elements’.

COSTS

While Minecraft in the classroom is now well established for some, for others it’s a new horizon yet to be explored. With the launch of the Playstation 5 and Xbox Series X consoles many teachers and leaders will no doubt want to explore their potential for learning but be put off by the costs involved. A class set of new-generation entertainment consoles would involve significant expenditure for a school. On the other hand, once bought, they could, with careful timetabling, be shared between many classes and used throughout the school in the course of a term.

There is of course no guarantee that all children will prefer to learn specific skills (such as mental computation) on an entertainment console, although it would seem reasonable to suggest that most would. Certainly, nearly all findings indicate that less-able children in particular may benefit from this type of activity.

INFLUENCE

The next generation of consoles may hold a special attraction for those children least likely to want to do ‘routine’ schoolwork and hardest to motivate. I for one would be keen to explore if the use of the next generation of consoles would have any ‘spin-off’ in other areas. In terms of children’s beliefs: do any increases in motivation—and confidence—transfer to other classroom tasks? Do they influence attitudes to learning in other domains? At the level of cognitive functioning, it is clear that speed of mental calculation is central to the gains achieved in most current studies; is it possible that this increased speed of processing information transfers to other learning tasks?

Gary Spracklen is Headteacher at The Prince of Wales School, Dorchester.



THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

A new report spotlights ‘inadequate’ access to technology in English schools

Just one per cent of primary state schools provide devices that their pupils can take home, compared to 38 per cent of private primary schools according to new survey data from polling organisation Teacher Tapp, published by Microsoft in association with think tank The Centre for Education and Youth.

This new data highlights the challenges faced in providing the connected learning that education increasingly depends upon.

Microsoft commissioned the survey of more than 5,000 teachers across England, including more than 1,200 senior leaders, to better understand the value and benefits educators perceive from current education technologies and the barriers they foresee to future adoption, the so-called “digital divide” included. The results are eye opening:

- In the state sector just one-in-three teachers has access to one-to-one technologies, compared to two in three teachers in the private sector.
- 72 per cent of students in schools rated inadequate by Ofsted do not have access to individual devices in their classrooms, compared with 59 per cent in outstanding schools.
- Just one per cent of primary state schools provide devices that their pupils can take home, compared with 38 per cent of private primary schools.

Evidence regarding the severity of England’s digital divide has been mounting throughout the pandemic. Although on any given day, only around 15 per cent of lessons involve anyone using a device, recent months have pressed fast forward on the process of transforming schools and education, with hybrid learning rapidly

becoming the “new normal”. Teachers agree that education technology tools benefit students across a whole range of needs, from developing more independent learning skills (65 per cent agree), to preparing them better for future studies and life at work (59 per cent agree), to empowering students with special educational needs (48 per cent agree). Yet access varies dramatically. However, in addition to issues around accessibility of devices, the report identifies a number of barriers to the adoption of connected technologies:

- Approximately one-in-four teachers said they would need training to use new tools and technology effectively, and a similar number had concerns around the durability of the solutions.
- One in five teachers said they would be concerned about safeguarding if pupils had one-to-one access to a device.
- They are also price sensitive, with more than half (54 per cent) of teachers indicating that the price of a device is a key factor when it comes to deciding on which product to buy.

Chris Rothwell, Director of Education at Microsoft UK, said: “In order for children to reach their full potential, they need teachers who are working at theirs, with technology that can help that. It’s critical schools, students, teachers and IT departments have access to the right software, tools, training, and practical guidance to do just that.”

To download the full Closing the Achievement Gap in the Connected Classroom report go to bit.ly/3gJDB74

“The report identifies a number of barriers to the adoption of connected technologies.”

Why EdTech is the route to equality

Rick Bell explains why technology is vital in inclusive education

For many years, EdTech tools have served as learning supports for primary school students who require additional attention from teachers or have special educational needs. Far from mainstream, they were implemented to aid teachers already being pulled in multiple directions.

However, as the emphasis is increasingly placed on inclusion and understanding the way individuals learn, we are seeing these same tools flooding into classrooms, with positive results for students across the board.

The current Ofsted framework, updated in 2019, focuses on helping schools to level the playing field. It states that, 'Our intention is to ensure that inspection is better able to play its part in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion... The criteria are clear that the expectation is that all learners receive a high-quality education.' This is an important point and an indication that we need a new narrative around inclusion that goes beyond special educational needs and disabilities (SEN), acknowledging that every student learns and expresses knowledge in their own unique way.

So how can EdTech tools really achieve this without requiring fundamental changes to curriculums or lesson planning?

The electronics debate

Educators, policy makers and parents have long debated over the extent to which technology should be used in the classroom and how it can be utilised most effectively. In the last five years, we have started to see compelling evidence that well-designed technology can make a significant difference to learners' outcomes when deployed by teachers.

According to a report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), five-year-olds in England who do not interact with technology generally have lower literacy scores than those who use it more regularly.

The study, which was designed to help the UK assess children's skills and development, recognises that 'the first five years of a child's life is a period of great opportunity and risk. The cognitive and social-emotional skills that children develop in these early years have long-



“Teachers must look to engage students by leveraging tools that offer interactive learning where they can.”

lasting impacts on their later outcomes throughout schooling and adulthood.’

With a vast array of tools available, which are often easy to implement, there are more opportunities now than ever before to make extra support available to all students. It's important to clarify that it is the synchronicity of tech and teacher time that will make an impact, rather than a heavy reliance on one or the other.

Climate

For example, imagine that technology which could help your students to read and write and make each learner feel supported, while adjusting to their own learning style and speed. Not only does this create an environment where teachers are able to manage their heavy workload, but they can also focus on spending time ensuring that classmates who require extra support are receiving it.

Given the current climate, this is obviously difficult in the short term. For those who are remote learning it can be lonely and disengaging for the student, and some structure is required. Teachers must look to engage students by leveraging tools that offer interactive learning where they can. There are also a huge range of complimentary tools supporting everything from assessment to feedback and collaboration. On top of this, without teacher assistance directly available, SEN students will be particularly reliant on software for the support they need.

During these testing times, EdTech tools surely give all students their best chances at success and may build a strong foundation for the future.

Rick Bell is Head of Education at Texthelp, the global education technology company

ONLINE/OFFLINE – CAN MY MIS HANDLE IT?

Anthony David considers the increasingly changing world of school management systems – MIS

It has been an extraordinary year, to say the very least. If your schools are anything like mine then you will have been playing a delicate game of ping-pong as you open/close classes or bubbles while maintaining our legal obligation for remote learning. It has tested all aspects of our school life, not least whether or not you can access your MIS for even the most basic things such as the register. For many schools it has revealed how tech poor we are.

Most staff are unaware of the importance of the school's MIS. Like major organs, it beats quietly in the background providing key legal data. This works well during a normal school day. Most schools will be operating SIMs and as long as you are in school it works fine. Step outside and the picture is not quite so straightforward. SIMs' natural habitat is not in the open; like a fish out of water, it can flounder. Perhaps I am being a bit over dramatic but there are real changes ahead for this background resource and Covid has, perhaps, driven the demise of this Goliath resource.

SKILLS

A quick history. For almost as long as I have been in education (I'm measuring in decades now) there have been two main school systems; Integris and SIMs. Both offered similar resources and both required specialised training to use it. Local Authorities across the country would employ tech advisors to support schools and often the office admin were the only people in the school able to access and use this resource with any particular skills. Typically, this would be the most expensive annual licence costing schools anywhere between £3-10,000 a year. At its height, SIMs accounted for nearly 85 per cent of all UK schools and generated close to £100 million a year for its company, making it a resource worth around £1 billion at its height.

Then about eight years ago a new generation of MIS providers entered the scene; Arbor, BROMCOM and ScholarPack. Unlike SIMs, these were cloud based. What these companies were offering was something that was quite new: easy to access, rapid, useful reports and importantly being user friendly. Suddenly this resource was open to all members of the staff, not just the office team. TAs and teachers could now input behaviour reports, assessments

or attendance. Heads of department could analyse these immediately. Third party resources (such as online assessment data by the Government or publishers like Hodder with PUMA and PIRA) could stream their data directly to these resources further adding to the richness of data available for interrogation by school leaders.

OPTIONS

I had the chance, seven years ago, to meet most of the CEOs of these new companies. I was opening a new school and wanted to see what my options were beyond the traditional MIS systems. BROMCOM is principally a secondary school resource and while it is a good tool was not the right one for a new primary. This then fell to Arbor and ScholarPack. Both are great resources and I could have easily gone with either though Arbor's offer of a MAT dashboard won me over (along with my fellow heads of school). I remember it was the clear passion for something different and new that attracted me. James Weatherall, the CEO of Arbor, was convinced that schools, who create so much data, could be doing so much more with it than they were doing at the time. And he was right. Whether I chose ScholarPack or Arbor, in some ways was moot.

The choice I was making was to centralise my data into one place.

At the time I was paying for an MIS, safeguarding, behaviour and assessment programme. The promise of eliminating these not only made life easier (one set of log-ins) but was cheaper.

CLOUD-BASED

Seven years ago, I was simply an early adopter. I had faith that these cloud-based products would be the way forward but I was very aware that I had made a bold move. People believe that schools are slow to move but anybody who has set foot in a good school will know that is far from the truth. Except with MIS systems, it seems. A headteacher neighbour was really interested in my new, zingy cloud-based system. I popped over to her school a couple of times and, because all I needed was the internet, I could show her the programme. She loved it, still does... four years later. It seems that schools are deeply reluctant to change the main organ, and I can understand why. Not so MATs. CEOs can see the advantage that ScholarPack and Arbor bring in both time saving and raw finances. Being able to efficiently find data not only saves time it looks professional and MATs are very keen to look professional. Indeed, if we were in a pre-academy world it is likely that these new systems would struggle to gain any ground but we are not and academies are happily disrupting established systems.



FUTURE

And the ground is shaking. SIMs dominated the market but between 2015-19 it has dropped market share from 83 per cent to 75 per cent. In the summer Capita ventured to sell off their share. Now, don't be fooled.

SIMs is still a mighty resource and generating tens of millions each year. Chances are that your school is still using SIMs. But will you in the future? To make SIMs work for (and to effectively mimic a cloud MIS) you need third-party resources like CPOMS. In itself, CPOMS is a great programme but the cost of adding licences is adding up. By considering the sale Capita are effectively

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Changing MIS can present as a challenging task, however, it doesn't have to be.

Key staff to keep involved are your office staff as they will be used to older systems and possibly most reluctant to change (that said, this has not been my experience). New providers also have well-established customer relations teams who are keen to develop partnerships rather than leave schools waiting on an answer phone.

Should you make the decision to change you may want to review your terms of conditions. It has been rumoured that Integris has changed its terms to reflect six months' notice of leave rather than three.

Finally, consider how long you take to migrate from one system to the other. It may be prudent to start with the basic MIS system before dropping all of your other third-party services such as safeguarding or assessment online tools. A practical timeline would be:

- JANUARY – serve notice to end contact with MIS (though check with Integris)
- APRIL – roll out basic MIS across school
- SEPTEMBER – migrate to new assessment system
- APRIL, FIRST YEAR – migrate to new finance system

suggesting that the product that was the Golden Calf for decades is now worth more if sold. A white flag? Maybe. What may well have sown significant doubt are the advantages that cloud products bring and it was these types of programmes that we have needed over these challenging months.

Seven years ago, I was an early adopter. In seven years, I suspect the market will look nothing like it does today; I predict Goliath will fall.



Anthony David, executive headteacher, St Paul's CE Primary School and Monken Hadley CE Primary School.

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KEEP PUPILS SAFE WHEN BEING TAUGHT AT HOME

Mark Bentley provides his advice for keeping pupils safe online

2020 is of course famous for many things, one of which is being the year that remote learning became mainstream. While schools have been doing an amazing job at providing continuity of education, even teaching in person and remotely at the same time, there are key safeguarding considerations that we must not forget.

Life has certainly been different in schools, with children of key workers in during the first lockdown and others at home, the phased return of primary year groups before the summer, and the bubble-bursting hokey-cokey and yet more new restrictions in this school year.

That has generated plenty of things to watch out for in school, but the concerns about staying safe at home have been accentuated as well. Even if nothing else changed, the sheer increase in time spent at home and online by young people increased the likelihood of exposure to online harm from bullying to child sexual exploitation, to gangs and county lines (child criminal exploitation or CCE).

SO WHAT'S THE ANSWER?

In school, it is important to recognise that during bubble/school closures when remote learning is implemented that the same principles of safeguarding, online safety and behaviour apply – major changes to policy documents should not be needed. However, schools should review policies, remind stakeholders of existing principles and identify any which need reinforcing due to new (mostly online) procedures and activities. You can find more advice on this at <https://safepolicies.lgfl.net> in an addendum document that will help schools update their policies.

A particular concern is over the use of livestreaming and other remote teaching technologies. These are all great teaching and learning tools, but it's important to take precautions to keep children safe and protect staff from allegations of impropriety. Here are twenty top tips for live streaming lessons (most applicable to all forms of remote teaching):

- Only use school-registered accounts, never personal ones.
- Don't use a system that your SLT has not approved.
- Will some students be excluded? Do they have internet, a device and a quiet place?



- Do students have a safe and appropriate place with no bedrooms or inappropriate objects/information visible? All the video platforms now allow you to blur or change the background.
- Check the link in an incognito tab to make sure it isn't public for the whole world!
- Has your admin audited the settings first (who can chat? who can start a stream? who can join?)
- What about vulnerable students with SEND and CP needs?
- Don't let students start their own streams by mistake when you allow them to access the class stream.
- Never stream without another member staff in the 'room' and without other colleagues aware.
- Once per week for live lessons may be enough to start with – don't overdo it and make mistakes.
- Keep a log of everything - what, when, with whom and anything that went wrong.
- Do you want chat turned on for pupils? Can they chat when you aren't there?
- Avoid one-to-ones unless pre-approved by SLTs
- Remind pupils and staff about the AUP agreements they signed. The rules are the same.
- Remind pupils and staff about the safeguarding policy and reporting process – does it work remotely?

- Do you want to record it? Are students secretly recording it? You may not be able to tell.
- How can students ask questions or get help?
- What are the ground rules? When can students speak/how?
- If you don't understand the system, if it won't be safe or reliable, if teaching won't be enhanced, DON'T DO IT.
- Is your DPO happy? GDPR covered? Parental consent needed?

In schools, we are used to using filtering and it's really important for schools to be sure that their filtering or monitoring providers are registered with the UK Safer Internet Centre to explain how they meet the 'appropriate' definitions.

At home, the picture is more varied, and that's why LGfL has decided to make our new home filtering solution available for all schools in the country for free (<https://national.lgfl.net/smartbuy/homeprotect>) for the next six months to cover the period of uncertainty and extra remote learning where pupils are likely to be online at home a lot more while doing their school work.

Mark Bentley, Safeguarding and Cybersecurity Manager at LGfL.

USE TECH TO TAKE PARENTS WITH YOU

Alex Handy says technology can play a big role in improving parental engagement

I took over a digital literacy leadership role at Castle Phoenix Trust's lead school, Caludon Castle, in 2019, and helped to drive the adoption of iPads as the main teaching delivery tool for staff across the school.

This work was part of our strategy to simplify and centralise our IT systems - a strategy that is beginning to have a major impact on parental engagement across the trust.

Parents at all of our schools want a simple, single place where they can find everything they need to know about their child's homework, progress and other school information, without the need to use lots of disparate systems, each with their own password.

Our primaries are following the adoption of the Firefly platform by our secondaries by about six months. From September 2019 we appointed two primary liaison teachers who work part of the week at Caludon and at our two primaries — Richard Lee Primary and Hill Farm Primary — the rest of the week. One primary liaison teacher has the remit to develop Firefly at our primaries. The idea is to encourage development of the platform at each school and to share their approaches with each other so that they can learn and develop together. Experience has taught me that you really need to give careful attention to the implementation of technology, if it is to be successful.

STRATEGY

The Firefly system is for staff, parents, pupils. For teachers it is the hub for everything they need to do their job. For example, if they need to read up on the behavioural policy or teaching and learning expectations, upload homework or check on their performance objectives this is the place. For pupils it is where they access their homework, and parents use it to find out about their child's homework, look at teacher feedback, and access information on everything from the

school calendar, announcements and the latest newsletters.

Our strategy was to focus on the pupils before their parents. We needed to get our children and young people to understand what the portal was, what it looked like and how it worked. If they know that their home learning is on there and they are logging in at home then this will also encourage parents.

We've also had to be careful to minimise any obstacles that might put parents off. Making it as 'frictionless' as possible is important; it has to be easy to log into, navigate and use. We're taking things step by step as we learn more about what works, and what doesn't. Our goal is that when the next academic year starts it will be normal practice for parents.

No technology-based approach is totally infallible so if parents do have problems, I'm

there morning, noon and night via email or phone to help. We've not had any real problems with the technology – the vast majority of issues are minor, such as forgotten passwords.



“As well as helping us to build parental engagement the technology has also won over teachers.”

TECHNOLOGY FACTORS

One of our key requirements when we adopted this technology was that it must be accessible in a range of ways and be ‘device agnostic’. Parents can use it via a smartphone app as well as a web browser. This is important for us because we can’t guarantee that our parents have the latest IT at home. Some parents do not have smartphones, or they have an older model smartphone.

The fact that our system can be used without parents or pupils having to download software – they access what

they need through links to online information – was another big benefit. Downloading is a problem on older devices. It’s another bit of ‘friction’ that can put parents off from engaging with the platform and it can also make it harder for our primary children to access their home learning.

PARENT FEEDBACK

Our secondary schools are six months ahead of our primaries in the use of the platform and it’s interesting how the feedback from secondary parents is now being echoed by our primary parents.

When we launched the system there was fear – some parents asked if they could go back to paper – but once they were on, they could see how easy and accessible it is. I think this technology approach is especially useful for primary age children and their families. It’s asking a lot for a six-year-old to manage a sheet of paper until it needs to be handed in. With a portal you can load on the homework with instructions of what the child needs to do and the teacher can also record verbal feedback when the task is done, which cuts their workload. That visibility of feedback is a big ‘in’ for parents; they get to see a piece of homework marked soon after it’s been submitted, rather than waiting for book inspection time at parents evening.

It’s still too early to tell exactly how parents have received the systems in our primary schools. We are planning a parental engagement survey at the two schools in the spring which will be very similar to the one we did at Caludon Castle.

The fact that parents contact me about passwords and getting onto the system is a good indicator of how embedded it is becoming with our parents. We also find that parents come to us more to ask about homework if it hasn’t been set. It’s because the system has put homework to the forefront. This is a great development because it leads to more productive discussions with parents, and that’s a key way of creating stronger links with parents.

As well as helping us to build parental engagement the technology has also won over teachers. Marking and feedback takes up a lot of their time, but the fact written feedback can be replaced with audio is invaluable.

Teachers say that the portal saves them time and gives them greater clarity in their job; it’s always clear what homework they have set, where their children are with it and when it should be in. It really helps them to plan busy schedules.

GET TO GRIPS WITH EDTECH



- Ask parents. Set up a quick online survey to ask parents which communication methods they prefer and check the best times to send them messages.

Use their feedback to inform your comms strategy.



- Don’t judge. All parents want their child to thrive, but not every parent has fond memories of school life. When

problems arise, talk in terms of areas of development, and use the language of suggestion and possibility. Try “Why not...?” rather than “you should”. The former empowers the parent; the latter assumes “teacher knows best” and risks alienating some. School communication is not a one-way, top-down broadcast: it is a two-way, mutual partnership.



- Think about the diverse needs of your parents. Consider the background,

working lives, language, and culture of parents. For instance, modern parent portals make it all the easier to schedule flexible timings for parents’ evenings. They also facilitate online video meetings as an alternative, which are often better for both teachers and parents, especially with covid-related restrictions. Language can also be a barrier for some parents. Think about using parent communication platforms which can translate messaging and information with ease.

Firefly’s new e-book, *Communicating Effectively with Parents*, is now available at <https://bit.ly/3abGHzw>



Alex Handy is strategic lead for digital technology at Castle Phoenix Trust, a MAT consisting of two primaries and secondaries in Coventry and another secondary in North Warwickshire.

CAN WE CLOSE THE GAP?

John Moore looks at ways EdTech can play its part in narrowing the Covid-19 achievement gap

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent local and national lockdowns have had a significant impact on the education sector as a whole. Teachers have had to face continuous obstacles from supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the pupils and delivering education remotely, to adjusting the school day and creating Covid-19 friendly classrooms to prevent further spread of the virus.

This has been even more of a challenge for primary schools as they try to support children who are in vital developmental stages of their lives. Ofsted's report found young children had often suffered the most — going backwards on words and numbers and with "regression back into nappies among potty-trained children" or losing "basic skills" such as using a knife and fork.

Children and families across the country have been affected in a wide range of ways. At Renaissance Learning, as an organisation that has always strived to offer every student the opportunity to reach their full potential, one of the most concerning trends has undoubtedly been the achievement gap.

There has always been a disparity in academic performance between groups of students, specifically those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. The gap existed before Covid-19, however recent research from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) suggests efforts to close the disadvantage gap have now stalled. Findings suggest disadvantaged pupils are 18.1 months of learning behind their peers by the time they finish their GCSEs. We have conducted our own research which showed almost two-thirds of school leaders (63 per cent) believe the attainment gap has grown during lockdown, echoing these findings.

While the attainment gap remains one of the biggest challenges the education sector faces, as an organisation we have been inspired by how responsive and resilient teachers and schools have been during these trying times as they explore the world of EdTech available to support them.

HOW CAN EDTECH HELP?


We have seen EdTech solutions act as a leveller this past year as they allow teachers to provide a blended solution between classroom learning and home learning. Resources can be shared widely in both learning environments, where pupils have access to devices, and they can also be adapted for students with special education needs so all pupils can benefit from a wide range of content. Teachers using edtech solutions to track and monitor progress can immediately identify students that are falling behind and take action to prevent learning loss. This can mean disadvantaged students working at home receive additional resources and regular check-ins from class teachers.

The uptake in education technology has also benefited teachers — allowing them to become more efficient with the way they mark pupils' work, monitor and track their classes' progress. There are lots of different types of technology which support this. At Renaissance many teachers use computer-adaptive Star Assessments for reading and maths, which provide valid and reliable student data in less time than traditional tests. The results are mapped against the national curriculum in the form of Learning Progressions built by the National Foundation for Educational Research, and can be used to see if they are on track to meet expected levels.

Collectively, this data helps teachers instantly identify learning gaps such as those arising from Covid-19 closures and disruption, while Focus Skills reveal the areas that should be targeted to help close these gaps. Such is the power of knowing where these skills fall across the curriculum that back in August we made them freely available to schools in the form of Focus Skills Teacher Workbooks for Literacy and Maths.

HOW DO WE TACKLE THE GAP NOW?

We are in no doubt that this will continue to be a difficult time for teachers and pupils, but there



"There are positives we can and should draw as we move forward."

are positives we can and should draw as we move forward. There is evidence that an achievement gap occurs every summer (the so-called 'summer slide') with some pupils experiencing more learning loss during the school break than others, and often at transition from primary to secondary. The response to Covid-19 has shone a light on this issue more than ever before, offering an opportunity for a renewed plan to tackle and limit the gap. Teachers have explored new technology, new ways of working to support their students' progress and offer a tailored learning experience. The education technology sector has had to respond to this increased demand for services as teachers quickly turned to G-Suite, Zoom,



Microsoft Classroom and many other programmes to enable remote learning. At Renaissance we offered all schools free access to myON and myON News so every student could access thousands of digitally enhanced texts and articles — and there are hundreds of products out there for teachers and schools to support teaching and learning.

Disadvantaged children still face challenges from a lack of devices, internet access or quiet working space at home and more work needs to be done to alleviate these hurdles. Yet the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of technology in the classroom and the best practices that support it, meaning teachers are better placed to tackle any learning loss than

ever before. We should remember, however, that the pandemic didn't create the disadvantage gap, it already existed to some extent before Covid-19, but we are all now better prepared to tackle this problem head on every year with proven edtech solutions.

Renaissance Learning will continue to explore ways to help schools navigate this challenging time. As a first step, Focus Skills have been turned into teacher workbooks that are freely available to schools to provide a roadmap for closing learning gaps, and can be used to support individual, group or class instruction. For more information and to download these free resources please visit renlearn.co.uk/focus-skills/

FREE RESOURCES

We continue to be inspired by how responsive and resilient teachers and schools have been. Teachers have explored new technology, new ways of working to support their students' progress and offer a tailored learning experience – we would urge schools to continue to use this data and information to tackle the achievement gaps going forwards.

The education technology sector has had to respond to this increased demand for services as teachers quickly turned to G-Suite, Zoom, Microsoft Classroom and many other programmes to enable remote learning. There are always new products and systems available to support teachers. At Renaissance we know the power of knowing where pupil's skills fall short against the national curriculum, so we made **Focus Skills Teacher Workbooks** (<https://bit.ly/3oO0ucm>) for Literacy and Maths freely available to schools so they can instantly identify learning gaps such as those arising from Covid-19 closures and disruption.



John Moore is the director at Renaissance UK.

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Is your school making the most effective and economical use of its learning technology?

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Inside this issue...

- Why schools should embrace personalised learning
- Making use of digital devices, minus the distractions
- How to get a good deal from your tech spend
- Is artificial intelligence really coming after your job?

LET DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY HELP TO EASE THE STRAIN

Haylie Taylor discusses how data visualisation can improve student outcomes, engagement and support teacher workloads

With the pressure to keep up with curriculum-specific student assessment, teachers often feel the strain in the classroom. Teaching is an incredibly worthwhile profession yet, with student numbers on the rise and resources remaining limited, it is perhaps unsurprising that almost 30 per cent of new teachers leave within the first three years according to the National Federation for Education Research. These worrying statistics suggest that teachers are under-supported when it comes to managing their workloads.

THE EDUCATION JIGSAW

Pupil assessment is an essential part of the education experience. Yet, given the heavy workloads teachers are faced with, regular monitoring and assessment can sometimes fall by the wayside.

The challenge for teachers is having a clear picture of the different elements which inform student engagement and outcomes. Teachers have various touchpoints such as lesson participation, test results and interventions to consider, which must also be correlated against the learner's key stage and their individual abilities.

A teacher might use a number of digital and paper systems to manage swathes of student data, which often makes it more challenging to visualise the insights which inform more personalised learning plans. Data siloes further makes it harder to carry out pupil assessment effectively and gauge the student's comprehension across the syllabus.

EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Education technology tools are set to play a key role in helping teachers streamline growing workloads while providing a holistic understanding of student data. Importantly, this enables educators to deliver an individualised response to each learner's needs.

EdTech resources are transforming the way teachers work and the quality of learning which students receive. EdTech enables teachers to quickly create curriculum-specific lesson plans, assign activities and even automate marking, boosting productivity and efficiency.

CONNECTING THE PIECES

The best digital tools will go further and help teachers to complete the student data jigsaw. Teachers should look at resources which allow them to set curriculum-aligned assessments and provide automatic marking and feedback features, enabling teachers to better evaluate student progress at a formative and summative level while easing the strain on their workload. Having the assessment results in one system helpfully provides a single view across a learner's activity and test results.

At primary school level, for instance, one teacher is typically responsible for teaching the entire primary syllabus from English to maths and science. Without the right tools and sufficient time, it is easy to see how a child's performance in each subject can become siloed. Effective digital resources will bridge the data gaps so that teachers can extract their true value for a more complete learning and teaching experience.

LONG-TERM STUDENT PROGRESS

The ability to assess a student's comprehension in the short-term is useful when it comes to certain topics, but what about the learner's long-term development? Linking up the various formative, summative and unit assessments is vital for seeing how the student is performing across the months and forecasting what the student will need to improve. For time-poor teachers, edtech enables them to pinpoint where learners are falling behind in their attainment and create a personalised plan to support them with their studies.



Looking at the bigger picture, teachers can assess how the class as a whole is performing. If a group of students are struggling with a concept, the teacher can then adapt their plans with additional time and materials to reinforce the learning. Such insights are important for identifying trends and being able to predict which students might require further support or more advanced activities for improved outcomes.

Haylie Taylor, former teacher and education consultant at EducationCity, which combines digital curriculum and assessment for students aged 3-18.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Al Kingsley explains how to build primary teachers' EdTech confidence

When we ask teachers how they feel about using EdTech in the classroom, at the same time as recognising that it is exciting, innovative, develops communication and creates learning opportunities, many also admit that they feel daunted and anxious about using it with their pupils.

It is easy to see why. If teachers are simply given a whistle-stop tour of a solution for an hour or so during an inset training day, they are unlikely to be immediately confident in its use. What they need is the chance to get their hands on it, practise and become familiar with it on their own terms. Without this time factored into their timetables, they will struggle to gain a working knowledge that enables them to use edtech meaningfully with their students – and so the cost of purchasing and implementing it is wasted.

WHERE TO START

Even if you do have a supportive SLT that is fully invested in helping staff develop their technology skills and has allocated time for you to do so, where do you start? Being left alone with unfamiliar technology can be intimidating, so receiving practical training that you can try out on the actual devices you will be using in class is crucial. Accessing the technology as soon as possible after the training really helps to consolidate what has been

demonstrated. Taking it slowly and becoming familiar with one feature at a time means that knowledge and confidence will build together, before you put things to the test in front of your pupils.

As with learning any new skill, repetition helps to achieve fluency. This rehearsal time is where making mistakes is beneficial as it provides you with the chance to find out how to fix things without being under pressure; minimising the fear factor and leaving you better prepared for the classroom. Some teachers I have spoken with say they have practised by videoing themselves and, when happy with the results, have incorporated the feature into their video exemplars for pupils or parents. This is a really useful tip because, not only can you review and adapt as you go, but you will also build up a bonus library of instructional resources.

FOUR STAGES

A model for describing the stages teachers may identify with when learning new EdTech is defined by Mandinach and Cline (1992), who outline the phases of survival, mastery, impact and innovation.

With that mindset, if we hand a new solution to a teacher and provide little or no training, that places them in survival mode. They are not sure how to use it properly, are fearful of breaking it and, under pressure with 30 eager faces in front of them (either in class or sitting at home), confidence does not really come into it; it is just a case of whether they will sink or swim!



“Having one platform that the whole school community can use to communicate and collaborate is vital.”

However, once teachers have learned the basics, they move to phase two, which is mastery. This is where they have received training and have had the opportunity to practise by themselves. They have also tried things out in lessons and, when they have worked, this has begun to boost their confidence.

The reason that schools have invested in devices, software and (hopefully) CPD, is that mastery evolves into stage three, which is generating impact. Teachers are no longer afraid of the technology, can cope when things do not go to plan, and they (and their pupils) are using it effectively.

The final step that every school aspires to is to generate innovation. Here, technology is used intelligently and appropriately, teachers feel that they are digitally literate (with their technology knowledge on a par with their pedagogical and content knowledge (TPCK)), so much so in fact, that they are in a position to share those skills with others and, in effect, become the flagbearers for those less confident than themselves.

PRACTISING AND RETAINING SKILLS

During the pandemic, through necessity, technology has taken centre stage. So whether

collaborating and communicating in Teams, Zoom or Google Meet or helping students to learn via ClassDojo or Seesaw, many teachers have worked hard to significantly raise their edtech skills in a short time – and for that, we applaud you!

What is critical though, is that these new-found skills are not lost once we begin to move past Covid, when the urgent need for remote teaching and learning inevitably diminishes. For that not to happen, the progressive use of edtech needs to be embedded across the school. Schools can ensure this by reviewing and standardising their solutions; making things easier for staff moving between sites within a Trust, and easier to support. So deciding, for example, whether you are an Apple/Google/Microsoft school is key and gives you the foundation on which to implement complementary applications that are therefore more accessible (in terms of intuitive usage) for your teachers.

Continued learning support is a fundamental part of retaining any new skill. This can take various forms, such as ongoing formal CPD training sessions, top-up/revision training, peer sharing, solutions champions or interacting on dedicated online forums to ask questions and share answers and experiences with others. The key is to keep your knowledge ticking over and evolving with changes in the technology, rather than letting your skill level drop and having to play catch-up. This way, you will retain the knowledge and confidence to use edtech as a tool to innovate, rather than simply just ‘use’ it.

FUTURE INVESTMENT

There has never been a more important time to be digitally literate and the pandemic has been a huge catalyst for change in this respect, with the need to teach children remotely and maintain communication with parents to support the continuation of learning. As many schools will maintain their current EdTech use after Covid, the work teachers are doing to increase their digital confidence now will integrate technology into their teaching practice, so that it moves from being a box they must tick to being a tool they automatically use to achieve their pedagogical aims.

GET TO GRIPS WITH EDTECH



• **Learn at your own pace.** Rushing things means you won't take information on board fully and increases the likelihood of coming unstuck later on.

• **Don't be intimidated if others appear to learn faster.** Stick to what works for you. You know you'll get there eventually.



• **Testing, testing.** Try things out with an audience of one: yourself. Video yourself and watch it back. You'll soon see which bits need refining.

• **Mental preparation.** If you have the sequence of what you need to do outlined clearly in your head first, then the practical side will follow.

• **Take it steady.** Minimise stress and validate your progress by introducing just one new tech feature into your lessons at a time.



• **Giving is receiving.** Share experiences and tips with colleagues in the same situation as you and they'll reciprocate. You'll all pick up some great ideas.



Al Kingsley is Chair of two MATs (as both a Trustee and Member), Chair of his local

Governors' Leadership Group, and is a member of the Regional Schools Commissioners' Head Teacher Board for North London and the South East.

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Mr Neil Bardsley
Head teacher, St Michael & All Angels
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Leadership & HR

MAKE YOUR SCHOOL STAND OUT

Simon Hepburn describes how to write a compelling job advertisement



“Don’t focus on your ‘ideal’ candidate and exclude other options.”

WHAT SHOULD A PLAN INCLUDE?

1. Make a list of reasons why someone would choose your school over other ones. These are the most important messages and the ones that people have to see first. If you’re not sure what these reasons are, do some research with your current teachers and perhaps especially with any trainee teachers you are hosting.
2. Look at where your job advert will appear and work out how many words a jobseeker will actually see before they have to click on a job. Some of them let you share job title, location, contract type and salary and then give you as few as 20 words to persuade someone to choose you!
3. Be ruthless with these words. Don’t repeat anything that is already in the rest of the advert (such as the school name or key stage that you are looking for). Focus on something that you do different — whether that be your location, the development opportunities you offer or how you support new staff.
4. Don’t write in the third person. Apart from wasting words explaining who you are, you want applicants to warm to you. Use ‘we’ and ‘you’ — and don’t mention that it’s the Governors who are looking to recruit!

The COVID pandemic may have increased the number of people looking to train as teachers, but it’s always important for your school to recruit the best from those available – and there are many schools that always find it hard to recruit new staff.

However, if you look at the websites that host primary school jobs, you’d be hard-pressed to realise this – they all seem to start the same way! ‘School X is looking for a creative, highly skilled, passionate, outstanding, hard-working teacher’.

Why should a teacher then apply for your school rather than the one down the road — or increasingly one in an attractive overseas location? Or what

if you set the bar so high that they don’t feel they tick all the boxes and apply elsewhere? The problem is that many primary schools start writing their job adverts from a job description, rather than seeing it as an opportunity to showcase the school and its culture and help people decide if it is right for them. And many also have missed the change that has happened in recent years from long printed adverts to online ‘job boards’ that provide much less information to casual browsers.

So, how do you change how you recruit? The first step is to get rid of the templates you’ve been using for years. Here’s how to start again...

5. Don't focus on your 'ideal' candidate and exclude other options. For example, if you would really like a full-time experienced teacher but would be fine with a flexible job share, don't restrict your options (especially if you've had problems recruiting in the past).

6. Think about finishing with a question. Would you like to find out more?

Here are two examples of these 'short-form' adverts – which would you click on (assuming the salaries and locations were equally appealing!)?

KS2 Teacher

ABC School, Manchester

The Governors of ABC School require a highly qualified, enthusiastic, and outstanding Teacher to teach in Year 5 in a

or

KS2 Teacher

ABC School, Manchester

Want to move your career forward in a friendly school with curious students and support from an experienced team?

Once you've written your persuasive introduction, you need to repeat the process for your main advert. There's usually a lot of space here – but that doesn't mean you can just copy and paste the job description and leave it. Again, you need to engage people to act further – for example to click and download an application form.

To do this, make sure that you pick up and amplify the ideas you mentioned in your short advert first – explain how you develop people (perhaps adding quotes from teachers you've hired recently to prove the impact) or have a positive working culture (perhaps by talking about the impact of your workload reduction campaign!).

You can often use design, photography and even video to make the advert more attractive. Large MATs are commissioning 'employer branding' videos.

A final point, think about asking for help within your school. Think about who could help — many of your teachers will be great at writing snappy copy, while others can contribute their own stories and help you become known as an 'employer of choice'!



Simon Hepburn is the Founder of Marketing Advice for Schools and recently wrote the book

'Recruiting Teachers'.



IT'S TIME TO STOP STRUGGLING ON

If you're sick, stay home says Matthew Murray

It may seem an impossibly distant prospect now, but there will be a life after COVID.

We will be able to plan for the future, and we will be able to think about how we can move on from the pandemic. In education, this means not returning to old habits.

For years there has been a pervasive culture of presenteeism in schools, where social pressures encourage individuals to believe that they should be present even if they are ill. This culture has been especially prevalent amongst staff, where it has been common for teachers to attend work while unwell. Most of us have succumbed to the logic that: 'it's easier for me to just go in, than to get everything ready for a supply'.

ABSENCES

Presenteeism is not just limited to staff, many parents are admirably keen for their children to not miss a single day of school. In part, this due to initiatives that over recent decades have seen successive governments wage war on school absences. Pressures to keep children in school have meant that it is commonplace to see them come into classrooms ill.

Yet, COVID has taught us many lessons, one being that it only takes a single person sniffing and sneezing to make a lot of other people sick too. If one contagious child coming into school subsequently results in three other children having to take a day off then, we end up losing more school days overall. Instead, if we urge parents to keep children at home when they show signs of illness, we can reduce the cumulative number of days lost to illness in a school's population.

This is also vital for another reason. As teachers we have to regularly be in face-to-face contact with large groups of people: we have to teach classes of 30 or more. Consequently, as teachers we are

naturally exposed to a heightened risk of catching viruses, from which they may become sick and take home to infect their families. However, we should not accept this risk, and we should do everything we can in our power to mitigate it.

HARM

We should move away from pressurizing families into thinking that missing a week of schooling will cause irreparable harm to their child's prospects. In a world where children have just lost four months of schooling, a few days out to play a part in keeping everyone healthy would certainly not be catastrophic.

This change in ethos should not be limited to students, we ought to foster an environment where teachers feel comfortable in taking a day off as well. Achieving this will encompass several changes, but a great place to begin would be to abolish the dreaded phone call to the head to tell them that you will not be in. Many staff understandably find this practice daunting, and when you are ill it is the last thing that you need.

Ultimately, we need to achieve a change in school culture after COVID. For years we have been operating inside of a pressure cooker, where teachers are too scared to take a day off and many parents feel the need to send their children in no matter how unwell they are. If ever there was a time to make such big changes to the way we think and behave, it is now.

Matthew Murray is a primary teacher and the creator of the site 2 Stars and a Wish, where he posts ideas for using songs, videos and poetry to teach literacy and guided reading; follow him at @2_starsandawish

Improve your CPD by becoming a mentor

Cheryl Campbell explains the benefits of being an SBM mentor

Speaking to other SBMs I've found that quite often they sacrifice their own CPD because they are very aware of their schools tight budgetary situations. This shouldn't be the case but it just works out that way. I've found that investing in mentoring is a great form of CPD for both the mentor and the mentee. Here we look at how the relationship can work well for both parties.

Experience

This doesn't mean that only SBMs with 15 plus years of experience under their belts can be mentors. Each mentor/mentee relationship is unique and based on the individual experiences of both parties. When matching people together using @SBMMentors on Twitter I ask the mentee to give me an overview of what their experience consists of and to outline what aspects of the role they are looking for support with. This will differ from one SBM to the next. The mentor is asked about their experiences and presented with the information about the mentee. Relevant experience is much more key than years and years of experience. The best matches take into account what the mentee has specified as key areas of focus and how equipped the mentor is to support in those particular areas of interest. If you're thinking of becoming a mentor, you can do a self audit to identify the key areas you could offer support in. Do you have a particular specialism? Have you got wide experience in a particular area? Have you recently completed a course of study and could mentor someone through gaining a qualification?

Take charge, set the scene

It's impossible to have a one size fits all approach to mentoring. At the start of the relationship the mentor needs to take charge and initiate the conversation with the mentee that will set out

how the relationship will work. This should cover things like frequency of contact – will you meet regularly, have scheduled phone calls or meet via video calls? One technique I have used in the past is to look at the aspects of the role that the mentee has identified and rate each one out of ten, thinking about how well the mentee feels they perform in that area. This gives a starting point and allows for a plan to be formulated around each area. Look at what is needed to increase the score in each area. It helps to identify training needs and opportunities. Using this starting point you can set goals and identify review points along the way.

“The mentor needs to be present but it must be a two-way street.”

Honour the commitment

Having set the scene of how things will work, it's imperative that the mentor honours that commitment. The mentor needs to be present but it must be a two-way street. A mentee should be making regular contact. As a mentor you must challenge the mentee along the way. This will steer the mentee to put the work in to meet the targets and goals they've identified with your help. The mentee will need you to challenge them, to make them stop and think about how they approach things and how they could do things differently to get improved results. Agreeing a series of dates to meet/talk is a useful thing to do at the start. It gives a chance to review and plan for next steps in the mentee's development.

Nothing lasts forever

It's often the case that mentoring is needed for a certain period in the mentee's career.

It's important to acknowledge that the relationship is not a lifetime commitment. The mentoring relationship should start with a discussion around expectations. Is there a specific event that mentoring is needed for, for example, submitting an ISBL fellowship application or completing an SBM qualification? Or is the mentoring need more around developing and supporting skills related to specific aspects on the role, such as developing financial skills for budget monitoring and reporting or support to become more strategic in your work. Don't allow the relationship to fizzle out. If it has come to an end then acknowledge that and part ways.

Keep a record

You can use your mentoring experience as a CPD opportunity. Speak to your mentor at the start about your record keeping processes. Evidence of mentoring is a useful tool for evaluating your own development as a mentor and looking at how you've approached the task. Keeping records allows you to reflect on how you've developed as a mentor and also gives you the opportunity to put together case studies.

If you're interested in mentoring you can look at @SBMMentors on Twitter or send an email to mentors@briscoecampbell.com for more information.



Cheryl Campbell started her career in School Business Leadership in 2015 following a 14-year stint in Local Government. She has recently set up the Association of BAME Business Leaders in Education



Primaryleaders.com has hundreds of articles written by headteachers and school business managers looking at how to run a successful school. New content is being added all the time, covering a wide range of issues from increasing school funds to mastering your budget management and getting the best out of difficult members of staff.

Take a closer look at outstanding examples of leadership in some of the best primary schools across the UK

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WHAT'S TRENDING

1

Teacher training in 2021
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Time to do things differently

Simon Botten describes the school leadership lessons learnt in lockdown

It has been a time like no other in school leadership. And while the challenges we have faced have been numerous and arduous, we have also learnt a lot about our schools and our communities.

We have also had time to reflect on how we go about school improvement. Here are some of my biggest learning points of the last eight months.

A PAUSE IS BENEFICIAL

Like many schools, mine had become ever more complex during the past ten years. Ideas and initiatives were added each and every year until it became difficult to keep all the plates spinning at the standard we wanted. Then on March 20 the stop button was pushed. We had to learn to work remotely and manage the crisis.

Come September, we decided we couldn't simply fire up the engine and bring every complex initiative and programme roaring back – it wasn't safe. But on reflection, this pause has given us the opportunity to look afresh at everything we do and decide: is it essential and desirable to fulfil our goals, or is it just 'stuff'?

RE-ARTICULATE YOUR VISION

Some interesting research is emerging surrounding how schools have coped with the pandemic. It concludes that schools with a strong vision, understood by all, have managed to somehow thrive in this adversity. While I would say that my school's vision is strong, since returning in September I have looked at whether it is clearly understood by all.

As a result we have simplified and clarified our vision so that it can be understood equally by parents, children and OFSTED alike. We created clarity and simplicity by asking 'how does this support our central vision?'

RE-EVALUATING THE CURRICULUM

Another benefit of the closure was time to invest in completely re-evaluating and then re-writing our wider curriculum, including

considering how our central approach tied into our vision. By going back to our core principles, we were able to build our curriculum so that our vision ran through it like a stick of rock.

We had the time to properly train staff, not just on delivery of the curriculum, but on its pedagogical design so that they could engage with it not just on an operational level, but on an academic and intellectual level as well.

The Education Endowment Fund's report on school improvement implementation suggests that up to half the total time of implementation should be spent evaluating different approaches and preparing staff for the change – before you get anywhere near training them how to make the change. Indeed, I believe that post pandemic we must learn to approach school improvement less as a mad dash to implement the latest craze, and instead with more thought, time and care.

GIVE STAFF FREEDOM WITHIN THE FRAME

When lockdown came, nobody had the faintest idea how to plan and implement remote home learning. So the best we

could do was set the parameters and expected outcomes as clearly as possible and then trust staff to invent effective practice to fill the blank space.

What happened was an explosion of innovation – but focused within the framework we provided. I am not suggesting for one moment that teachers should be given complete autonomy to organise learning how they wish – I believe quality first teaching is a team sport. However, I also believe that within our framework for what must be consistent between all classes, there is a space for teachers to research and innovate new approaches to practice.

So this year, we have formed staff into research groups. Our approach to planning and teaching in many areas is as clearly defined as before, but staff have been given a space to innovate within this (in our case researching effective approaches to modelling, questioning, stages of practice etc).

Simon Botten, Headteacher, Blackhorse Primary School, Bristol



THE CPD CHANGEMAKERS

Sally Bishop talks to primary leaders who see professional development and school improvement as one and the same thing

Primaries have long been individual oases of talent, innovation and improvement.

But it's only in more recent years that primary leaders have realised that by working more closely together they can combine that energy and make a real and lasting difference to more schools.

The growth of multi-academy trusts since 2010 has created a fertile climate for this development, with schools grouping together in trusts, small and large, to realise economies of scale in times of tightening budgets.

It's not just about the bottom line, though. By combining their talents and their human resources, primary schools have also taken a prominent role in leading what became known as the school-led system. The

identification, nurturing and professional development of aspiring and current leaders has formed a big part of this drive.

We at Outstanding Leaders Partnership are making a big contribution to the school-led system, working with hundreds of these schools in our growing network of partners which deliver our National Professional Qualifications for school leaders.

INVESTMENT

One of them is Plymouth CAST, a Catholic MAT comprising 33 primaries, two secondaries and a nursery across Dorset, Devon and Cornwall.

Diana Taylor is trust development officer at the MAT, involved in staff development. She sees the trust's involvement in the delivery of the NPQs as an investment in staff that will create more home-grown leaders and retain staff.

"Our challenge is capacity. Many of our schools are small and they are mostly rural and coastal, with some in areas of high need and deprivation," she says. "It is often difficult to develop leadership expertise in a small school because staff have to wear several different hats. It's a problem that larger schools don't encounter as much. This can make succession planning a little more challenging," she says.

As part of her role Diana has created a database that captures the school improvement projects that each of the 40+ trust staff are working on as part of their NPQ qualifications.

The pandemic slowed the project down but it is now back up and running and will



“By combining their talents and their human resources, primary schools have also taken a prominent role in leading what became known as the school-led system.”

eventually provide the trust with a comprehensive and detailed picture of where leadership expertise – and leadership passions – reside.

“It will give us an overall picture across the trust of who has developed a specialism within which area,” says Diana. “This may be maths mastery, early years literacy or improving maths progress. It’s about understanding as a trust where our expertise lies so that we can direct this expertise to schools that want it.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Stephen Dean, CEO of Primary QuEST MAT near Gloucester, is a good example of how the insights and knowledge gathered through professional development can translate directly into school improvement.

He used his National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership school improvement project to create a maths improvement strategy that helped the trust’s four primaries make impressive strides in maths outcomes at Key Stages 2.

Stephen took part in a review of maths teaching and learning across a neighbouring trust where he observed how the trust’s maths lead practitioners were given responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and supporting staff to improve.

This encouraged Stephen to consider changes to the way maths lead practitioners were used across his own trust schools.

Curriculum reviews completed across the trust showed that as a result of Stephen’s NPQEL school improvement project staff were more confident teaching maths and English than foundation subjects; Stephen believes that the emphasis on maths CPD had been a crucial factor in this.

The project resulted in impressive improvements. For example, at Key Stage 2 there was a nine per cent increase in pupils at age-related expectations in maths, with a 22 per cent increase in pupils

DRIVING CHANGE

Warrington Primary Academy Trust (WPAT), which consists of six primary schools in Warrington and nearby Widnes, has been a lead player in some impressive strategic school improvement projects in recent years.

WPAT’s teaching school, for example, led a £1 million project funded by the DfE’s strategic school improvement fund to give early years foundation stage practitioners in 56 schools in disadvantaged areas across seven local authorities the skills, strategies and teaching and learning techniques they needed to help them improve children’s literacy, communication and language.

PROBLEMS

Nearly 2,000 children – mostly in reception classes, as well as some in nursery provision – were involved in the project.

The project had two main strands: literacy, and communications and language. Professional development was a cornerstone of this programme: practitioners were trained in the early identification of children with speech, language and communication problems, while project leads – often SENCOs or literacy leads – were appointed in each school to head up the project.

An independent evaluation of the programme highlighted significant impact. The programme’s

communication and language strand revealed a significant impact on children’s learning: 97 per cent of all participating children made some positive progress, with 35 per cent of girls achieving the most frequently reported level 4 and level 3 being the most common level amongst boys.



IMPROVEMENT
Louise Smith, WPAT CEO, (pictured) says that the trust’s desire to lead improvement on a large scale is undimmed. The trust is currently playing a

lead regional role in the DfE’s workload reduction project, developing and trialling workload reduction strategies amongst its schools, which are now being shared nationally.

The trust is also developing a proposal with more than 20 other primary schools across the region to create subject knowledge CPD for primary teachers.

LEADERSHIP

“We are in the midst of a maelstrom with covid but we need to plan ahead. True leadership is also about horizon scanning. That’s why we are leading in areas like this. You have to keep these things moving forward and putting things in motion and not let the spinning plates drop.”

reaching the higher standard.

“This project has helped me see the importance of leading well and visibly, the importance of building capacity at all levels and the importance of partnership for mutual benefit,” he said.



Sally Bishop is a lead facilitator and coach on the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) programme run by Outstanding Leaders Partnership (OLP). Further information on OLP’s National Professional Qualifications is available at www.outstandingleaders.org

STOP THE EXODUS

The government should be concerned about a ‘post-covid exodus’ of school leaders, says Nick Brook

In November, NAHT published some worrying new research alongside a report calling for a radical shake up in the way leaders in schools are supported throughout their careers.

A survey of NAHT members, school leaders across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in October 2020, revealed that nearly half of them (47 per cent) are now less likely to remain in school leadership for as long as initially planned as a result of the pandemic.

School leaders have shown exceptional determination, courage and optimism in leading their teams to support pupils through these extremely difficult times. So it is deeply concerning that many school leaders are considering leaving the profession prematurely, once they have guided their schools through this crisis.

But it is perhaps unsurprising given the sleepless nights they have been faced with and how little support they have been given by government. They have been left to figure out for themselves how to balance their budgets with no promise of reimbursement for all the

additional costs they have faced due to Covid. They have had to navigate last minute U-turns and guidance issued on Sunday evenings, hours before it needed to be implemented in schools. They have stayed up until the early hours of the morning trying to make the government's failing free school meals voucher delivery system work to make sure children didn't go hungry during lockdown and the holidays. Only to be thanked with a pay freeze.

“Schools are only as good as the people that work in them.”

DISSATISFACTION

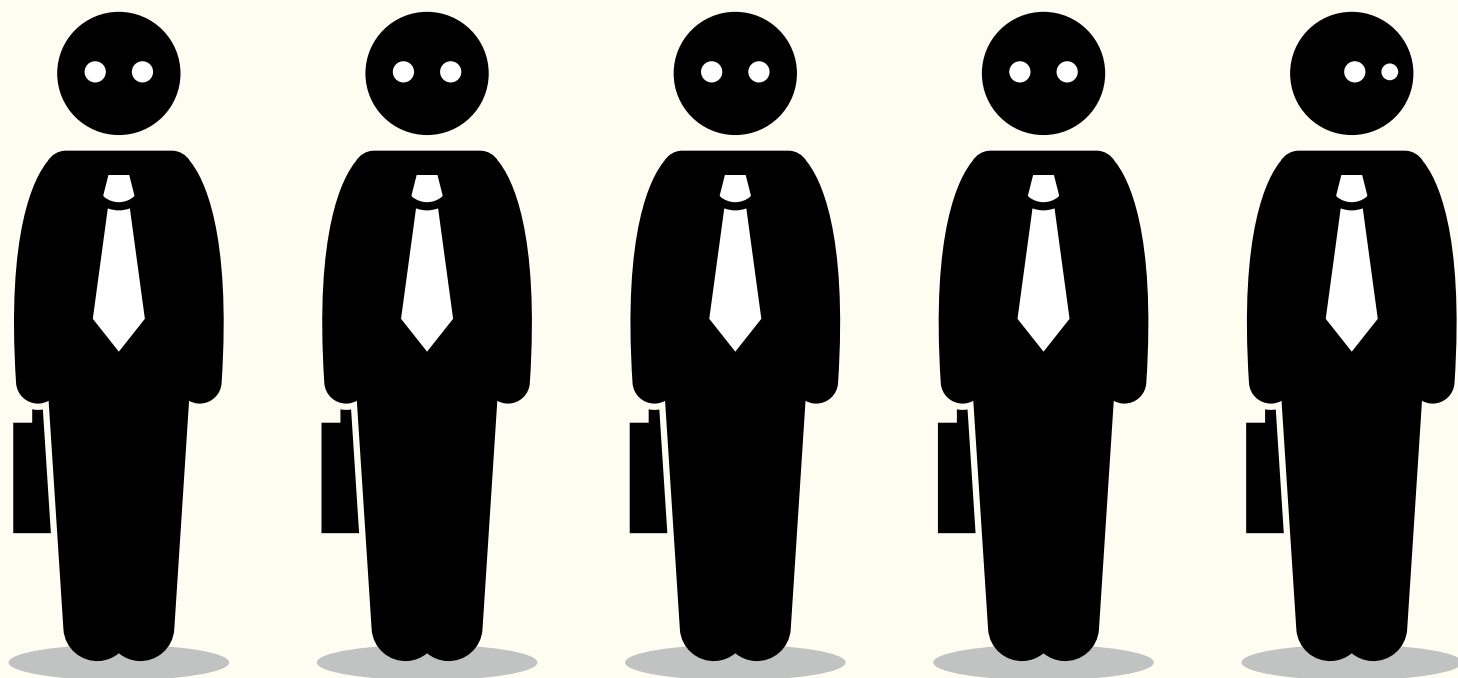
The Covid-19 pandemic has compounded the sense of dissatisfaction with the state of education that had begun to grow among some leaders before the crisis hit. It has highlighted the importance of community,

reaffirmed the importance of supporting students' well-being as well as academic progress, and it has demonstrated that schools are not islands.

Without question, education standards in this country have transformed over the last 25 years. By all measures, we have the best cadre of professionals that have ever worked in our schools. But we have to go further.

The rising tide of school improvement has not lifted all boats. Even before the pandemic hit, annual improvements in pupil outcomes had started to slow, and the wide gap in attainment between children from poorer backgrounds and their more affluent peers had stopped closing. It is abundantly clear that current approaches are not driving improvements in education in the way the government hoped or intended.

When we emerge from the pandemic, there can be no sense of merely flicking a switch and returning to the way things were, with all the same fault-lines as before. And we cannot wait until the pandemic passes before considering how education must change in the future.



IMPROVEMENT

That's why NAHT brought together the School Improvement Commission, a report from which was published alongside our survey findings in November. Launched at an event being jointly held with the Wellcome Trust and the Teacher Development Trust, the Commission was made up of educationalists, school leaders and academics, as well as taking evidence from senior government officials, researchers and thought leaders in education.

The Commission met on five occasions between November 2019 and March 2020. Commissioners considered the effectiveness of the government's school improvement initiatives over recent years, reviewed research evidence on effective improvement strategies, from both home and abroad, and explored the barriers that can prevent schools from improving. It found that a revolution in professional development for teachers and leaders is needed to unlock pupils' potential.

CONDITIONS

Schools are only as good as the people that work in them. In order that every child has the chance to achieve their full potential we need every pupil to be taught by an expert teacher. We need to create the conditions in which every teacher can be the very best that they can be. We need schools to be geared up to be effective learning organisations, not just for the pupils that attend them but for the staff that work there. Great teachers are made; they are not born that way.

Yet access to high quality training and support for teachers and leaders is variable, at best. To raise standards of education in this country further, the school improvement commission concluded that the next phase of education reform should focus on transforming the quality of training and

support for teachers and leaders, including a commitment to a minimum entitlement to professional development and a new bursary fund to widen participation in such activity.

Greater support and professional development is needed for teachers and leaders, throughout their careers, to make sure schools are well set up to respond to future challenges and continuously improve the quality of education provided over the next decade. Without this revolution in support for school leaders, the government risks a post-Covid exodus from the profession.

ATTRACTIVE

The last few months have been challenging. But, there is an urgent need to do more than just restore the factory settings of education. We need to seize the opportunity presented to make changes to the parts of the education system that simply aren't working as well as they should.

We need to make it easier and more attractive to school leaders to work in the most deprived areas of the country. It has always been the case that leaders who make this choice are accepting some exceptionally 'high-risk' posts. An enhanced package of support for these leaders would help spread their expertise more widely and reduce the risk for them professionally. It is my belief that this kind of transformation in the way we approach education is not only advisable, it is essential.

The best response to the damage inflicted by covid-19 on learning is to ensure that every pupil is taught by an expert teacher, someone who is continually improving their skills and is properly supported to do their job, in whatever circumstances they work. Now is precisely the time to invest in the ongoing development of professionals

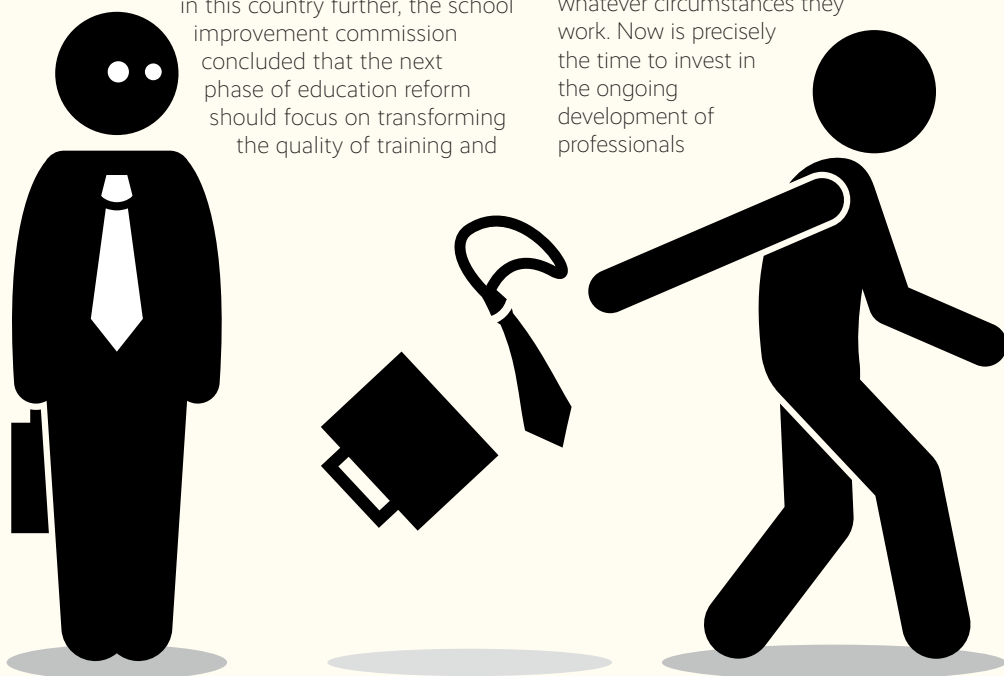
throughout their careers so that teachers can thrive and pupils can succeed.

Not only is it increasingly clear that prioritising high-quality staff development is the key to sustainable school turnaround, but, critically for the current context, it is also a means of successfully navigating the complexities and uncertainties of covid-19 and keeping teachers in the profession.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

NAHT's School Improvement Commission brought together internationally renowned education experts to consider how to better support all schools to improve further, and found that a revolution in professional development for teachers and leaders is needed to unlock pupils' potential, as well as enhanced support for school professionals working in the most deprived communities. The commission's report makes several recommendations, including that the government should:

- **Extend the commitment to funded support for new and recently qualified teachers to all teachers and leaders by 2025.**
- **Develop a fully-funded support package, to provide structured support for all new head teachers.**
- **Create a new bursary fund to facilitate and incentivise participation in NPQs.**
- **Create a more compelling proposition to encourage the most successful leaders to become National Leaders in Education.**
- **Create a national network of high-quality teacher development providers,**
- **Provide more support and incentives for leaders working in the most deprived communities.**
- **And refocus the work of Ofsted to provide stronger diagnostic insight for schools that are struggling.**



Nick Brook, deputy general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT



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Five ways to reduce the strain on teachers

Emma Meadus gives her advice on how to lower your staff's stress levels

Teacher absence from the classroom is something no one wants. The impact is felt on children's learning, behaviour and wellbeing.

For the teacher who is absent, there's no settling down for a duvet day and binge-watching Netflix. Instead, the absent teacher will not only be dealing with ill health but also the dreaded "teacher-guilt". Concern about the children, parents and colleagues that teachers feel they are letting down preys on their mind. Furthermore, anyone who's ever taught knows that a day's leave for a teacher means more work when you go back into school as you try to unpick what's been done (or not done) in your absence. Teachers don't want to be absent from school.

Why then, is there a recruitment crisis in teaching and alarming statistics about teacher retention and absence? It's estimated that 1.3 million stress-related days' leave were taken by teachers in a four-year period between 2013-2017, something that the National Education Union described as an epidemic of stress. I can't help thinking that this figure will be much higher now, with the additional pressures of teaching during a global pandemic.

Stress is a major player in teacher absence, particularly extended and repeated leave. But what makes teaching so stressful? There is the age-old perception that teaching is an easy-ride, a nice job, five days a week, 9am-3pm with brilliant holidays. What is the problem, exactly?

Well, it's a myriad of things. Teachers work long hours, anywhere from 49-60 hours a week according to a 2018 study by University College London. Planning, marking and responding to ever-changing education policy create hours of work. Add to this the anxiety and stress that can be created by accountability systems like inspection and external testing. The responsibility teachers have for their pupils doesn't end with good grades. Safeguarding matters, mental health, social and emotional difficulties all present added pressure on the teacher as they try to care for their children. Top this off with the pressure that can come from parents,

preach. Fear of what external inspection or parents will think creeps in and teachers revert to old habits. We do mark in my school, but we do the vast majority in the lesson with the children because it's more efficient for learners and teachers.



PLANNING

I'm a big believer in thorough planning. Schemes of work and prepared curricula reduce the hours thinking up ideas or trawling the internet. We used the school closure this Spring, to write our own curriculum – long-term plans, unit plans, vocabulary lists – the works. Having this means teachers know exactly what to teach and when. They can invest their planning time into preparing the bespoke elements to fit their classroom dynamics.

students' behaviour and the strain of working in a school that may have weak leadership or perhaps not be in a good place, Ofsted-wise. Coronavirus has only added to this tension with a sudden and steep learning curve involving mastering distance learning, operating in isolated bubbles and coping with new technology. All this can make for a very stressed teacher.

So, what can school leaders do to lessen the stress-load on their staff? These are the top five things my staff tell me have a meaningful impact on lowering their stress levels.

SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES – SIMPLICITY AND CLARITY

We all get a sense of security from knowing what we're doing. Leaders can lessen unnecessary worry by ensuring staff know what's expected of them. Systems like annual calendars, with deadlines and simple, clear documents that lay out exactly you want, when and how are welcomed by staff. This year, I invested in a professionally written and printed booklet for staff which was well received.

MARKING

Minimal marking is nothing new but I see a lot of teachers that don't practice what they

BE GENEROUS WITH TIME

On top of standard PPA time, teachers at Coppice Valley get an additional hour a week release time from teaching to spend on subject leadership. Teaching assistants cover for teachers while they monitor standards in the subjects they lead. This means less for teachers to do in their undirected time but also gives me the assurance that subject leadership is happening.

COMMUNICATION

There's no point having fantastic systems if no one knows about them. You can't over-communicate when it comes to embedding new systems and policies. Staff do appreciate reminders to help them avoid dropping a ball. I've started using a Virtual Staff Room Hub since we went into bubbles to get over the isolation and communication difficulties. I update it weekly and add daily news as things happen. Adding a thank you or a shout-out to staff members keeps up morale, too.

Emma Meadus is headteacher at Coppice Valley Primary School.

[@meadus_emma](https://twitter.com/meadus_emma)
[coppicevalley.com](https://www.coppicevalley.com)

HOW TO MANAGE REMOTE RECRUITMENT

Xavier Roeseler outlines how you can adapt your recruitment process to find the right candidates for your school

With coronavirus restrictions likely to continue in the spring term, your school may need to carry out your recruitment remotely. Here are my seven tips to get it right.

1. TAKE EXTRA PRECAUTIONS SO THE PROCESS RUNS SMOOTHLY

You'll need to plan for the possibility that staff involved in the recruitment process may be off sick. Use a shared drive for all recruitment documents and make sure everyone who needs to has access. At the end of each day, note down where you're at in the recruitment process and what the next steps are, so that others can pick it up. As remote recruitment is likely to still be a relatively new process for many of you, add extra buffer time into your process to account for any delays. Also, have more than one recruitment panel member trained in safer recruitment.

As things may be new and different for everyone involved, it's important to over-communicate throughout the process. Make sure panel members and candidates are clear on what the entire recruitment process will look like now - how many stages there'll be, how candidates will be assessed and a rough timescale. This will help to reassure candidates, too.

Decide what you need to adapt in your recruitment process and review any relevant policies, for example, your safer recruitment policy and recruitment policy (if you have one). Make sure you update these policies to reflect the changes, even if they're only temporary.

2. HAVE AN ADDITIONAL PHONE INTERVIEW TO SCREEN CANDIDATES

This will give you another opportunity to get to know the candidates, assess them and build a relationship with them, making

the process more robust. Treat this as a formal stage of the process and be clear on what you want to learn about candidates. Set five or six questions and ask each candidate the same questions so you can easily compare. You can also use this extra step as an opportunity to 'sell' your school. Make a note of the three things you want candidates to go away thinking, and be sure to get those across. Wrap this call up in 30 minutes — that's more than enough time.

3. SPEAK WITH REFEREES BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Once you've shortlisted candidates for the remote interview, follow your usual practice with seeking

references, but ask for three referees instead of just two. Also, ask to chat to referees over the phone so you can probe and build up a more accurate picture of candidates.



4. SET UP REMOTE INTERVIEWING AND TEST IT

You'll need an account with a video-conferencing provider (Skype, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, etc). Make sure panel members have a quiet space that's well-lit, and that their camera and microphone work well. Test it out with panel members to make sure you're happy with the setup and iron out any tech issues - you want it to feel just like a real interview.

If at all possible, give candidates the opportunity to have a trial run, too. Use this conversation as an opportunity to let them know how the interview will take place and ask them whether they need any reasonable adjustments. You can also continue to build up your relationship with candidates (they'll feel more at ease during the real interview) and fix any issues with the set-up.

Get your panel members up to scratch on etiquette during the interview. You should give candidates your full attention. Nominate a chair to manage the interview process and invite panel members to speak - agree beforehand who'll ask what questions. Use physical cues - like putting your hand up - during discussions so the candidate knows who's about to speak. Agree to keep microphones on mute unless you're talking.

Prepare interview questions as you normally would but give candidates extra time to answer and type each one into the chat

“Make sure panel members have a quiet space that's well-lit, and that their camera and microphone work well.”

function of the software so you're sure candidates have heard you right. Add more safeguarding questions if needed, since you won't be meeting candidates face to face.

5. PLAN AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL LESSON OBSERVATIONS

If your school is currently delivering remote lessons, you could ask candidates for teaching posts to deliver a lesson remotely. Otherwise, review the evidence you're normally looking for when observing a lesson and use this to set specific interview questions. You can also arrange for a group of pupils to meet candidates remotely. Have someone from the panel there to observe and make notes, so you have something to refer back to when choosing your preferred candidate.

Most other interview tasks will probably be the same. Decide whether you want candidates to complete tasks before, during or after the interview and make sure this is clear to them ahead of time - including how long they'll have to complete the task and how to submit it. For tasks such as presentations, ask candidates to send a video of themselves delivering the task so that you can review it in your own time and not over video conference.

6. GET CANDIDATES FOR SENIOR POSITIONS TO MEET STAFF REMOTELY

If you're recruiting for a senior position, you'll likely want candidates to meet staff. Organise a schedule and send it to candidates and your staff. Use a single video-conference link that the candidate can stay on and have specific times for members of staff or groups to log in and join the call. As you normally would, ask members of staff to feed back on their impression of each candidate.

7. CHECK ID DOCUMENTS REMOTELY

For DBS checks during coronavirus, instead of having to see physical ID documents face to face, you'll be able to see them via scanned images and video link. The applicant will still need to present the original versions of these documents when they first attend school in person. All other pre-employment checks continue as normal.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL REMOTE INTERVIEW



- Make sure panel members have a quiet space that's well-lit, and that their camera and microphone work well.

- Get your panel members up to speed on etiquette during a remote interview.



- You should give candidates your full attention.
- Nominate a chair to manage the interview process and invite panel members to speak - agree beforehand who'll ask what questions.



- Use physical cues - like putting your hand up - during discussions so the candidate knows who's about to speak.



- Agree to keep microphones on mute unless you're talking.
- Prepare interview questions as you normally would but give candidates extra time to answer and type each one into the chat function of the software so you're sure candidates have heard you right.
- Add more safeguarding questions if needed, since you won't be meeting candidates face to face.



Xavier Roeseler is a Lead Content Producer at The Key. This article is an extract from The Key's

resource *Recruitment during coronavirus: how to manage it remotely*.

I wish to be a teacher

Leah, 7

Brain tumour

*"Leah is noticeably
more independent
since her wish."
Mum, Elaine*

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The seven steps towards restructure

No school wants to consider a restructure but planning, preparation and sensitivity can help take some of the sting out of the process, says Vicki Hunt

Covid has turned the financial pressure dial to 11 across the public sector, and schools are no exception.

With the additional spending needed to make schools covid safe – and the fact that extra cash from the government hasn't covered all the costs – means that some school budgets, already tight, will look more vulnerable in 2021.

No business manager or head wants to contemplate the impact budget pressures may have on their staff, but as staff costs make up the bulk of the school budget restructuring is an inevitable part of cost-cutting measures.

Restructures don't happen overnight. The process has to start now because any process that might include redundancies must include detailed planning, consultation with employees, time for appeals and the creation of a new staffing structure – all in time for the beginning of the new academic year in September 2021.

It's a difficult process for all involved, especially when it follows what has been for many a stressful and draining time, both personally and professionally, so it goes without saying that the seven step process I've described below needs to be guided by compassion, sensitivity and care at every step.

1. Check your policy

The first step is to look at your school policy and see what requirements it places on the school in terms of timescales, process and additional redundancy costs.

2. Consider all the costs

Remember that support staff who have been members of the LGPS for more than two years and are 55 or over can draw their pension early following redundancy, and that your school has to cover the shortfall that results from it being drawn early. If your school is required to offer an enhanced redundancy payment for compulsory layoffs remember that it could be costly if any long-standing or older members of staff are affected.

3. Prepare your documentation

A detailed business case, timetable and associated documentation such as skills audits, selection criteria and job descriptions, will help achieve a smoother and more meaningful. It will also make it easier to answer any questions from staff or their union representatives. Check your policies for guidance on what to include in a business



case, but in short it should be a handy guide for staff that sets out the background and rationale for the proposed changes, with next steps and a draft timeline. It should contain details of 'at risk' posts or new posts to be created, how staff will be selected for any new roles, and information on whether voluntary applications for redundancy will be considered. It also needs to set out details of any redundancy payments and how these will be calculated.

4. Get local authority approval

If you are a maintained school, get any necessary local authority approval before you begin so that you know what costs the LA will cover. You'll also need the OK from the LA before you issue notices of dismissal.

5. Notify the Secretary of State

Remember that if you are entering into a collective consultation (for example, you are proposing to dismiss 20 or more employees within a 90-day period) you must notify the Secretary of State by completing form HR1 and sending a copy to employee representatives.

6. Remember the modification order

The modification order is used when calculating redundancy payments. Under the order, an employee's previous service in any body listed in the order, including all local

authority schools, voluntary aided schools, foundation schools, free schools and academies, counts towards their continuous service and, therefore, their entitlement to redundancy pay. If the employee secures another job at a modification order body during the restructure process, then their entitlement to redundancy pay may be affected.

7. Factor in notice

Don't forget to include notice periods in your restructure timetable. Support staff may be entitled to as much as 12 weeks' notice and teachers' will need to be given notice by May 31 to terminate their contracts on August 31.

As I mentioned earlier, a restructure is a very stressful, uncertain period for your staff. Obviously, it will have the greatest impact on those who leave their jobs, but even those not directly involved are likely to be affected. Remember to offer support to all members of staff, including those who have gone through the process and emerged with their existing position or a new role.



Vicki Hunt is Head of Employment Law & HR at Judicium Education.

Educater Assessment

A sophisticated tracking system to help you stay on top of your pupil data

- **Finely tuned assessment tracking and performance analytics**
- **Sophisticated data collection to better understand your school's needs**
- **Ability to record children's progression from EYFS to KS2**
- **Gap analysis that serves up valuable learning insights**
- **Option to select assessment frameworks from different content providers**

Reviewed by: John Dabell



Getting to grips with pupil assessment is one of the biggest challenges schools face. The need for meaningful assessment data is paramount, but so too is the need to avoid creating superfluous workload at the same time.

The Assessment module produced by Educater, as part of its broader pupil tracking and communication platform for schools, is a state-of-the-art online assessment solution that can support schools in their attainment scrutiny, while helping staff gauge where pupils are and fuel their growth. It can be used to demonstrate pupil progress and compare cohorts, thus pointing the way towards relevant and appropriate pupil interventions. Staff can use its insights to ensure the right children are being challenged at the right time and address underachievement, all from one place.

What makes Assessment a 5-star offering is that it's set up to cater for each school's particular needs. Far from being a 'one size fits all' solution, it can be customised according to your specific curriculum, with unique objectives and scoring systems.

Moreover, Educater has forged partnerships with a number of external content providers, including STAT Sheffield, Rising Stars Progression Frameworks, Mathematics Mastery and NAHT Assessment Frameworks, allowing schools to pick the assessment framework that's right for them. If they wish, schools can

even opt to mix and match, incorporating frameworks from multiple providers. If this bespoke feature doesn't tick your boxes, surely nothing will.

The Educater software itself is carefully laid out to provide assistance every step of the way, via an easy to use, intuitive and no-nonsense dashboard that links into every base you'll need to cover. The wealth of features on offer here is extensive, spanning planning and assessment grids, key concept grids, statement descriptors, PITA (Point in Time Assessment), EYFS grids and scheduled reports. Being browser-based, staff can, of course, log into Educater securely from anywhere at any time, quickly input their data and see their records updated in real time.

To help make sense of it all, Educater provides a comprehensive teacher manual containing a range of 'How to...' guides relating to data, report generation, groups and filtering, alongside guides setting out step-by-step assistance for subject leaders and administrators. The level of support is impressive, and goes some way towards addressing the wider teacher workload challenge.

This is a top-quality, user-friendly and seamless solution that's streets ahead of other pupil tracking systems. It's also great value, with pricing starting at £350 per year, based on pupil numbers.

PSM
PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

VERDICT

- ✓ Superbly tailored to schools' individual requirements
- ✓ Impressive data insights and rapid information updates
- ✓ Effective at pinpointing gaps in learning
- ✓ Huge potential for reducing teacher workload
- ✓ Can boost the effectiveness of interventions

UPGRADE IF...

You're looking to secure pupil progress and curriculum coverage, engage parents, governors and inspectors and drive school improvement. Educater offers options galore, with fabulous functionality.

Visit:
educater.co.uk or follow @educateruk

Evidence Me

An observation and assessment suite with a host of time-saving features

- An outstanding observation and assessment app
- Works offline, with support for iOS and Android devices
- Monitor coverage of curriculum areas
- Automatic intelligent objectives selection
- Instantly generates reports in a range of formats

Reviewed by: John Dabell



Building a profile of pupils is crucial to understanding their needs, but it's a process that relies on the evidence we're able to capture and collect about them. Schools have an enormous amount of information flying around the place, of course – but actually getting hold of it can be like using a net to catch a butterfly. It's harder than it looks.

OBSERVATION

There is, however, another way of doing things, and 2Simple's next generation observation and assessment suite could well be the tool you're looking for. Evidence Me is a classroom capture system that enables you to grab meaningful moments while providing real-time evidence of learning that helps you improve the quality and consistency of formative assessment. The idea is that you perform your assessment directly in the app itself, thus saving time.

VIDEOS

The app uses the camera functionality of your tablet or smartphone, allowing you to take snapshots of learning as it happens, wherever that may be, and add up to 10 photos or videos to each observation. The app is set up so that you can then tag your learning objectives and next step objectives. Based on the notes teachers make about observations, objectives and next steps will be suggested automatically – an impressively dynamic feature.

The workload wonders continue with the system's ability to let you

tag the same objective to multiple children, and if you want, you can use your preferred early years to KS2 framework.

With the data collected, you'll need to produce reports for evidence. Evidence Me lets you do just that, ensuring that you'll always have clear and concise reports at the ready from now on. You can track a group, cohort or individual, easily import baseline data and produce curriculum coverage reports at the click of a button.

ASSESSMENT

The beauty of Evidence Me is that it enhances formative assessment and can also be used for summative purposes, such as reporting to parents. There's even a dedicated parent app that can be updated directly for same-day observations.

POWERFUL

This is a superb formative to summative 'documentation of learning' tool, as it helps us get closer to children's thinking while helping teachers understand and support learning processes. One particularly powerful feature is that you can see observations captured across the school on a single device.

Schools are always on the lookout for powerful, easy-to-use software that can take the stress out of school improvement and assessment, and that's exactly what Evidence Me delivers. Its usability, accuracy and speed is second to none.



VERDICT

- ✓ Makes learning visible and record-keeping both secure and effortless
- ✓ Intelligently links to formative assessment
- ✓ Generates personalised learning journeys
- ✓ Supports an enquiry-led, investigative approach to learning
- ✓ Strengthens feedback and reflective practices
- ✓ Saves teachers' time and your school money

UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for a well-designed classroom management tool that can capture evidence of learning and progress for formative assessment on the go..

To learn more, contact 020 8203 1781 or visit 2simple.com/evidenceme

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3 HYGIENIC GRASS

Combat the spread of viruses and bacteria with Nomow's Pure Play Artificial Grass! This is a revolutionary new artificial grass which is made using the breakthrough material, PURETi. The grass has a number of unique characteristics and exceptional qualities which include air purification, anti-pollution, anti-odour, anti-static and the ability to act as a catalyst in destroying bacteria, fungi and viruses. Pure Play is safe and already used in a number of applications including suntan lotion and food packaging and it is supported by the world's top institutions. Pure Play is a high-quality artificial grass that provides a safe, durable and fun environment for children to play on. Please call 0808 501 7092 for more information. www.nomow.co.uk



2 PORTABLE SECURITY

DoorJammer and Lockdown are powerful, portable door security devices that prevent unwanted entry. The patented design redirects external force against the door into the ground, acting as a quick-fit barricade. DoorJammer's light and compact shape empowers travellers with the ability to secure a room anywhere they go, while Lockdown can be instantly deployed during threatening scenarios in schools and public buildings, creating 'safe rooms' for occupants and deterring entry attempts.

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4 ONE OF A KIND SIGNS

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5



YOUR SMOOTHEST PARENTS' EVENING YET

There are few things you can plan for this academic year; parents' evening is one of them. In fact, with Parents' Evening Manager, this could be your most successful and productive parents' evening ever.

- Schedule video meetings and phone calls.
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to suit their schedules.

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6



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gyms are suitable for all abilities and kids love it! We design, manufacture, deliver and install our outdoor gyms, as well as provide a comprehensive after-care service. All equipment is manufactured to the highest standard and is certified to the European Standards EN1176 & EN16630.

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7

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TALAXY is an intuitive online pupil data management software solution for schools, academies and MATs linking with your MIS. TALAXY helps schools manage pupil data effectively in one complete solution and share information with parents and pupils. With more than 20 years experience in pupil data management, TASC Software designed TALAXY to reduce teacher, SLT and administration work, save money as well as further promote parental engagement in schools. A cloud-based progressive web app, TALAXY is multi MIS, multi-operable and multi-device.

tascsoftware.co.uk



8

CUT THE ADMIN

Efficiently managing your pre- and after-school clubs can often prove to be a bigger job than initially expected. Kids Club HQ is a cloud-based system built to solve this problem, featuring an online booking system for parents and numerous administration functions for school and club staff.

Automatic invoicing and payment reminders, along with up to date registers, mean that schools like yours can save lots of time previously spent on various administrative tasks. For more details, contact hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk.

kidsclubhq.co.uk

Out with the old and in with the new

Hilary Goldsmith tells us what her New Year's resolutions are after a challenging 2020

Every January, without fail, I set myself a number of new year's resolutions, and every February, without fail, I cast them aside and go back to my tried and trusted patterns of behaviour.

But, this new year will be one which sees the end of 2020, the most extraordinary year that most of us have ever experienced, so I'm determined to learn from it and take away some trophies from the battles of that hellish year. Throughout 2020, we learned to adapt to rapid change, to cope with new ways of working, to embrace technology and to challenge our preconceptions of how schools, and our teams, should operate. It would be a real shame to drift back to old ways of being, when we have all learnt so much from the challenges we have faced.

Each of us will have our own resolutions, but these are mine for 2021.

Remote Working

I absolutely loved remote working during lockdown, and beyond, particularly for complex financial tasks where you don't need interruptions. Remote working is now so commonplace that it would be a real shame to just slip back into our old presentee-ist way

of working. While we need to be available to colleagues, the chance to complete a complex piece of work in a more efficient and effective way has to be a keeper. The opportunities for us as employers to support requests for flexible working are now proven, and trust established. So let's update our outlooks and our HR policies to support new ways of working in order to retain and attract the highest calibre of professionals.

Rethinking Appraisal

I've ditched appraisal targets for all support staff in my school, and moved towards a self-led coaching style of professional development. If 2020 proved one thing, it was that target-driven micro-management has had its day, and the very best way to develop core skills and nurture independent innovation is to trust your staff to do whatever needs to be done, learning as they go. Review how your teams responded to the pandemic and the extraordinary efforts they put in. Harness that creativity and passion by allowing your teams to lead their own development and to celebrate their expertise.

Online meetings

Zoom and google meets have been an absolute game-changer for improving the efficiency of governing body and board meetings. Attendance has been hugely increased, timings adhered to, waffle reduced, and the power politics of the boardroom table seating plan are a welcome thing of the past. Admittedly, online meetings do reduce your ability to 'read the room' and observe body language, but that's a small price to pay for the time and paper, saved. The ability to time, record and

share resources in an online way have revolutionised Governance in practice, and our new ways of operating remotely will open up opportunities for many other experts from outside of education, and even the UK, to offer to serve as trustees and governors.


Online Communities

At a time of enforced separation, with our usual face-to-face networks impossible, our use of online and social networking has been an absolute saviour. During the early weeks of lockdown, social media was a key player in the dissemination of information to schools. As time progressed, we shared our interpretations, and our local experiences, as school leaders caught the flurry of ever-changing guidance and crafted them into workable plans to deliver remote learning. As the weeks and months wore on, we used Twitter to support each other as the fatigue of the ongoing battle hit us all at different times. We have also created wonderful networking opportunities, both for training and for social interaction and support.

We are now in a very unusual position to rewrite our own futures, taking the forced changes that Covid brought us and turning them to our advantage. We don't yet know what 2021 will bring, but let's resolve to take back control and turn the opportunity to be truly innovative to our advantage.

Hilary Goldsmith is a school business leadership consultant

 @sbl365

 sbl365.co.uk

“Review how your teams responded to the pandemic and the extraordinary efforts they put in.”



2020

2021

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