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Oracy education must be a priority for schools

The speaking skills of some pupils have been affected by national lockdowns, especially among our Pupil Premium cohort. Campaigners are urging government and schools to put oracy at the heart of recovery

➤ *By* ***Pete Henshaw***

The Covid-19 pandemic has hindered oracy and language development, with the impact being felt most by students living in poverty. A cross-party group of MPs is now calling for action to prioritise oracy skills as part of Covid recovery.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Oracy (APPG) has published the final report of its two-year "Speak for Change" inquiry into oracy education. The work began in 2019, but the inquiry was expanded last year to focus on the impact of the pandemic.

Covid-19 and oracy

The report confirms that Covid-19 has widened the language gap for some students.

Research conducted for the inquiry by the Centre for Education and Youth (Millard et al, 2021) found that 44 per cent of secondary teachers and 66 per cent of primary teachers report that the pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the spoken language development of their Pupil Premium students. This is compared to around 20 per cent of teachers who say that the oracy skills of their most advantaged pupils have been hit.

English teachers were most likely to report problems. One teacher told the inquiry: "Many of our children will not have had a full conversation in the whole lockdown period. They may not have been asked a question higher than a comprehension level. They will have missed out on hundreds of hours of exploratory, story and formal language."

The report adds that 92 per cent of teachers believe that the "word gap" – which refers to when children have a vocabulary below age-related expectations – has widened further following lockdowns; seven in 10 teachers say that teaching online has also had a negative impact on oracy.

The Millard et al study concludes: "Responses to our poll paint a devastating picture regarding the pandemic's impact on pupils' oracy development. Teachers believe school closures will have a far more negative impact on Pupil Premium pupils than the most affluent. Many teachers feel teaching online negatively impacted upon opportunities to develop pupils' oracy, with English and languages teachers feeling this most acutely."

It adds: "Teachers are calling out for additional training and age-related guidance in oracy."

Students already struggling with speech and language skills have been hit hard too. The report quotes March 2021 research from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists showing that 81 per cent of children and young people received less speech and language therapy during lockdown, and 62 per cent did not receive any therapy at all. Referrals were down by around 50 per cent in April and May 2020 alone.

Also affected are pupils using English as an additional language. Ofsted has noted that "literacy-related learning losses had affected some pupils who speak EAL the most because they had not been speaking English during the first national lockdown" (see *SecEd*, 2021).

View from the chalkface

Schools *SecEd* has spoken to have

Continued on page 3 ➤

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TEA-AD-0006 04/21

echoed concerns about an impact on spoken language, including students being less willing to contribute during lessons, one-word answers, and a loss of vocabulary for some.

Josephine Smith, head of school at Kesteven and Sleaford High School in Lincolnshire, told us that some students had been "reticent to speak online". She added: "Students have missed out on classroom and breaktime interaction. This means they haven't had opportunities for so much purposeful talk for months. Students have missed the oracy-focused targeted questioning and discussion of the classroom and group work was tricky remotely.

"We are already planning CPD sessions ... and getting students to speak with purpose is definitely high on the list, as is managing effective group work."

Helen Blachford, head of humanities and PSHE curriculum leader at Priory School in Hampshire, said that their work on developing students' ability to "talk like an expert" – using subject-specific vocabulary and talking through responses before putting pens to paper – is now being ramped up: "It is something we are making a priority even more in lessons, as in the virtual lessons students were much less willing to contribute verbally and this has led to a lack of confidence and loss of vocabulary for some."

Matt Perry, head at The Halifax Academy in Yorkshire, told *SecEd*: "We had done a huge amount of work on oracy before lockdown, encouraging longer answers, dialogic approaches and debates. This has been massively impacted. Students are more reticent in answers, use one-word answers and need a lot more scaffolding."

> *"Students have missed the oracy-focused targeted questioning and discussion of the classroom"*

And Emily Hazell, director of English at Shenley Brook End School in Milton Keynes, said that pupils in years 7 and 8 are showing evidence of a "spoken language gap". She explained: "I don't think this gap is necessarily one of vocabulary or ability to express ideas verbally, (it) is more in terms of the protocols of talk. The 'teach from the front' environment necessitated by the pandemic has meant that group work has been limited, meaning that we haven't been able to practise the skills of group discussion in the way we would want to. Year 7 and 8 students also seem to struggle with the listening aspect of discussion and how to respond appropriately to each other's contributions."

The bigger picture

More widely, the APPG inquiry concludes that there is a "concerning variation" in the time and attention given to oracy across schools. It says that oracy is "undervalued in our education system".

The report defines oracy as "the ability to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through social language". The report states: "Research shows how the development of spoken language skills requires purposeful and intentional teaching. While some schools give oracy a high priority, many are not meeting the statutory requirements for spoken language."

Only 23 per cent of secondary and 46 per cent of primary teachers are confident that they understand the "spoken language" requirements within the national curriculum, which set out expectations for oracy teaching and learning, including a learning progression for students.

The benefits of oracy

The APPG report sets out what it calls "compelling evidence" about the benefits of oracy, including improved academic outcomes, its role in underpinning literacy and vocabulary acquisition, its links to future careers, and also to good wellbeing and pupil confidence.

The Education Endowment Foundation's trials of oral language interventions in schools have shown, the report says, that they can lead to five months additional progress over a year (six months for Pupil Premium students). The report adds: "Contributors to the inquiry have stressed the specific role of oracy in relation to language development, vocabulary acquisition and literacy.

"The ability to communicate effectively is an essential ingredient to both success in school and beyond."

Recommendations

The APPG's report calls for schools and the Department for Education (DfE) to raise the status and priority of oracy education, including by increasing teacher confidence and capability to teach it.

It states: "Oracy is seen as optional and without shared expectations and understanding, provision too often depends on an individual teacher's perceptions of the value of oracy, their subject area, and the particular challenges their school faces."

In particular, the report calls for non-statutory guidance from the DfE to help schools embed the statutory spoken language requirements of the national curriculum. It wants to see oracy included as part of the Covid recovery programme, too.

The report also calls on exams watchdog Ofqual to "review the best means of assessing spoken language at GCSE to ensure assessment at this vital stage is fit-for-purpose".

Commentary

Charity Voice 21, which provides the secretariat for the APPG, works with schools to promote effective oracy education. CEO Beccy Earnshaw is hopeful the report could be a "turning point" for oracy education.

She said: "The stark evidence presented on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on spoken language serves to strengthen the need to act now.

"As with our own research, the report finds that teachers recognise the importance of oracy but often face barriers in giving it the attention it deserves. We therefore welcome the APPG's calls for greater investment in teacher development for oracy and new non-statutory guidance from the DfE." **SecEd**

Further information

- APPG: *Speak for Change*, Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry, April 2021: ***https://oracy.inparliament.uk/speak-for-change-inquiry***
- Millard et al: *Oracy after the pandemic*, Centre for Education & Youth, April 2021: ***https://bit.ly/2RKxaIH***
- *SecEd*: *EAL in the Early Career Framework*, May 2021: ***https://bit.ly/2QlaL4k***
- Voice 21: ***https://voice21.org/***

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Safeguarding, staff we

A wealth of educational research has been published since our last edition. We round-up some of the key reports and findings, including links to more in-depth articles on the *SecEd* website

Safeguarding warning

Online predators are specifically targeting pre-pubescent children – aged from around seven to 13 – and bullying, grooming, deceiving or exhorting them into producing and sharing sexual images or videos.

Self-generated images and videos accounted for almost half of the online child sexual abuse material reported to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) last year. Covid-19 lockdowns have led to a huge spike in incidents.

The IWF works internationally to find and remove child sexual abuse content from the internet and has issued a stark warning after around 68,000 of the 153,369 reports in 2020 involved images and videos taken by the victims themselves – a 77 per cent increase on 2019.

The analysis from the IWF raises particular concerns for girls aged 11 to 13, who were involved in more than 55,000 of the 68,000 cases (case numbers drop to around 2,500 for the 14 to 17-year-old age category).

Parents and schools are warned that it is very often pre-pubescent children who are being targeted as they are "less accomplished in their social, emotional and psychological development". A hard-hitting new campaign – GURLS OUT LOUD – is now warning girls and their parents about the dangers of being groomed online by sexual predators.

● Report: ***https://bit.ly/3arfpVh***

Long Covid

With thousands of teachers reporting symptoms of Long Covid, schools' sickness policies need to better recognise the "debilitating" impact of this little understood phenomenon, the NASUWT has said.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that Long Covid has hit both healthcare and education professionals the hardest.

Over a four-week period up until March 2021, the ONS says that 114,000 teaching and education professionals and 122,000 healthcare workers have reported Long Covid. Long Covid is when people who have contracted Covid-19 continue to have a number of symptoms for weeks or even months after they begin to recover. Its medical name is post-acute sequelae SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC).

Symptoms range from mild to incapacitating and all age ranges are affected. Some estimates show that one in 10 people with Covid will get some form of Long Covid.

Symptoms that can linger include fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, joint or chest pain, muscle pain or headaches, fast heartbeat, loss of smell or taste, and memory, concentration or sleep problems.

The ONS reports that across the UK, 1.1 million people reported Long Covid during the four-week period under review. Long Covid is most commonly reported in the 35 to 69 age range, and among females (roughly two-thirds).

During the NASUWT's recent annual conference, the union called for schools' sickness policies to be updated in light of the often debilitating impact of Long Covid.

● Report: ***https://bit.ly/3fPxzU8***

Autonomy, workload, wellbeing

There are fresh concerns over the state of mind and wellbeing of our nation's teachers after a third said that they would definitely quit in the next five years.

Research by the National Education Union (NEU) and involving 10,700 teachers from across England and Wales found that 70 per cent have seen increased workload during the pandemic, while 95 per cent are concerned about their wellbeing.

Meanwhile, 55 per cent said that their work/life balance was now worse than before the pandemic, a third said that their workload was "unmanageable" most or all of the time, and 35 per cent said they would definitely be quitting in the next five years.

When asked about what strategies schools might adopt to reduce the workload burden, the most popular suggestion was a reduction in class sizes (47 per cent), more professional autonomy, reducing bureaucracy, and more PPA time (all at 44 per cent).

Other suggestions included employing more staff (43 per cent), reducing data requirements (39 per cent), changing approaches to marking and feedback (36 per cent), fewer meetings (35 per cent), and more collaboration (28 per cent).

When asked what would improve their wellbeing, the teachers said a reduction in workload (51 per cent), and a reduction in the stress caused by external accountability including performance tables and inspections (50 per cent) as well as internal accountability such as appraisal and observation (46 per cent).

● Report: ***https://bit.ly/3dSsnxb***

Retention problems not at an end

The spike in applications to teacher training must not fool us into thinking that retention issues in schools are a thing of the past.

The warning comes as analysis of the teacher labour market in England reveals that initial teacher training (ITT) applications were up 20 per cent in 2020 as Covid hit the wider economy. And the trend has continued into 2021, with ITT applications up 26 per cent this year.

However, the *Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report*, which has been published by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), also warns that teacher wellbeing has been hit hard by the pandemic. The lack of capacity in schools due to self-isolation requirements has also put a strain on those teachers remaining in schools, the report adds.

The research confirms that during the first lockdown teachers reported lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction and a rise in anxiety.

It adds that working hours, which

TOP 5 MOST READ BEST PRACTICE

1 Stretch & challenge
Practical strategies to raise the bar in your lessons for all pupils
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Stretch

2 Behaviour & NQTs
Ten strategies for new and early career teachers to help them manage poor behaviour
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Behav

3 Graduated approach
Meeting pupils' SEN through the graduated approach using the assess, plan, do, review cycle
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Grad

4 Distributed leadership
The three secrets to distributed leadership: Autonomy, capacity and accountability
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Distrib

5 Teacher modelling
Effective teacher modelling can help to address misconceptions before they arise
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Model

TOP 5 MOST READ RESEARCH ANALYSIS

1 How do you know?
How can you judge whether all your students are making the progress they are capable of?
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Learning

2 Self-harm
How schools and staff can support young people at risk from self-harm
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Harm

3 Applying Rosenshine
How Rosenshine's 10 Principles of Instruction can help to improve the quality of teaching
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Rosen

4 Metacognition
Six teaching approaches for the classroom using metacognition and self-regulation
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Meta

5 Interleaving & spacing
Spacing and interleaving techniques to boost students' long-term memory and retrieval
http://bit.ly/SecEd-Revision

llbeing, Covid recovery...

had fallen during the first lockdown, are now rising again. During the autumn term, teachers reported working hours of 46 hours a week – which compared to 41 hours in other similar professions.

● Report: ***https://bit.ly/2Qtdbxf***

Ransomware attacks

Remote access systems, phishing and unpatched or unsecure devices are among the common routes being used by ransomware attackers to target schools.

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has issued a warning to school leaders and IT managers after a rise in attacks on education institutions.

An NCSC alert reports an increased number of ransomware attacks since February. This continues a trend that was first seen in August and September last year.

It is feared that in the rush to move to remote learning during the Covid pandemic, schools may have left their systems open to attack.

Ransomware is a type of malware that prevents you from accessing your systems or the data held on them. Typically, the data is encrypted, but it may also be deleted or stolen or the computer itself may be made inaccessible.

Following the initial attack, those responsible will usually send a ransom note demanding payment to recover the data. Recently, there has been a trend for cyber-criminals to threaten to release sensitive data stolen from the network if the ransom is not paid.

Many of the recent attacks have targeted remote access systems, such as remote desktop protocol (RDP) and virtual private networks (VPN). They exploit weak passwords, lack of multi-factor authentication (MFA), and unpatched vulnerabilities in software.

RDP, which enables employees to access their office desktop computers or servers from another device over the internet, remains the most common attack point to gain access to networks.

The NCSC has published advice for schools on defending their systems.

● Report : ***https://bit.ly/3eBzU2R***

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Sickness policy warning: Official figures show that Long Covid is hitting healthcare and education professionals the hardest…

Recovery: Students' views

A reduced curriculum, small group tutoring, more resources, a focus on mental health, and one-to-one support for students who need it – but no summer schools!

More than 5,000 secondary-age students have told schools and politicians just what they think education recovery should look like in the months to come.

The School Catch-up Survey was run by the Jack Petchey Foundation and saw 5,297 responses from young people aged 11 to 19 living in Essex and London.

The most popular strategy was a reduced curriculum (55 per cent), followed by small group tutoring (44 per cent), and more resources and text books (42 per cent).

Pastoral issues are also key for those responding, with 41 per cent prioritising mental health support. A further 36 per cent said that one-to-one support must be available for students who need it.

However, the government's penchant for summer schools – for which it has ringfenced £200m in funding – is not popular at all. Only nine per cent said that this would be a useful approach.

The students also revealed what they had missed most during the national lockdowns and periods of remote education – 66 per cent identified interactive learning, such as group work and exercises, while 54 per cent said they struggled to understand new content while learning remotely.

Forty-one per cent said that they had no idea how well they are doing with their learning.

● Report: ***https://bit.ly/37IuQXy***

Ventilation is vital

Improving air quality and ventilation in classroom spaces should be as important as social distancing, mask-wearing and hand-washing, doctors have told schools.

In this regard, schools could learn some lessons from how the aviation industry have been working to make planes Covid-safe.

The argument is put forward in a commentary published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* by doctors from Imperial College London and Louise Voden, headteacher of Nower Hill High School in Middlesex.

The authors call for specific guidelines to support schools in better using effective ventilation to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission in the classroom.

The commentary also calls for the introduction of temperature "kiosks" at the school gate to ensure any students with a fever are sent home directly.

The commentary points out that it takes about four minutes for the number of small droplets in the air to be halved in a room with no ventilation, whereas with mechanical ventilation turned on in a room, the number of respiratory particles is halved in 1.4 minutes.

It adds: "In a room that also has a door and window open, the number is halved after 30 seconds – substantially faster than in poorly ventilated and unventilated rooms."

It continues: "Therefore, an important approach to lowering the concentrations of indoor air pollutants or contaminants, including any viruses that may be in the air, is to increase ventilation. Increasing air flow by ventilation, whether by window and door opening or mechanical systems – which could mix outdoor air with indoor air – or air filtration and cleaning devices, reduces the risk of infection by diluting concentrations of respiratory particles and removing them in the ambient air.

"Improving indoor air quality in classroom spaces should be followed at the same level as government advice regarding social distancing, mask-wearing and hand-washing to lower the risk."

● Report: ***https://bit.ly/2S0jpWd***

Where has all the money gone?

Much education funding does not reach the front-line, with excessive levels of academy leadership pay now 'hardwired' into the system, the NASUWT says. ***Pete Henshaw*** reports

THE COST of chief executive remuneration in the 20 largest academy trusts stands at £4.72m – or an average of £236,000 per chief executive, according to a report into education funding. On top of this, unspent school reserves, redundancy and other costs mean that a significant proportion of education funding is not reaching the front-line.

Published by the NASUWT, the report summarises the long-standing problems of the eight per cent real-terms cuts to school funding since 2010. While unions continue to argue the case for increased school funding from Westminster, the NASUWT report – entitled *Where has all the money gone?* (2021) – says we should also be making better use of the money we do have.

Excessive CEO pay

The report's biggest concern is with executive leadership pay in multi-academy trusts (MATs).

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Quoting the latest available figures – from 2018/19 – it finds that 325 academy trusts remunerated at least one trustee more than £150,000 – this is up from 146 trusts in 2017/18. Additionally, in 2017/18, 27 trustees were remunerated at more than £190,000, rising to 65 in 2018/19 (although 2018/19 figures include employer pension contributions). The report cites some salaries of as much as £300,000 and even £450,000.

It states: "The cost of chief executive remuneration in the 20 largest academy trusts in 2018/19 is £4.72m, or an average of £236,000 per chief executive across the 20 trusts. The DfE (Department for Education) is unable or unwilling to disclose the total cost of leadership pay in the academy sector, which is the minimum information which should be in the public domain for the system to be accountable."

However, the DfE has said that it is challenging trusts over high remuneration. In 2018, it contacted trusts to warn that executive pay must not increase at a faster rate than that of classroom teachers and wrote specifically to all trusts with executives earning more than £150,000 a year (*SecEd*, 2018a).

However, the NASUWT says that the DfE's challenge "does not seem to be working".

It is not the first time concerns have been raised. In 2018, Emma Knights, chief executive of the National Governance Association, said that the "astronomical sums" being paid to some chief executives were a result of "group-think" by boards dominated by people with a background in the private sector (*SecEd*, 2018b).

NASUWT national president Phil Kemp did not hold back during his address at the union's annual conference earlier this year. He said:

> "The snouts have to come out of the trough and the public purse protected from those who will take advantage of the increasing deregulation of our education system.
>
> "Those taking these huge salaries should hang their heads in shame."

Balances and reserves

Another bone of contention for the NASUWT is how much schools are holding in their reserves. As of March 2019, maintained schools were holding in reserve a total of £1.54bn (an average of £111,000 per school). This is around 6.5 per cent of local authority revenue for maintained schools. Meanwhile, in academies, the total cumulative surplus in 2018/19 was £2.8bn and there are 189 trusts with a surplus greater than £3m, according to DfE figures published in July 2020.

It should be added that Covid costs will have shrunk many schools' reserves given the lack of sufficient government funding to cover the extra costs of the pandemic.

While there is a debate to be had about how much schools should sensibly hold in reserve, the NASUWT points to Ofsted's 2016 investigation into a number of academy trusts which resulted in it warning the DfE about excessive reserves: "This poor use of public money is compounded by some trusts holding very large cash reserves that are not being spent on raising standards For example, at the end of August 2015, these seven trusts had total cash in the bank of £111m." (Ofsted, 2016)

Redundancy payments

The report is also critical of high amounts being spent by academy trusts on redundancy. Figures from the DfE's 2019 *Sector Annual Report and Accounts* show that 2,016 compulsory redundancies in 2018/19 cost the taxpayer £27m. The report also highlights that the total cost of "exit packages in the academy sector in 2018/19 was £59m" – pointing to 52 packages of between £50,001 and £100,000 and six of £100,000-plus.

Consultancy and supply

In 2018/19, academy trusts spent £230m on consultants, an increase of £29m when compared with 2017/18 expenditure. The report again quotes an Ofsted investigation of seven MATs which found that in 2014/15 they spent £8.5m on education consultancy, including "to compensate for deficits in leadership".

Meanwhile, the report bemoans the "exploitation" of schools by supply agencies: "Expenditure by schools and academy trusts on supply agencies has reached eye-watering proportions. (Our) research indicates that in 2015/16, £792m was paid to supply agencies by schools and academy trusts."

Funding row continues

In 2019, the DfE announced increased funding to the schools budget of £2.6bn in 2020/21, £4.8bn in 2021/22 and £7.1bn in 2022/23 (compared to 2019/20 funding levels). A further £700m was added to the high needs budget.

However, the NASUWT says that the additional funding for schools from 2020-23 "does not fully compensate for 10 years of austerity", pointing to analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies showing that it represents a 7.4 per cent expected real-terms growth in spending per-pupil over the 2020-23 period, which effectively means that since 2010 we will have seen "no real-terms growth in spending per-pupil over 13 years" (*SecEd*, 2019).

The NASUWT's report adds: "Much education spending still does not reach the front line. Substantial levels of unspent reserves, inefficient and wasteful school-level procurement, together with excessive levels of academy trustee and CEO leadership pay, are now hardwired into the school system. The NASUWT believes that there is need for urgent change in these areas."

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Further information

- NASUWT: *Where has all the money gone?* March 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3elTkcQ***
- Ofsted: *Focused inspections of academies in MATs*, 2016: ***https://bit.ly/3eqjBHg***
- *SecEd*: *Minister warns academies over levels of executive pay*, 2018a: ***https://bit.ly/3vMvbSC***
- *SecEd*: *Academies: 'Group-think' is leading to high CEO salaries*, 2018b: ***https://bit.ly/3usUHw3***
- *SecEd*: *Funding pledge: We're not out of the woods yet*, 2019: ***https://bit.ly/2SuvEe2***

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Diversity: Student leadership

Where do we start when it comes to ensuring our school has a genuinely diverse ethos and avoids tick-boxing and tokenism? One answer lies in student leadership and empowerment

Dr Gohar Khan

Director of ethos and associate senior leader at the Ridgeway Education Trust in south Oxfordshire. In this role, she works to promote equality and diversity in leadership opportunities for young people. Her subject specialism is English and she has a PhD in post-colonial English literature

> *"Schools need to steer clear of privileging only the voices they wish to hear – the convenient, predictable voices. This boils down to listening to our young people in an open-minded way, acknowledging, understanding and validating their experiences"*

The Black Lives Matter movement last year became the catalyst for many school leaders to rethink their approach towards fostering a culture of diversity in their schools.

As director of ethos at a trust comprising circa 2,500 students, it became a priority for me – I was determined never to approach diversity in a tokenistic way again.

There was a lot to think about and it became apparent that it was easy to talk about diversity, restate its importance and aim to do more – better; chalking out an action plan, however, and taking the first steps towards creating a meaningfully diverse culture seemed more challenging.

We all knew there was work to be done, but how would we make a positive start towards a powerfully diverse school ethos?

Openness

As school staff, we are rightly cautious to remain politically correct, sensitive, and respectful at all times. Herein, ironically, might lie the problem. My conversations with black friends and colleagues throughout the Black Lives Matter movement made it clear that they did not wish for people to tread on eggshells when discussing diversity. This guardedness had led to a dangerous reticence in having conversations in the first place.

Openness, even when it exposes pockets of ignorance or puts people at risk of saying the wrong thing, is definitely recommended when it comes to any discourse on diversity – and it is certainly possible to achieve this while respecting boundaries and sensibilities. But the conversation needs to start – and urgently.

Vocabulary

It is risky to assume that the vocabulary around diversity that we use in everyday language will be accessible to young people. The trouble begins when certain basic concepts remain unclear and we become reluctant to clarify them.

Words and phrases can become easily loaded with connotations and the temptation is to avoid using them altogether, in order to remain safe and neutral.

However, I have found that explicit communication of well-known concepts – such as race, racism and white privilege – are gratefully received by students (and often with a degree of surprise). My talk to students on white privilege, one of the most misunderstood concepts of recent times, generated a whole host of questions and stirred a range of emotions. But more than anything else, young people felt grateful to be armed with knowledge about this complex notion.

Finding a variety of ways to communicate these critical ideas is important – images, videos, drama, speech all help enormously. Crucial is the invitation to ask difficult questions in a safe setting. Remember, assemblies are rarely intimate and can often feel impersonal. It is good to get creative about the setting in which heavy concepts are unpacked.

Empowerment

Understand that a culture of diversity in our schools is not only the right thing to do – but the best thing to do. It is exciting, energising, and empowering. Diversity will not just balance our institutions, it will improve them. This mindset will enable us to abandon any remnants of "tick-boxing" and to spare no effort in achieving our goals wholeheartedly.

Student voice

Delineate the sorts of diversities we need to consider when appointing student leadership teams and creating co-curricular calendars – socio-economic, sexual, cultural, racial, and cognitive diversities should all be on that list.

Cognitive diversity, less commonly discussed, must be harnessed if we want our young people to arrive at the best possible ideas, including what Matthew Syed calls, in his 2019 book of the same name, "rebel ideas".

Schools need to steer clear of privileging only the voices they wish to hear – the convenient, predictable voices. In practical terms, this boils down to listening to our young people in an open-minded way, with a view to acknowledging, understanding, and validating their experiences.

As educators we know that we are in it just as much to learn as we are to teach. In schools, our students do some of the most powerful teaching and we need to provide platforms for student voice in eclectic ways. Some students will speak, others will write, and others will need to be asked the right questions in order to truly speak out. All these voices need listening to.

Student leadership

We must develop student leadership teams that are truly diverse and representative. Aim to fully include Pupil Premium, SEND, LGBT+, ethnic and religious minorities. Participation should be tracked to establish where and why there are gaps and identify the steps that need to be taken to fill them. When inviting guest speakers, aim for a diverse range of role models.

As children's rights activist Marian Wright Edleman said: "You can't be what you can't see."

We must also make student leadership opportunities eclectic and accessible to a range of student personalities: your assertive, confident and "noisy" students, as well as quiet, reflective and sensitive learners.

At Ridgeway Education Trust, student leadership roles have been created over the years with immense thought and care. This has ensured that our student leadership teams are truly diverse and have great impact in the school and wider community.

I believe that expanding the number of leadership roles available to young people is an important first step: this will go a long way in eliciting a diverse range of individual strengths.

At our trust we don't shy away from appointing a healthy number of young leaders. Some see this as detracting from the exclusivity of leadership – well, that is the point.

Conclusion

There is much to be done by way of promoting diversity, inclusivity and belonging in our schools. Believing that in great difference lies great strength is a good starting point. SecEd

Creating a safer culture: Tackling sexual abuse and harassment in schools

April was Sexual Assault Awareness Month and the issue of peer-on-peer abuse in schools and colleges is more prevalent than ever. School staff are in need of support and guidance to not only handle incidents, but to effectively intervene and prevent them from happening in the first place.

Mike Glanville, the chief safeguarding officer of safeguarding software solution MyConcern, caught up recently with Luke Ramsden, the senior safeguarding lead at St Benedict's School in London, to discuss how schools must respond to peer-on-peer abuse, the influences and consequences of social media and online behaviour, as well as how schools can best support their students. Here are some of the key points of their discussion...

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Ofsted's review of sexual abuse and harassment: What must schools do?

Recent events have put the spotlight firmly on peer-on-peer abuse, but safeguarding professionals have been working to tackle this problem for years. It is of vital importance that we understand the significant dangers students face not just from adults, but also from peer-on-peer sexual abuse and harassment.

Schools need to review their safeguarding practices to ensure that all members of staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. There are some key points we must remember when it comes to sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges. Harmful sexual behaviour including harassment should be considered in a child protection context and responses should be as with any other safeguarding case.

The basic safeguarding principle is that if a child is at risk of harm, is in immediate danger or has been harmed, a referral should be made.

Schools are not operating in a vacuum but in a whole safeguarding framework. Safeguarding leads should reach out to organisations that offer safeguarding advice if they need support.

What advice do you have for schools undertaking an internal review?

It is all about transparency and honesty – understanding where the problems have occurred, rather than an opportunity to apportion blame.

It is vital that schools have a recording system – such as MyConcern – to ensure they can track any concerns raised, have paper trails and the ability to report what has happened, as well as clear procedures in place for safeguarding issues.

Why are students unwilling to disclose peer-on-peer abuse?

Students may not report incidents for several reasons. For example, if intimate images of a student are being shared, they may feel embarrassed or they might not want the person sharing the images to get into trouble.

Schools have to offer as many avenues as possible to help students feel comfortable disclosing. This could include via social workers or counsellors on site for a set number of hours per-week to allow students to approach adults who are not teaching staff.

It should also include digital platforms, so that students can disclose online.

Educating students on these issues is also an important step – having conversations around consent, abusive relationships, bullying, online bullying and peer-on-peer abuse can help to raise awareness and encourage disclosures.

What must safeguarding leads consider when faced with a serious allegation?

Schools need to recognise that they are a part of a broader safeguarding framework. When faced with a difficult allegation, a safeguarding lead should pick up a phone and contact social services or the LADO (local authority designated officer) for assistance and guidance.

Based on many of the Everyone's Invited allegations, it is obvious that there is a culture of secrecy within some schools. If we can eradicate this culture where it exists then safeguarding work in schools would be much more effective; there needs to be a change in direction and a whole-school approach to safeguarding within the school.

How do schools create a safer culture for students?

It is critical that all staff have safeguarding training and understand that safeguarding is a responsibility shared by every member of the organisation. Once everyone is on the same page you are a step closer to creating a safer environment for students.

MyConcern offers a range of CPD-accredited safeguarding training courses that provide you with the skills to carry out your role, whether that is as a safeguarding lead, a member of staff, or a school governor.

What do you think the future holds?

There is an increasing number of people calling for mandatory reporting, which would make it a legal requirement to review safeguarding concerns. Mandatory reporting could give schools the impetus to create a safer culture and environment for all their students.

To read the full discussion and for further resources, visit
www.myconcern.co.uk/seced

MyConcern is the Queen's Award-winning safeguarding solution designed by child-protection experts with backgrounds in policing, social care and education and used by thousands of schools across the UK and around the world.

Everyone's Invited: Have we done enough?

The Everyone's Invited revelations and Ofsted's review of sexual harassment and abuse in schools has clear implications for safeguarding practice. ***Elizabeth Rose*** advises how we can review our safeguarding structures around sexual harassment, violence and abuse

The Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges (2021) following the testimonies shared on the Everyone's Invited platform has been a source of anxiety for lots of schools.

In my conversations with safeguarding leads, the overriding concern is not around whether schools have been named or whether Ofsted is going to visit, but rather, "have I done enough to keep children safe?".

From a safeguarding perspective, this is an excellent question to ask. We know that safeguarding is an ever-developing picture, with the level and type of risks faced by children changing all the time. It is a statutory requirement that designated safeguarding leads attend training regularly and keep up-to-date with new information, because we are operating in a dynamic arena and need to understand the risks that children are facing.

There have been lots of articles and points of view shared about Everyone's Invited and the role that schools play in supporting children with peer-on-peer abuse that happens outside of school. While there are differing opinions on this, the fundamental facts outlined in the Children Act 1989 and the statutory guidance that schools operate under (DfE 2020, 2021) remain the same.

Schools have a responsibility to safeguard children, act in their best interests and take action when a child is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, harm. As such, I am going to consider the question that many people have been asking of themselves in recent weeks – "Have I done enough to keep children safe?" – and offer some practical tips for conducting an internal review of safeguarding structures around sexual harassment, violence and abuse.

Your policy and training

The safeguarding policy and your child protection training are the foundations of your culture of safeguarding. Conduct a review of your policy and critically consider if it is robust enough in relation to sexual abuse and, in particular, peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

The information about what to include in your school policy around peer-on-peer abuse is detailed in paragraph 106 of *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (DfE, 2021) and is very prescriptive. It is important to look at this carefully and consider if you have really made it clear what your procedures are and how children can disclose if they need help.

The curriculum

Significant changes and modifications have been made to school PSHE curricula since the publication of the Relationships, Sex and Health Education statutory guidance for schools and colleges (DfE, 2019).

The Ofsted review into sexual abuse will be considering whether schools are in need of more

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

support to deliver effective teaching around sexual abuse, cyber-bullying, pornography, healthy relationships and consent, and all schools can consider their approach to these issues within the curriculum and think about how effective the sessions are. Things to consider:

- Do all staff feel confident in delivering sessions around challenging topics such as sexual abuse and pornography? Consider the training that they have to deliver these sessions and whether it needs to be strengthened to support more effective and confident delivery.
- Do teachers differentiate PSHE lessons to ensure that all children can access them? What approaches do you take as a school to support children with SEND to understand the issues of consent, for example?
- Have you included the voice of the child in your consultation work around the new curriculum? What do your pupils say they need to learn about in relation to peer-on-peer sexual abuse?

Mechanisms for disclosure

Throughout the pandemic, schools have rapidly and successfully embraced technology to allow them to function as normally as possible. It is really important to look carefully at the channels that children have chosen to use to disclose over the past year and think about what you can keep in place to allow children a variety of options when it comes to seeking support.

Many children like to speak to a member of staff face-to-face, but others might prefer to send an email to a safeguarding inbox, or have a virtual meeting from home with two members of staff to discuss an issue like peer-on-peer abuse in school.

Lots of schools use "worry boxes" at the back of classrooms, or outside the safeguarding office door, which still continue to be useful and valuable as a means of seeking help.

One of the key questions in the Ofsted review is: "What prevents children from reporting sexual abuse?" There will be many answers to this, but we cannot ignore the fact that 15,000 young people have reported abuse online and many of these examples cite a lack of opportunity to disclose, or being dismissed following disclosure at school (or university). It is important to think about barriers to disclosure and work to remove them, as far as we possibly can.

Pupil voice

There is a pupil voice dimension to the work that needs to be done around the issue of peer-on-peer sexual abuse. Many of the testimonies shared either explicitly or indirectly say that the victim did not feel listened to or understood.

As well as having an effective culture of disclosure and support, we need to hear from children to understand what their experience of their context is. When looking at provision and support for children, the biggest source of information about what will be helpful will come from the children themselves.

Mobilising and utilising pupil voice is important in understanding the issues and creating structures to help children come forward if they have experienced peer-on-peer (or any type of) abuse.

> *"We cannot ignore the fact that 15,000 young people have reported abuse online and many of these examples cite a lack of opportunity to disclose, or being dismissed following disclosure at school"*

Providing children with positive opportunities to be involved in peer support, leadership and in shaping the safety and culture of their school will lead to an environment where all children can feel safe and cared for.

A culture of safeguarding

A "culture of safeguarding" begins with the compliance and professional development work – policies, training, procedures and record-keeping. But in order to be truly embedded and effective, safety, respect and tolerance needs to feature in all interactions that children have with staff throughout the day and needs to be promoted between children too.

We know that we cannot prevent every safeguarding issue from happening and peer-on-peer abuse will happen in one or more forms at some point, but considering how we speak to children, what our reactions are when they disclose what may be perceived to be "lower level" concerns, and how we manage behaviour incidents all feed into a culture that prevents peer-on-peer sexual abuse from happening. Some points for consideration:

- Does your behaviour policy create a culture of safety? Is it robust enough to create safe environments in all school contexts and how far does it extend beyond the school gates?
- Have staff been trained on the language to use when talking about peer-on-peer incidents relating to children of different genders?
- Is a culture of listening and responding embedded? Is this reflected in structures from the top down and the bottom up?

Conclusion

The issue of rape culture, sexual abuse and gendered violence against women is one that has been cast into sharp relief over the last few weeks and months. It is an issue that is endemic in our society and not something that will be overcome easily. However, when we work with children in schools we do have the power to influence the context that we are working in and we must listen to the voices of young people, learn about what they need, and put as much in place as possible to proactively keep children safe and to ensure we can respond in a way that helps them when they are in need. SecEd

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Further information & resources

- Children's Society, Victim Support, NSPCC: *Appropriate language: Child sexual and/or criminal exploitation guidance for professionals*, February 2020: ***https://bit.ly/3x4ixQm***
- Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport: *Guidance: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people*, December 2020: ***https://bit.ly/3v4y9lj***
- DfE: *Working together to safeguard children (statutory guidance)*, last updated December 2020: ***http://bit.ly/2hZOeVM***
- DfE: *Keeping children safe in education (statutory guidance)*, last updated January 2021: ***http://bit.ly/2bI2Zsm***
- DfE: *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (statutory guidance)*, June 2019: ***https://bit.ly/3x6QdwM***
- Everyone's Invited: ***www.everyonesinvited.uk***
- Lloyd, Walker& Bradbury: *Beyond referrals: Levers for addressing harmful sexual behaviour in schools*, Contextual Safeguarding Network: ***https://bit.ly/3tv8BgP***
- Ofsted: *Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges* (announcement), April 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3akqjMs***
- Ofsted: *Review of sexual abuse in schools: Terms of reference*, April 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3e7hTZQ***
- Farrer & Co: Peer-on-peer abuse toolkit, 2017**:** ***https://bit.ly/3gx38CD***
- *SecEd*: *Teaching consent as part of statutory RSE*, Whittington, March 2021: ***https://bit.ly/2P2QAqQ***
- *SecEd*: *Sexual harassment and violence: What can schools do?* Eeles, March 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3f9mtsw***
- *SecEd*: *PSHE & RSE: The impact of porn on the young*, Enson, February 2018: ***https://bit.ly/2Q41ixX***
- *SecEd Podcast*: RSHE in Schools, November 2020: ***https://bit.ly/2UCzU8X***
- *SecEd Podcast*: Effective Safeguarding Practice (featuring Elizabeth Rose), April 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3tyyY5r***
- Smellie: Everyone's Invited: Let's talk, Farrer & Co, April 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3dpN2Zp***
- Stop It Now! Information about harmful sexual behaviour for professionals and parents: ***https://bit.ly/2REv78J***
- UK Government: Children Act 1989: ***https://bit.ly/3uZbg2t***

Exam grading 2021: The challenges ahead

Several trends are emerging from the concerns that school leaders have about this summer's exam grading process. ***Tom Middlehurst*** looks at the main sticking points and offers advice and reassurance for secondary school leaders and teachers

In the coming weeks, further guidance and support about this year's grading process will continue to be released from Department for Education (DfE), Ofqual and the exam boards – including more exemplifications of grading, and long-awaited detailed about the appeals process.

In the meantime, schools and colleges will have submitted their high-level Centre Policy by the end of April and, in some schools, the process of assessment is already beginning.

As school and college leaders have digested the various Ofqual and Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) guidance documents over the Easter break (see further information), several trends are emerging from the on-going concerns that school leaders express to us at the Association of School and College Leaders.

The selection of evidence

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges this term will be deciding what evidence to use at a subject level. In most cases, school and college's Centre Policies will not go into this level of detail, but may articulate some broad principles and cross-centre approaches to evidence.

The key thing to remember here is that students should only be assessed on what they have been taught – a fundamental part of the process aimed at addressing differential learning loss between schools and between students due to the pandemic.

A trickier question, then, is the extent to which all content that has been taught should be assessed. When we say "all content", we do not mean assessing every single concept, knowledge or skill in a subject. Indeed, in a normal exam year, depending on the qualification, only around 50 per cent of the course content might be assessed.

Instead, we are talking about content coverage at a broad topic or paper level. For example, if you have taught three of the five texts normally assessed in GCSE English literature, do you have to assess students on all three? If students have been taught all six exam topics in GCSE geography, do you have to assess all six?

Both the Ofqual and JCQ guidance documents are pretty quiet on this issue, so it is up to individual schools and colleges to make these sorts of granular decisions.

A key change from the first iteration of the Head of Centre Declaration and the published version (JCQ, 2021, p39) is the switch from a requirement for heads to be confident they have covered enough content "for students to progress", to confidence in having enough content coverage "to award a grade". But beyond that, it really is up to schools and colleges to decide what sufficient content coverage, and a broad enough portfolio, looks like.

A word of warning though: Although there is nothing explicit in the guidance to say that all taught topics should be assessed and used as part of the evidence, it is worth thinking ahead to appeals. One of the grounds for appeal is that the selection of evidence does not represent a reasonable exercise of academic judgement. If a student can demonstrate they were taught a whole topic or paper but were not assessed on it, this would be very good grounds for an appeal of this nature. It is therefore in school's and college's interests to assess as broadly as possible.

Common approach to assessment vs individualised evidence

There seems to be some confusion over the extent to which, at a qualification level, schools and colleges should be using a consistent approach to evidence between all students; and how much flexibility there is for a personalised approach.

The guidance is clear that, as much as possible, centres should adopt a common approach to assessment and evidence at a subject level; based on what the cohort has been taught. Where individual students or small groups of students were either not able to access the teaching of this content, or are unavailable to complete the assessment, schools and colleges should factor this into their grading and either discount that evidence or seek an alternative form of evidence.

However, this is not a negotiation between student and centre, nor students "picking" their own assessment evidence. Rather, all students need to be aware of what evidence is being used, and have an opportunity to raise any concerns or contextual issues with the school. Some schools are managing this process centrally to reduce classroom teacher workload and ensure a consistent approach to that candidate is used.

Performance vs historical outcomes

A contentious issue last year and this – to what extent should students' grades be aligned or based on historical outcomes of the centre?

The data shows that, especially for large-entry subjects, very few schools and colleges see significant year-on-year variation in their attainment measures. Before the government's U-turn last summer, this led to a statistical attempt to standardise results, which was widely seen as deeply flawed.

So, how should schools and colleges use historical data this year? The answer we have to keep returning to is that, this year, students must be graded on their evidence performance in content they have been taught, against the national grade descriptors and exemplifications.

Historical data should figure strongly in a school's or college's internal quality assurance, as a benchmarking exercise or high-level check, but must not be a limiting factor to any student

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

achieving a certain grade – providing you have the evidence for this.

Furthermore, given that the nature of assessment is fundamentally different from a normal exam year – and from last year – then we may see more students achieving more higher grades – and schools and colleges should not be worried about this, providing they have the evidence for this.

Ultimately, it is about the robust evidence of a student's performance, underpinned by rigorous quality assurance including the use of historical exam data.

Pressure from students and parents

If you look at the headlines in the non-specialist press, it is easy to understand why many students and parents believe that grades this year are solely determined, and awarded, by teachers. The language of "teacher-assessed grades" does little to counter those views.

We know that this has resulted in some students and parents, however well-meaning, putting unacceptable amounts of pressure on classroom teachers. This pressure can take many forms, from reminding teachers of conditional university entry offers, to questioning every piece of evidence used, to questioning the academic judgement of the teacher.

Parents and students want to do as much as possible to boost achievement, but it is vital that teachers, and schools and colleges, remain objective in their grading.

Students and parents need to understand that grading is not at an individual teacher's discretion this year; it is against a national standard; must be evidenced; will be subject to internal quality assurance including sign-off by at least three members of staff including the head; subject to external quality assurance including random and risk-based sampling of students' work; and that it is possible to appeal the grade this summer.

Furthermore, JCQ has beefed up its guidance from last summer and is explicit that any student, parent or other individual trying to exert pressure on teachers to award a certain grade should be reported to the exam boards, who may investigate as exam malpractice and ultimately refuse to issue a grade at all (JCQ, 2021).

Appeals

After everything is "done" by June 18, schools and colleges will naturally look ahead to August and the appeals process. The first stage of an appeal is to check for any admin or procedural error at a centre level. If none are found, a student may obligate the school to take forward an appeal to the exam board on their behalf.

Appeals will begin from published results days, with schools and colleges having until August 23 to send priority appeals to the exam boards. In reality this means that some staff will need to be working between August 9 and 23, which is likely to mean a change in resourcing for many schools.

Looking at what evidence will be required in the case of an appeal, and preparing that evidence as schools collate assessment evidence before submission, may significantly reduce the workload of stuff in August.

Conclusion

We do not think anyone believes that this year's approach is perfect, but given the parameters we are under and the political decision to cancel all forms of exams, we are probably in the best place possible. We now owe it to our young people to make a success of this year's process so that achievements can be meaningfully recognised.

SecEd

Tom Middlehurst is curriculum and inspection specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders. Read his previous articles for SecEd via ***http://bit.ly/seced-middlehurst***

Further information & resources

- JCQ: *Guidance on the determination of grades for A/AS Levels and GCSEs for Summer 2021*, March 2021: **https://bit.ly/3dxWKch**
- JCQ: Information and documentation on awarding arrangements for summer 2021: **https://bit.ly/3nABiXw**
- Ofqual: *Guidance: Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of teacher assessed grades*, March 2021: **https://bit.ly/3al5NeD**
- Ofqual: *Publications and documentation relating to GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in 2021*: **https://bit.ly/32tmFLE**

Tackling racism in schools: Three starting points

How is your school tackling racism? Is it working? How do you know? Ahead of September's inaugural National Schools' Human Rights Conference, ***Peter Radford*** looks at three principles that should underpin your school's anti-racism work

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

The past year has exposed in alarming ways just how much racism still pervades society and remains inherent in the national consciousness, institutions and systems.

Racial inequality is undeniable, and the Black Lives Matter campaign has brought this fact to the fore for a new generation of students. The power of social media to inform about and expose injustice has galvanised a generation. However, its power to misinform and exacerbate echo-chambers which undermine meaningful dialogue and engagement has the potential to nullify calls for change and create further division.

As schools we have a responsibility to educate students on this matter and to find ways to model and facilitate change in attitudes and systems. But how on earth do we go about doing this? In a year when schools have been stretched to the max just keeping up with Covid, this essential social and moral education has fallen by the wayside, though it was never exactly front and centre in the first place. The danger is that as we get back to "normal" and focus on "catch-up", the momentum and will for systemic change could be lost.

Society is arguably the consequence and extension of the education we deliver. We have an opportunity – or rather a duty – at this juncture of history to think about the kinds of schools we want to build and, by extension, the kind of world we want to live in.

We don't have racism here

Racism in most schools sits as a subsection of the anti-bullying or behaviour policy; in other words, we recognise that it is a negative behaviour that requires a sanction. When a racist incident occurs, it is logged. If you ask most schools whether they have problems with racism, they will answer no. What they usually mean is that they think this number of "racist incidents" is low or at an acceptable level. But this is to miss the point, and especially to miss the point about systemic racism. What we must recognise is that...

The majority of racist incidents go unreported: I found this to be true in one of the schools I worked in where I sought to address this issue. The racist incident count was low but when I carried out a survey of minority ethnic groups in the school their anonymous responses revealed a shocking picture of daily comments and exclusion that they readily admitted were "normal".

Racist 'incidents' are not the whole story: So-called racist incidents do not account for the myriad of ways in which a person of colour is overlooked, ignored or excluded in our schools and classrooms every day due to both conscious and unconscious bias. These are not "incidents" because nothing actually happened – but that is exactly the point. Many people of colour or minority ethnic students miss out on opportunities, or feel they have to work twice as hard or live with the fact that they or their people are not represented on a daily basis (whether in the curriculum or in leadership or on school councils etc). For many there is a resigned acceptance that it will always be so.

> *"The racist incident count was low but when I carried out a survey of minority ethnic groups in the school their anonymous responses revealed a shocking picture of daily comments and exclusion"*

Achieving equity will never happen without proactive intent: When a system is inherently biased in favour of a white privileged majority (even if that bias is not intended or knowingly malicious), change has to be a deliberate agenda item. We cannot be reactive. Addressing racism cannot be about simply responding decisively to "racist incidents". We must educate for change. Starting with an understanding of equity itself.

Achieving equity

We have made great strides in achieving equity where disability is concerned. This is not to discount that there is still a long way to go, but I would suggest that we at least understand the concept. Equity acknowledges that we are not all equal and to treat everyone "equally" makes no sense. To require the person in the wheelchair to battle along the corridors and up the stairs to get to class on time is ridiculous. I do not know anyone

who thinks it is "unfair" that the disabled student gets to leave the class five minutes early to avoid crowds or has all classes on the ground floor.

We get this. In order to achieve true equality we deliberately treat people unequally. This is equity. This is a fairer society. For this reason most schools now have robust accessibility plans – many of which have cost a significant amount of money.

But we have not, in the main, applied the same principle to racial inequality. We have not proactively sought to address inequalities by changing our systems, changing our curriculum, changing our school structures in order to promote fairness and celebrate difference.

So how can we do this? Below I suggest three starting points – that are both challenging and inspiring – to help us begin to transform our schools into beacons of hope for a fairer world.

Valuing difference: At every level

As human beings we have a soft spot for sameness. Sameness makes us feel comfortable and safe. The unknown is just that – unknown, and therefore we are by nature a little less sure about things or people we don't know.

The problem is that this tendency to "flock together" with people like us impoverishes us and undermines progress. A study at Columbia Business School gave teams the task of solving a murder mystery. In half the cases the groups were composed of four friends. The other half were composed of three friends and a stranger. The result? The teams with a stranger consistently and significantly outperformed the teams without one. They also found the task more cognitively demanding as they were forced to engage with different perspectives and think carefully in order to justify their own perspectives. They were enabled to see their own blindspots which in turn helped them collectively to find more effective solutions (Syed, 2019).

Difference is good for us. Making sure that difference is represented at every level of school is essential if we are going to grow effective schools. This approach has often been dismissed as "tokenism" or as undermining meritocracy. The phrase "positive discrimination" has been unhelpfully used to refer to this which in many people's minds seems to legitimise unfair treatment.

But all of this misses the point. We need difference represented not as a token gesture, not because we "need to be seen to be inclusive", but because we need difference (when I use the word 'we' here I mean we all… not "we white people").

We need female leaders and headteachers because females provide a different perspective to males and they can speak for women and girls in a way that men will never be able to.

In the same way we need people of colour in leadership because people of colour can speak for people for whom white people cannot speak and bring a perspective without which schools are impoverished.

And, of course, the idea that our "meritocracy" is fair in the first place anyway is an absurdity. As we know full well, a disadvantaged start in life translates to significantly poorer life chances on every measure we know. Hence the Pupil Premium and its admirable though so far inadequate attempt to "level the playing field" and pursue equity.

So, is difference represented in your governing body? In your senior leadership team? In your middle leadership? In your teaching staff? In your support staff? In your student council? Change starts here: we need to begin listening to people who have a different experience, different context and different perspective. Without this we are just navel-gazing.

> *"We are enriched mentally and spiritually when we set aside our preconceived ideas, listen to each other and work together"*

Engaging with difference: In and beyond school

At one school I worked at in the South West I arranged an exchange with a school in Tower Hamlets in east London. We took 15 students from Poole (96 per cent white) to visit a comprehensive state school which, due to its catchment, is 99 per cent non-white and 97 per cent Muslim. My students joined in with their lessons and took part in a collaborative session with 15 of their students to work on producing a charter for creating a more harmonious society. A few weeks later, they came and visited us in return. Both days were moving and striking.

As our students got out of the minibus and mixed with the students in Tower Hamlets, the vast majority wearing the school uniform hijab, they were essentially mobbed. The London students gathered around them asking about their uniform, exchanging Instagram addresses, wanting to know about Dorset and their lives there. Our students were visibly taken aback by the friendliness of the welcome they received.

As the day progressed, it was as if stereotypes and prejudices perceptibly crumbled as our students recognised that the presentation of Muslims they had encountered in the media was wrong. They quickly realised what they had in common with their new friends and that what unites us is far greater and stronger than what divides us. I came home feeling that this was the most important day of my life.

Engaging with difference is life-transforming. We are enriched mentally and spiritually when we set aside our preconceived ideas, listen to each other and work together.

Our schools, however, are incredibly tribal. Students form into groups very quickly and become entrenched in them. It is our job as schools to facilitate engagement both in the classroom as well as in "free time".

What are you doing to challenge this tribalism? The recent Channel 4 series *The School That Tried to End Racism* (2020) is a fascinating and inspiring look into proactively educating about racism and providing opportunities for dialogue and greater understanding. I urge you to watch it – it is a brilliant place to start.

Challenging indifference: Promoting justice

Inertia is the greatest barrier to change. A movement for change requires clarity of purpose and a coherent message that galvanises action and generates momentum. Two questions:

- How much focus and attention do you give to the ethos and values of your school?
- Are your values in need of an update? In other words, do they firmly and unequivocally affirm the value of every human person and do they translate into the everyday living reality of school life?

Many school mottos focus disproportionately on academic success, as if the social and moral impact of education is by-the-by. Yet the educational project should be all-encompassing. What is the end product? What are we trying to achieve? Surely producing outstanding global citizens equipped to make their best contribution to the world has to be about more than gaining a set of qualifications?

On this point, I know no better vehicle for whole school transformation than the Unicef UK Rights Respecting School Award. This is not an additional extra. Rather, it proposes that the rights of every child (as enshrined in law in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) should underpin everything we do and thereby means that we adopt an outcome-focused, children's rights-based approach to education. It aims to "create safe and inspiring places to learn, where children are respected, their talents are nurtured and they are able to thrive". Having led two schools to become Rights Respecting I have seen first-hand how firmly, deliberately, routinely and consistently affirming, defending and promoting the rights of all can create a lasting foundation for a fairer education system and greater inclusivity. SecEd

Peter Radford, founder of Beyond This, is a speaker, teacher and writer. This September he is hosting the first National Schools' Human Rights Conference addressing racial inequality. Peter is an Amnesty school speaker and assessor for the Unicef Right Respecting Schools Award.

Further information & resources

- National Schools' Human Rights Conference: Entitled 'FREE & EQUAL?', the event takes place in September 2021 and is an opportunity to start educating proactively about the reality of inequality and how we each have a part to play in building a fairer world. The event will be streamed live to schools across the UK and is sponsored by The Young People Index. Visit ***www.beyondthis.co.uk/stand-up-conference***
- Channel 4: *The School That Tried to End Racism*, June 2020: ***https://bit.ly/3t8doUp***
- Syed: *Rebel Ideas: The power of diverse thinking*, John Murray, 2019.
- Unicef UK Rights Respecting Schools: ***www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/***

Teach Like a Champion: Implementing Lemov

Teach Like a Champion is an internationally renowned educational book and theory that has been adopted by many schools looking to improve quality of teaching. ***Adam Riches*** explains how his school has implemented Lemov...

IMAGE: ADOBE STOCK

Finding a solution to improving whole school teaching and, in turn, learning is difficult. There are so many variables in different contexts and this makes finding a universal solution near impossible.

Quality first teaching must be at the forefront of our work, and in order for us to work effectively and efficiently, teachers need a solid framework on which they can base and adapt their practice. Moreover, when it comes to individual and collective progression, a school or a trust needs to have a commonality of language to ensure that their discussions, evaluations and adaptations of practice is synchronised.

As a teacher (and leader) in a school that has made rapid improvements, I know first-hand the power of the right pedagogical approach. For us, that approach has been found in former teacher and principal Doug Lemov's books *Teach Like a Champion* (2010) and *Teach Like a Champion 2.0* (2014).

Of course, *Teach Like a Champion* is one of many approaches, but we have used Lemov's work to effectively build consistency and quality into our teaching across every subject. So with that in mind, if you would like to find out why and how we have adopted Lemov, read on...

This article was inspired after I joined the panel for a recent episode of the *SecEd Podcast* focused on quality first teaching. You can still listen to this discussion (*SecEd*, 2021).

Teach Like a Champion

Teach Like a Champion is a book of instructions. It is a comprehensive guide to effective instructional teaching. The key for me is that the book is applicable to both novices and masters of the teaching craft. It covers everything from boosting academic rigour, to improving classroom management, and inspiring student engagement.

What makes the text so suitable for school improvement is the simplicity of the layout. The book is broken into chapters and sections, each dealing with an element of classroom practice. The clarity allows teachers to drill-down to basic skills and ensure that those skills are embedded in aspects of their lessons.

The key aspect is consistency and if you are familiar with the history of direct instruction (e.g. Rosenshine or Engelmann) you will know that logic and consistency of approach rule supreme. At its core, Lemov takes the best aspects of direct instruction and gives teachers the "how" to the theoretical "what".

When working with such a text, it is important to get the right balance between practical application and theoretical content. Simply arming teachers with a plethora of approaches is not sustainable or effective. Lemov underpins the practical instructions and elements with the theory that is so important for teachers to understand. He also gives the "why".

I should say at this point that this really is not a sales pitch for Lemov. What is important is that if you are looking to build consistency into your school development plan, using an accessible text or resource is of paramount importance, not only for the initial understanding and dissemination, but also to make the subsequent development more sustainable.

Quality of teaching

Using a set approach to improve the quality of teaching in school is not a silver bullet. It takes planning, clarity and buy-in from staff. Ensuring that you build a culture of growth and collective efficacy is of paramount importance. This can be done simply by ensuring that teachers see the value of the resources you are using to spur progression.

The approaches that have the most impact in my experience are those that make teachers more

effective and which reduce their workload burden. By applying concepts and approaches from Lemov's work, we were able to strip-back teaching to what is important – focusing on building learners who are independent and resilient.

What is needed is time. Time to train collectively and in departments, time to apply new approaches, and time to reflect and adapt.

What is crucial is that to see an improvement in the quality of teaching, teachers need the approaches and information to empower them but the freedom to apply the ideas in their own subject discipline.

Using Lemov has also allowed us to build a robust and effective quality assurance and coaching model that both supports individual progress and informs middle and senior leaders of areas that need further development in the classroom.

Having a consistency of language makes feedback and coaching effective within and across subjects (and even across phases) which opens up incredible progression opportunities for teachers.

Moreover, the collective empowerment of staff means that everyone is teaching on the same playing field, whether they be senior leader or trainee teacher.

Essentially, Lemov allowed us to define what we think exceptional teaching is; it gave us a benchmark from which we were able to build a clear and transparent blueprint.

Dissemination

At the start, the implementation of any new strategy needs a somewhat rigid input. Using an instructionalist approach, it was possible to explain, demonstrate and model strategies appropriate for our context.

Although Lemov comes with videos that show the approaches applied in the classroom, there still needed to be some translation into our context. The reality is, as discussed, that nothing can be truly used straight out of the tin.

Once the first phases of embedding were complete, it was possible to move to a more open and transactional model of training, allowing staff much more freedom in terms of how they engaged with the approaches. With any type of change, there are periods of calm and periods of rapid modification. What is important is that leaders are informed and adaptive and staff feel supported.

Lemov allowed us to build a culture of success in our school which was tightly linked to routines. This had a huge impact on behaviour and engagement. The approaches gave staff the consistency they needed to ensure that students knew what was what.

Similarly, as learners, the students quickly became accustomed to recall, modelled examples and independent practice, because they did them in every lesson.

More traditional approaches of change management simply would not have been so successful. I suppose in some ways, the tight nature of the early days "routined" the teachers as well as the students and so now teachers have the confidence to experiment more.

Drawbacks

As much as Lemov has revolutionised our collective approach and the way in which students are taught, there are always concerns. Using one idea as the basis for your approach to teaching and learning can mean that teachers begin to not look beyond that one school of thought.

Another danger is that teachers begin to look at teaching through a very specific lens and discount other approaches. We must work hard to avoid this.

Lemov was created in a context very different to ours, and it required some modification in terms of the language and application, mostly culturally, for it to be successful. It must be noted that whatever approach you take to pedagogy, there needs to be some free thinking and some element of adaptation.

SecEd

Adam Riches is a senior leader for teaching and learning, a Specialist Leader in Education and author of Teach Smarter (Routledge, 2020). Follow him on Twitter ***@TeacherMrRiches****. Read his articles for SecEd at* ***http://bit.ly/seced-riches***

Further information & resources

- Lemov: *Teach Like A Champion*: ***https://teachlikeachampion.com/***
- *SecEd Podcast*: Adam Riches features in a recent episode dedicated to Quality First Teaching, April 2021: ***https://bit.ly/2R5PIT8***
- *SecEd*: *Four ideas for applying Rosenshine's Principles*, McHugh, September 2019: ***http://bit.ly/2TWs3nO***

Emotionally based school refusal

Emotionally based school refusal occurs when a student refuses or feels genuinely unable to attend school because of stress or other wellbeing barriers. How should we respond? ***Darren Martindale*** offers some practical steps that schools can take

It should go without saying that regular attendance at school is a prerequisite for pupils' learning and achievement. With the exception of pupils who have access to a good quality and effective home education, if they are not in school, they are not going to be learning.

This will obviously have serious implications, not only for their academic progress, but also their social development, mental and emotional wellbeing and physical health, as well their future chances of progressing into further education, employment or training.

It is no wonder, then, that pupils who become persistently absent are a major worry for schools, as well as parents and other adults with responsibility for supporting them.

There can be a variety of reasons for none-attendance, and some of these may be relatively straightforward to address. Other attendance problems, however, may not be so simple to solve, and can be extremely worrying, especially when a child is already vulnerable.

Within children's services, when we look at the case histories of pupils who are vulnerable – children involved with social care and/or the youth justice system, for example – who have become disengaged from school, we often find that one of the first agencies to become involved was education welfare. Absence from school, especially in the earlier stages, can be a very good indicator of greater problems to come.

Emotionally based school refusal

But what to do about pupils who refuse to (or feel genuinely unable to) attend school because of stress or other barriers related to mental and emotional wellbeing, resilience, confidence or self-esteem? What if these issues are related to difficulties within a child's home life or other issues outside school?

Emotionally based school refusal (EBSR) or emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is the term generally given to cases when a child avoids school for emotional factors. One of the first local authorities to regularly coin the term and offer concrete guidance was West Sussex, and their contribution to this area deserves reference (2018). Another local authority that has developed useful guidance is Derbyshire (Hull & Clarke).

On the subject of anxiety, Derbyshire's guidance points out: "While EBSR is not, of itself, a mental health disorder, it is characterised by feelings of anxiety related to school attendance. Anxiety can be thought of as the body's warning signal and is a normal response to a perceived or real threat.

"It can be helpful in terms of preparing the body for action by releasing the hormone adrenaline ... this is crucial when we need to escape from an immediate physical threat. Likewise in some situations, such as in an interview or exam, a moderate amount of anxiety can help an individual focus and concentrate. However, high levels of anxiety can, over time, become harmful, particularly when it starts to interfere with an individual's ability to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday life." Fear. Anxiety. Negative thoughts. This grows into a powerful, embodied response akin to a physical illness.

Early intervention

The Department for Education offers general guidance for schools and local authorities on promoting school attendance (DfE, 2021). Most of the key principles of that guidance reinforces what I have to say here, such as the advice that school leaders should "make sure staff, pupils and families understand that absence from school is a potential safeguarding risk and understand their role in keeping children safe".

However, some other approaches, such as "use physical presence to reinforce routines and expectations on arrival and departure", while perfectly appropriate for the general school population, are likely to be counter-productive for pupils exhibiting EBSR. A more bespoke approach which is evidence-based and carefully tailored to a pupil's individual needs and circumstances is more likely to prove successful.

This has been supported by research. Kearney (2008) highlights the importance of understanding the underlying reasons behind a child's non-attendance. Kearney identified four potential key reasons: avoiding school-related stressors, avoiding aversive situations (such as social situations), attention needing or separation anxiety, or reinforcing activities (such as activities bringing enjoyment or gratification).

In most cases, there is no single or easily identifiable cause, but a complex interplay of different factors relating to school, the family/home, and other factors – often outside school – which would be contributing toward persistent school avoidance.

Clearly, early intervention is key and this will be supported by having a whole-school ethos which not only, as the DfE puts it, communicates "a clear vision for attendance, underpinned by high expectations and core values", but also recognises the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

As always, a properly managed assess-plan-do-review action plan is critical. In accordance with the principles of early intervention, schools should take a graduated approach, utilising the range of resources they have at their disposal and seeking advice and help at the appropriate stage and level, when it is needed.

As a pupil's needs become more complex or specific, the need for support from external agencies is likely to increase and strategies will become more detailed and carefully targeted. If it becomes necessary to create a modified timetable

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

or to seek alternative provision, that carefully staged approach will aid a school's understanding of their pupil's experiences, strengths, barriers and motivators, and help to ensure that the right package of support is put in place.

Assessment and planning

At the assessing and planning stage, it is useful to recognise that there are a number of factors which are often prevalent in relation to EBSR. These can be related to the school, the child, and their family or home environment. School factors can include bullying (one of the most common), difficulties with school work and academic demands (with the obvious implication of a possible need for an educational psychologist's assessment), anxieties over exams or other assessments, and difficulties with relationships with peers or adults.

Family-related factors can include traumatic changes such as bereavement, separation or divorce, high levels of stress within the family, and the health problems of parents or other family members.

Other factors related to the child can include confidence/self-esteem, hopes or aspirations, struggles with transition, anxieties such as separation anxiety, learning difficulties or the impact of past (and/or present) trauma. Then there are the wider factors around that child's life or environment – religious or cultural, socio-economic factors, even their journey into and from school, can all be relevant or even pivotal.

Other factors can include difficulties with diet or sleep, communication difficulties and risk-taking behaviour. At the most worrying end, it could be a symptom of criminal exploitation.

Covid-19 has introduced a whole range of additional (or potentially increased) factors, such as death/bereavement, social isolation, increased risk of domestic violence and/or mental health issues, and anxieties around returning to school after partial school closures during lockdown.

Push and pull

Think about the resilience or risk factors – or "push" and "pull" factors. What might push a child toward attending school more regularly? What might pull them away and further into a pattern of none-attendance? If these questions can be discussed with the pupil, their answers are likely to be the best place to start the planning process.

Do you, as a school, have the right tools for this? There are frameworks which will help to write a detailed "risk profile" for a vulnerable pupil, and to properly identify their barriers and push/pull factors, then balance or prioritise these in terms of risk level, urgency or complexity.

Ask your educational psychology, education welfare or inclusion service for advice and support, if you need it. School leaders should also talk to each other! Discuss experiences, learning – successes and challenges – and share good practice.

Good day/bad day

A "good day/bad day" discussion can be a useful way to unpick a child's difficulties with them. The following is adapted from advice developed by the Educational Psychology Service at Wolverhampton City Council:

- Ask the child to think back to the last bad day they had.
- Ask them to describe what happened and why it was bad.
- Discuss with them what could have helped them on this bad day.
- Now ask the child to describe what would make a good day.
- Who helped to make this day good and what did they do.

They may struggle to describe a good or a bad day, but can tell you about the last week in detail, allowing you to gently ask which bits were good and which not so good. Or they may be able to tell you about a good/bad day from their past. And if the child cannot tell you directly themselves, then family or support staff may be able to help.

A useful follow-up exercise to this can be to describe through words and/or pictures – simple drawings can be a powerful medium – the main elements of a good school, or a school that they like to go to, and then a bad school, or a school they would not want to go to.

Think about the pupil, their class mates, the other adults, the building itself, what would be happening and what that would look and feel like. By exploring the ideal school and classroom (and its opposite), we can start to dig down to their core values, or what is really important to them, and this information should be invaluable in informing your assess-plan-do-review plan to follow.

> *"In most cases, there is no single or easily identifiable cause, but a complex interplay of different factors relating to school, the family/home, and other factors – often outside school"*

A good support plan

A good support plan for EBSR is likely to contain certain key elements. One is a restorative focus on relationships – peer-to-peer, child-to-family, pupil-to-teacher, home to school. It may be, for instance, that the child's parents did not attend school regularly when they were young or had negative experiences of education.

Another is a sense of agency – pupils in this position often struggle with feelings of powerlessness or loss of control. Facilitate their input, look for ways to give choices around, for example, a staged return to school or the structure of the school day, at least in the early stages.

Transition is another area where pupils who struggle with anxiety are likely to need extra support. The transition from primary to secondary school, for instance – arriving, as it does, at a crucial stage in a young person's development – can be hugely unsettling for a pupil who lacks confidence or resilience, or struggles with anxiety in any way.

Such a change involves loss and separation, and again, children may be particularly sensitive to this given the additional uncertainties of the pandemic.

These pupils are likely to need additional support before, during and after such changes. Going a step further in making sure that they are confident in finding their way around the school, for example, or knowing how and where to spend their unstructured time such as lunch breaks, as well as using peer mentors and buddy systems, can be critical in preventing any anxieties from blowing up into bigger problems including EBSR.

So, the back-to-school plan needs to be very carefully thought out, flexible, is likely to be gradual (while a part-time timetable should normally be a short-term measure, it may be necessary to re-introduce the pupil to situations that provoke anxiety in a gradual way), and may include the support of other agencies outside school, such as education welfare, other children's services and therapeutic or counselling support if appropriate.

A good, individualised learning plan, developed along assess-plan-do-review principles, is not vague in any way. It should contain SMART, personalised targets (which the pupil has helped to design) to improve attendance and engagement. These targets will tell the pupil exactly what they are looking to achieve, in bite-sized chunks, and what success will look like when they get there.

The process can include writing, drawing, talking, scaling, reflecting, and being as creative as you can be to move forward, one step at a time, and to understand that it may be three steps forward and one step back, at times. And at those times – when things do not work out as planned – don't just throw the plan out: review, change, add, remove, adapt, and try again. SecEd

Darren Martindale is service manager, vulnerable learners – encompassing the role of the virtual school head – at City of Wolverhampton Council. Read his previous articles for SecEd via ***http://bit.ly/seced-martindale***

Further information & resources

- DfE: *Guidance: Improving school attendance: Support for schools and local authorities*, DfE, updated March 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3aoNyEZ***
- Hull & Clarke: *Emotionally Based School Refusal: A guide for primary and secondary schools*, Derbyshire County Council (undated): ***https://bit.ly/2QhQE71***
- Kearney: *School absenteeism and school refusal behaviour in youth: A contemporary review*, *Clinical Psychology Review (28, 3)*, March 2008: ***https://bit.ly/2OZuC8k***
- Martindale: Darren Martindale has written two in-depth Best Practice Focus downloads for *SecEd* on supporting vulnerable students (June 2019, June 2020). He has also given advice on two episodes of the *SecEd Podcast* (June 2020, February 2021): Find these resources at ***https://bit.ly/3eif346***
- West Sussex County Council: *Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Good practice and guidance for schools and support agencies*, Educational Psychology Service, 2018: ***https://bit.ly/3gqtgie***

Developing your school's long-term strategic plan

It is crucial that your long-term strategic plan helps you to sustain your school. ***Ciara Lamb*** outlines what to consider when deciding on your priorities and how to create a robust plan

Be clear on the difference between a long-term strategic plan and the school development plan

Your school's strategic plan and school development or improvement plan (SDP) go hand-in-hand. However, there are key differences between the two:

- A long-term strategic plan will offer a top-level overview of the direction of school improvement over the next three to five years. It will break-down how you are going to achieve your school's vision or mission statement.
- A SDP on the other hand will outline how you will achieve part of that strategy across a one, two or three-year period. It will include specific actions you need to take to meet your medium-term objectives and will keep you on track for achieving your long-term strategy.

Lean on school leaders and governors for their expertise

To develop a clear strategic plan, every headteacher will need to collaborate with senior leaders and governors (and trustees and trust leaders where applicable). However, how much input these individuals have will depend on your school's context and the experience of those around you. To help you develop your plan, you may need to lean on others for their expertise. You will want to involve your senior leaders, but who else you pull in will depend on any gaps in experience. For example, you may need individuals who have experience in business strategy (members of your board) or a specific area of focus such as curriculum or wellbeing (school leaders with those areas of responsibility).

Make sure your vision statement still reflects your aspirations

Your vision and values form the foundation of your strategic plan, so you will want to make sure you are still happy with your vision statement before you begin.

You likely will not need to review your vision statement in light of the changes over the past year and the issues that have been brought to the forefront (staff wellbeing, inclusivity/anti-racism, sexual harassment) – if it is a broad general statement, it should stand the test of time.

However, if your vision statement is more detailed, ask the questions: does it still reflect what is most important to our school and where we aspire to be? Your governors are responsible for developing your school's vision so speak to them about carrying out a review to assess whether it needs a refresh.

Hear from your school community to identify priorities for action

To understand what you need to focus on, you will need to be clear on the strengths and weaknesses in your school, taking into account any changes over the past year. Your self-evaluation form (SEF) and last Ofsted report will give you a good idea of what weaknesses you need to focus on, but you will also want to hear from your staff, pupils and parents.

You will not take forward every weakness you pick up on – this part of the process is just so you can get a feel for what is important to your school community and where they think the school needs to be. If you need more clarity on what you need to work on, use your usual methods for gathering insights from your school community, such as staff focus groups, informal gatherings with parents (virtual or in-person) and pupil, parent and staff questionnaires.

Once you have decided on priorities, check they tie into your vision

With your leadership team, discuss your weaknesses as a school and decide which areas you will work on in the plan. Have around four to six priorities that are going to help you achieve your vision. You will probably have a good idea of what these are going to be, but be sure that each priority ties in with your vision statement.

If you have a longer vision statement, you could chunk it down into separate components and think about where each priority fits in. If your statement is more general, ask what will happen if we don't prioritise this and what will happen if we do?

Write clear objectives and actions

To write-up your plan, you will need to turn your priorities into clear written objectives that give a short overview of what you want to do. Your objectives will need to be quite high-level. You are not trying to write a SDP at this stage, so these objectives might still feel quite big, but that is okay, as you will use your SDP to break them down further into specific objectives and actions. You will need to use everyone's experience about what good looks like to decide on your targets for your school.

Make sure the objectives give a clear idea of what you want to achieve and that the targets are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound).

> *"Your self-evaluation form and last Ofsted report will give you a good idea of what weaknesses you need to focus on, but you will also want to hear from your staff, pupils and parents"*

Map-out what you can realistically achieve each year

Plan carefully what you can do and when. For each of your objectives, you will likely have a range of actions – some will be smaller, quick wins and others will be bigger tasks that require more work and will take longer to embed.

Ideally, you only want to introduce one new concept at a time. For example, if one of your objectives is to provide exceptional teaching and learning, one of your actions may be to introduce a new assessment system. But do not do this at the same time as introducing another initiative, such as a new curriculum. Staggering initiatives will ensure staff are not overwhelmed.

Roll-out big initiatives gradually. Give yourself enough time to implement each new initiative. A template plan might involve:

- Year one: Choose your new system and run a pilot in one key stage or year group.
- Year two: Review what worked and improve your approach.
- Year three: Roll-out across the school.
- Year four: Review what worked across the whole school and improve your approach.

Also, identify anything that is time-sensitive. For example, if you are expecting an Ofsted inspection (e.g. in the next two years), make sure you focus first on actions that could affect your grade, so that you can show in your strategic plan that you are working on the weaknesses previously identified.

SecEd

Ciara Lamb is a specialist content editor at The Key, a provider of intelligence and resources for education leaders. The advice in this article is taken from The Key's resource How to develop your long-term strategic plan, which it worked on with Audrey Pantelis and Pete Crockett. Visit ***https://thekeysupport.com***

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From vision to impact: Strategic school leadership

A school's strategic education plan brings together its vision and values, achieving buy-in from the staff and community. In this *Best Practice Focus*, headteacher ***Ben Solly*** sets out his approach and offers practical advice. He discusses his vision, values and priorities, how to create highly effective teams, and how this all links to impact and outcomes

Culture eats strategy for breakfast: Vision, values & team

Ever since I heard the phrase "culture eats strategy for breakfast", I have worked hard to establish a healthy culture in each of the schools I have led. The culture and climate of a school are the pivotal foundations for building a successful organisation.

I like Andy Buck's really simple definition of these terms in his book *Leadership Matters* (2018). He states that culture is what we do in schools and climate is how it feels. I also like the thought of a healthy school culture as being "what everyone does, without having to be asked to".

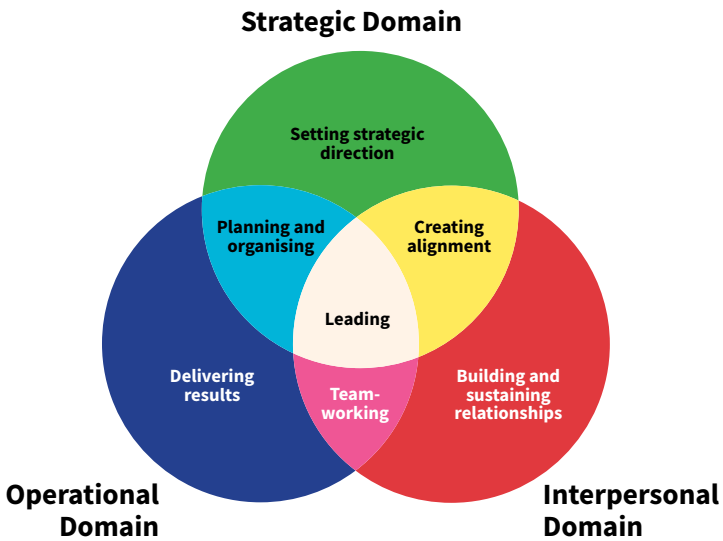
Schools thrive on the discretionary effort of diligent and committed staff and this can only be achieved through establishing a healthy school culture where staff are treated with respect, as professionals and feel valued.

Culture has to come before strategy because even with the greatest strategic plan ever created, a headteacher cannot achieve it alone.

However, schools cannot fully thrive on culture and climate alone. There has to be a plan. The plan needs to be thorough, meticulously organised and focus on the right things for the right reasons.

The plan should not be the sole property of the headteacher, it should be high-profile and transparent across the organisation; a document that all staff know about.

This article is aimed at schools leaders, aspiring and new headteachers who are considering how to construct their strategic plans in the coming years.



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Three leadership domains

I am certainly not advocating this as the best way, or the only way, to construct a strategic plan. It is merely the process I have developed over time, having stolen as many ideas as possible from people with whom I have worked and collaborated during my time as a headteacher.

I have taken inspiration from the Venn diagram model – illustrated here – put forward in the book *Leadership: All you need to know* (Pendleton & Furnham, 2012). The model is similar to Steve Radcliffe's Future, Engage, Deliver (2008), which provides a simple, no-nonsense model for strategic planning. Both of these ideas have helped me develop my own

Three domains: The Pendleton Venn Diagram states that leadership always requires attending to three domains: strategic, operational and interpersonal. The diagram contains seven tasks that leaders need to achieve (graphic adapted from Pendleton & Furnham, 2012).

systems for creating a strategic planning framework in schools.

This article is divided into three core sections, focusing on how school leaders can effectively operate in the three core areas of the Pendleton Venn Diagram, namely the Strategic Domain (by setting a strategic vision, creating alignment and designing a strategic plan), the Interpersonal Domain (how we can create highly effective teams), and the Operational Domain (how we actually get things done in schools).

The Strategic Domain

Vision

It all starts with a vision. There should be a simple, one sentence vision that describes the raison d'être of the organisation in a coherent, concise and memorable statement. Distilling everything a school is aiming for into a meaningful sentence is extremely hard and should not be done in isolation.

In my first week of headship at Uppingham Community College (UCC), I spent a lot of time talking to staff as individuals, in small teams and collectively before I condensed everything I had learned about the organisation into a vision statement that could be adopted by the entire school community.

Values

All schools will have values, but the acid test is whether everyone in the organisation can name them and genuinely claim that they demonstrate them each day. I look at many school websites and wonder if even the headteacher can recite the long list of very credible values that the school has listed.

It is hard to disagree with any of the values school use, they are almost exclusively ethical and speak to the altruistic nature that one would expect from educators. However, my belief is that schools should select a manageable number of values and these should form the foundation of everything the school does.

For the values to have credibility and authenticity among the school community, every adult should model them in every interaction they have, every email they write, every lesson they teach, every staff meeting they are part of.

This starts and finishes with the headteacher, modelling the values and reinforcing their importance daily so that the staff know and understand what is expected. The values should permeate every aspect of a school strategic plan and carry significant currency throughout the school.

Ben Solly

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Creating alignment

I frequently hear the term "buy-in" used to describe the notion of getting everyone in school pulling in the same direction. I prefer to use the term alignment. It is crucial for headteachers to create alignment throughout the organisation and this encompasses more than just the staff signing up to the vision statement.

Alignment, in simple terms, is ensuring all staff are working towards the same vision, aiming for the same objectives, using the same strategies and working within the cultural expectations of the school community.

Alignment is achieved when all staff embody and consistently display the school values in all aspects of their role in school. Alignment is about creating a critical mass of staff who genuinely subscribe to the vision of the school and then work diligently towards achieving it.

This cannot be achieved if the headteacher creates the strategic plan in isolation; if this happens then people are likely to resist the plan as they feel they have not been involved. Heads need to strike the skilful balance of being somewhat consultative, in order to understand the opinions of staff, but then decisive enough to identify the main strategies that will be used.

Another key aspect of creating alignment is communication. A successful headteacher always communicates effectively and I frequently turn to the words of Sir John Dunford: "Leadership is 10 per cent doing things and 90 per cent explaining why you've done them."

When it comes to communicating a whole school strategic plan, it is important for staff to know what the school is aiming for (the objectives), how they are going to achieve them (the strategies), and what success will look like (impact).

However, it is essential they understand why those objectives have been selected and why those strategies have been chosen. Headteachers should put considerable thought into how to communicate this in the most effective way in order to develop a high degree of alignment.

Finally, alignment within a school community is only possible if the strategic plan is realistic and achievable. I have seen many strategic plans that are extremely lengthy, to the point where I question whether the senior leadership team or even the head themselves could remember everything that it contains.

This overloading of strategies might look thorough and comprehensive, but the reality is that a lengthy plan will stretch a senior leadership team too thinly and the impact is that nothing gets done to a high standard, as the team is trying to achieve too many different objectives.

Essentially, when it comes to strategic planning, less is more. I encourage my team to try to get any document they present to me, staff or governors onto one side of A4, and while this is not always possible, it certainly encourages leaders to use concise language and distil ideas and strategies into a succinct, easy-to-digest format.

> *"This starts and finishes with the headteacher, modelling the values and reinforcing their importance daily"*

Below is a recommended format for constructing a concise but comprehensive strategic plan.

Introduction and rationale

This is the ideal opportunity to introduce the purpose of the plan. What is it for? Who is it for? What are the educational philosophies that underpin it? How have the wider staff body been involved in its creation?

This is the head's opportunity to create alignment by articulating a powerful message that inspires the staff body and leaves them wanting to know what the plan contains.

It should embody the school vision and values and speak from the heart. It should be no longer than one side of A4.

The strategic priorities

I tend to use only three or four main objectives. These are the four main areas that everything we do as a school should be working towards. I often say to our staff, if we are investing our time, energy or resources into something that does not contribute towards one of these priorities, we should stop doing it.

As an example, the three education strategic priorities for my school in our current plan are below (note that there are other school priorities pertaining to resources, site and finances that are in a separate Resources Plan):

- At UCC we create the conditions for everyone to thrive.
- At UCC students make excellent progress in their education and holistic development.
- At UCC we have excellent student behaviour and effective safeguarding.

From these priorities, the basis of the plan is formed. I use a simple system I call Provision, Impact, Evidence – PIE for short.

- Provision includes all the main strategies that will be used to achieve the identified priorities.
- Impact identifies how we will measure success.
- Evidence is where we will document all of this for external scrutiny of governors or Ofsted.

I tend to present this in a tabular format, with one page of A4 for each school priority. The table becomes a working document

that is updated on a half-termly basis, using a BRAG format:

- Blue: Objective achieved and embedded.
- Green: Objective achieved.
- Amber: Objective on course for completion.
- Red: Objective requires further intervention.

Selecting the strategies is a critical aspect of the plan (provision). In simple terms, these are the things that the school will do in order to achieve the identified school priorities. The responsibility for most of these strategies will reside with the senior leadership team, therefore it is essential they have ownership of the areas they will be leading.

Employing a distributed leadership model with the senior leadership team – I have written previously in *SecEd* about distributed leadership (Solly, 2018) – will ensure they have the autonomy and authority to lead these strategies; it is the headteacher's responsibility to ensure they are accountable for delivering the desired impact.

Making the plan a reality

I cannot recall ever seeing a school's strategic plan until I joined a senior leadership team. I think it is counterproductive to hide these documents away from staff, but I know that in many schools this still happens.

I believe that the plans should be available for all staff to see at any time if there is any chance of the strategies being achieved. Some schools publish their plans on the website for an additional element of transparency to their school community.

Ultimately, an enormous amount of leadership resource is invested into the construction of a strategic plan. As such, the worst possible thing to do is file it away or lock it in a draw for the rest of the year. The best plans are tweaked, refined and updated regularly throughout the year – they are living, collaborative documents that multiple leaders contribute to.

The Interpersonal Domain

I will now recommend the next steps which lead towards the delivery of the plan. I will focus on the people in schools and how we can most effectively utilise the skills, knowledge, motivation and commitment of our workforce to ultimately deliver a superb education for the young people we serve.

> *"The more teachers are encouraged to work together, learn from each other and collaborate in research-based learning activities, the more effective the school becomes"*

Building the Social Capital in a school

If you consider the term "capital" in a business context, it refers to any value added to an organisation that increases its net worth. In educational terms we can easily understand the term "value-added" in relation to student progress, but my experience has shown me that we do not always implicitly understand how to recognise and develop the professional capital of the staff in our schools.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, 2013) helpfully dissect professional capital into three distinct components: human, social and decisional capital.

Human capital is the talent, ability and skill of the staff within a school – essentially I interpret this as how effective your teachers are in the classroom in terms of their subject knowledge, understanding of pedagogy and their ability to unite these into high-quality lessons.

Decisional capital is the capability of your teachers and staff to make effective judgements within their work – judgements on how to deal with situations, on the quality of student work, on how to manage and lead individuals and teams. I think of decisional capital as something that evolves and develops over time as we accrue experiences and learn from mistakes.

And perhaps most important is the concept of social capital – the way in which teachers and other members of staff within a school collaborate and work together in a collegiate and supportive culture.

This is a critical element of the Interpersonal Domain in the Pendleton model. There is powerful research that points towards schools making significant and sustainable improvements due to an investment and dedication towards developing the social capital within the school. The more teachers are encouraged to work together, learn from each other and collaborate in research-based learning activities, the more effective the school becomes.

Where human capital focuses on the talents and skills of individual teachers and decisional capital draws upon their capacity to make effective judgements, the concept of social capital is concerned with the way in which teachers work together within an organisation.

Schools can structure their CPD programmes and internal meeting structures to allow teachers to work more effectively together and as a result social capital can develop. We should ask ourselves questions such as:

- How much time do we give to staff to collaborate on joint planning or joint evaluation activities?
- How much time do we spend in unnecessary meetings discussing things that do not make the difference. Could we use this time together more effectively?
- The pandemic has forced us to strip away many of the events and processes that clutter a school calendar and eat away at teachers' time. How many of these will we re-introduce when normal service resumes?
- How do we use processes that can be viewed as oppressive or punitive, such as lesson observations or performance management, to positively impact on our staff and develop social capital within our teachers?
- Are our CPD programmes focused on harnessing internal expertise within the school or do we rely on buying in external resources?

It is unrealistic that the social capital of a school will naturally increase or improve. It should be deliberately planned for by leaders as part of a strategy to develop a highly effective workforce.

Putting staff first

Many schools proudly state that they always put their students first. However commendable this might seem at first, it can actually be counterproductive. If the students in a school are always considered first, when it comes to key decisions, strategies and policies, what can transpire is that staff suffer from unworkable conditions and subsequently this can lead to burn-out and a high staff turnover. This, in turn, will result in students' education becoming compromised because:

- Staff are too exhausted to perform their roles effectively.
- Staff are absent because they are unable to sustain the levels of performance required by school policies.
- Staff turnover becomes high because of the unrealistic conditions; this leads to an inconsistency of adults in school and potential recruitment problems.

Instead, if the emphasis is flipped and schools put staff first, everyone in the school community can benefit.

If a school can create the conditions in which the staff can thrive in their professional roles, the students will subsequently receive a great education because

all staff are performing to a high standard.

In this school, we have highly motivated teachers, who have their workload considered and managed effectively by the school leaders, and whose professionalism is valued and trusted. Compare this with a tired, unmotivated and undervalued workforce – which set of teachers would you want teaching your own children?

Developing leaders

If we are to develop and sustain strong relationships in schools, as outlined in the Interpersonal Domain of the Pendleton model, then school leaders play a critical role.

The headteacher cannot do this alone. Indeed it is unrealistic for the senior leadership to take on this responsibility all for themselves; it is a collective leadership effort across the school. Of course, everything starts with the headteacher demonstrating highly effective leadership behaviours, which are then modelled consistently by the senior leadership team. This can then permeate into the middle leadership layer within a school, who in turn develop and sustain strong relationships with the staff in their departments.

Andy Buck explains this expertly in his blog on discretionary effort (2018), where he outlines the single most influential factor in determining discretionary effort in an individual member of staff is their relationship with and respect for their direct line manager.

Therefore, it is essential for the school to take the development of leaders seriously. Are there progression routes mapped out for those aspiring towards leadership positions? Are staff able to access National Professional Qualifications for leadership, or does the school organise its own leadership development programme?

The development of leaders is not something that happens by magic, it is again something that should be deliberately planned for within a school's strategic plan. I refer you again to my previous *SecEd* piece on developing leadership capacity through a distributed leadership model (Solly, 2018).

Once a school begins its journey towards developing a sustainable and authentic leadership model, they have a much greater chance of building strong relationships across all departments within the school, ultimately ensuring that all staff are working collaboratively towards the school vision and strategic objectives.

Building discretionary effort

I personally define discretionary effort as the work that people in schools complete that falls outside of their substantive role. This is work that is done for free – no extra pay and no time in lieu accrued.

In many jobs outside of education the basic premise will be that there are a set number of hours per week, those hours are completed and at the end of each shift the employee goes home. However, the teaching profession relies heavily on teachers working hours way beyond those of the school day.

There are the obvious imperatives such as planning and marking. However, there are so many other activities that occur within the school environment that enrich the lives of students and create a positive atmosphere for learning.

Such activities will only occur because of the goodwill of teachers; people going above and beyond what is detailed in their job descriptions because they know it will have a positive impact on their students. Schools can only thrive when their workforce collectively delivers a significant level of discretionary effort.

This is an essential ingredient in the Interpersonal Domain in Pendleton's leadership model. If we are to build and sustain positive relationships and highly effective teams, then discretionary effort must be high across the school.

The question is, how do we create an environment where school staff freely contribute large amounts of discretionary effort? Creating a culture within a school where discretionary effort is high takes a long time, and it can be eroded very quickly with the wrong approach.

The headteacher has a crucial role to play here, the most important in the school. The head sets the tone for everyone in the school community and is responsible for establishing the conditions and culture where everyone can thrive. Staff need to feel valued and trusted and the working practices across the school need to be sensible and appropriate.

There are many, many notable quotes regarding team-work that most school leaders could cite as pertinent mantras to live by. However, one that perennially resonates with me is from Henry Ford, who said: "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is a process, working together is success."

For school leaders, creating alignment among your staff and supporting everyone to collectively work together in a highly effective and impactful manner is perhaps the most important aspect of the job and is one we should take very seriously indeed.

The Operational Domain

The final section of the Venn diagram concerns how we actually get things done in schools. It is about delivering results. It is about impact.

Delivering results

"However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results." Winston Churchill

Like it or loathe it, our education system is a results-based ➤

business. Headteachers are ultimately accountable for the results achieved by students each year. It is up to school leaders to develop a vision, create a strategy, deploy an effective team and then deliver impact. Sounds simple doesn't it? Far from it.

The high-stakes, high-accountability nature of the English education system has certainly increased the pressure on school leaders to deliver results rapidly. Occasionally, this has driven perverse incentives across the system, with some schools taking decisions which are often questionable, sometimes unethical.

Thankfully, the days of playing qualification games with the curriculum are gone, and a bright light has been shone on shameful off-rolling practices. Nevertheless, the pressure on heads to deliver impact quickly is often overwhelming and it takes a brave school leader to put their faith in long-term, sustainable school improvement strategies, over quick-fixes and short term gains.

However, this long-sighted approach to leadership is exactly what I am advocating, and as Dave Harris points out in his book *Brave Heads* (2012), we must work out how to lead our schools without selling our souls.

Coming back to that phrase, "culture eats strategy for breakfast", I believe a strong school culture is more powerful than any strategic plan. There does, however, need to be a plan so that we can align all of our well-meaning, committed and talented staff in the same direction, and ensure they are all striving for the same goals.

This covers the Strategic and Interpersonal Domains of the Pendleton model. However, unless school leaders actually make things happen, the objectives of any plan will not be delivered and little will be achieved. This is why the Operational Domain is the important, final aspect of this leadership model. Here are my practical tips on how to successfully navigate the Operational Domain.

Trusting the process

"You don't get results by focusing on results. You get results by focusing on the actions that produce results."
Mike Hawkins

There is no question that the education system we work within is challenging. It can be cut-throat, ruthless and unforgiving. Accountability measures, league tables, financial pressures and the pressure associated with school inspection make up just a few of the many burdens.

The role of a headteacher has become akin to that of a Premier League football manager and shelf-life for some can be brutally short. In simple terms, the pressure is on for us to deliver results quickly.

However, the most effective headteachers are "architects", not "surgeons" (*SecEd*, 2018), who build sustainable self-improving schools that focus on the core purposes of teaching and learning in order to improve results. They do not play games with the curriculum, they don't work staff to within an inch of their lives. Instead, they carefully design authentic and sustainable ways of working that enable their staff to thrive and deliver a great education for their students.

Given the competitive conditions within our education system, schools are perennially at the behest of an outcomes-driven culture. Therefore it is no surprise that many school leaders become obsessed with achieving the highest possible performance outcomes in the shortest possible time. However, in order to create a school that continues to grow and develop beyond our own tenure, we must "trust the processes" that generate these outcomes.

For me, this is simple; we should teach students really well, as well as we possibly can do, and therefore the vast majority of our time, energy and resource in school should be directed at supporting highly effective teaching.

School leaders must decide the key strategies that will be deployed in order to achieve their desired vision, and then create a culture in school where all staff can develop and deliver these strategies to the highest possible standard.

> *"They do not play games with the curriculum, they don't work staff to within an inch of their lives. Instead, they carefully design authentic and sustainable ways of working that enable their staff to thrive"*

As a result, we stop chasing outcomes and focus on the process of teaching. In simple terms, if we want our examination outcomes to improve, then the focus should not be on chasing decimal points in a Progress 8 calculation, it should be on enabling teachers to deliver the curriculum in the most effective way possible.

What does success look like?

When we teach students, we will often spend a considerable amount of time modelling a desired answer or response for them. This is to show them "what a good one looks like" and the most effective teachers will break this modelling down into simple, memorable "chunks".

We do this to show students what the success criteria is, and then provide them with a series of steps which will enable them to achieve the desired outcome.

However, how often do school leaders do this with the staff they lead? How explicit are we with what our success criteria is for a particular objective, and how much time do we spend modelling or coaching the person that is delivering it? We do this without

thinking for our students, why not for the adults in school?

The art of professional modelling for the staff in schools is achieved by striking a balance between not being too patronising, alongside being really clear about what is expected from people. From experience, I know that staff appreciate clarity and crystal-clear expectations, so it is important for school leaders to identify the success criteria of a particular objective during the planning stage.

For less experienced leaders, they may require slightly more explicit modelling, whereas more experienced colleagues will be more than capable of delivering the strategies and achieving the desired impact with less direct support.

Removing all the nonsense

One of the most important roles of the modern headteacher is to remove as much red-tape, bureaucracy and nonsense from the professional life of a teacher as possible. Teachers are our most expensive resource from a financial perspective, but I feel that too many heads do not place as much emphasis as they should on creating the conditions in which their teachers' effectiveness can be optimised.

If we are serious about delivering results, we need to strip away everything we possibly can that impairs a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. This should start with creating systems in school that allow teachers to deliver the curriculum in a classroom that is disruption free.

In his book *Education Exposed* (2020), Sam Strickland likens low-level disruption to kryptonite for teachers. It is incumbent on headteachers to take a leading role in ensuring low-level disruptions, or "white noise", in classrooms are dealt with swiftly and effectively so that the teacher can focus on delivering the curriculum and sharing their expertise.

Another practical step headteachers can take to support teachers in being highly effective is to make some of the more traditional processes in school work for teachers, rather than against them.

An example of this is performance management and performance-related pay. Perennially, these are the bane of a teacher's life, when they are set data-driven targets that are probably unachievable and inevitably demoralising.

Instead of this process, why not introduce an annual cycle of Personal Improvement Planning, where each teacher identifies an area of their pedagogy that they wish to develop and then their CPD programme is personalised towards achieving this? Why do we continue to embark on judgemental lesson observations, when we could instead offer developmental coaching opportunities for our staff and harness the internal expertise that already exists within our schools? For more on the CPD culture at UCC, look-up my previous *Best Practice Focus* for *SecEd* (Solly, 2020).

Finally, given that many school calendars have become completely "decluttered" during the pandemic, we should be seriously questioning which events, meetings and time commitments for staff will be re-introduced when the world returns to some form of normality.

Finding opportunities in the school calendar and the 1,265 directed hours that free teachers up to focus on planning, providing quick and effective feedback, or developing resources will be highly valued by staff and contribute significantly towards schools actually being able to deliver results in a sustainable manner.

Intelligent accountability

Holding colleagues to account is an important aspect of leadership in schools. We all have a responsibility to deliver results and have impact in our roles. However, the manner in which we go about this is critical.

The most effective schools have systems and routines, which are crystal-clear and within which all members of staff know their roles and what is expected of them. This starts with the most basic element of getting people's job descriptions right. This is a painstaking process but is the most effective starting point for making people accountable.

The second step is to design and implement quality assurance systems within the school that are supportive, collaborative and not punitive. They exist not to catch people out, but to ensure the school is focused on incrementally becoming more effective.

In order to achieve this, the systems must be fair, mutually agreed, understood and consistent. They must be owned by all leaders in school and should be completed with senior leaders working alongside middle leaders, and with middle leaders working alongside teaching staff. They should be considered as part of a learning and development process and they should form an authentic aspect of the way a school operates.

A good example of this is the Department Self Review process that we operate at my school. In the design of this process, we took the previous model of quality-assurance, which involved each department being reviewed by the senior leadership team every two years, and created a yearly cycle, in which each department reviews their own provision every term.

The senior leadership team is used to coach the middle leaders towards identifying the right priorities and delivering the selected strategies in order to achieve a positive impact. By flipping the system from being a "done to" process, to one that is "done with", we have created an authentic and sustainable quality-assurance cycle that is owned and valued by middle leaders.

Conclusion

Ultimately, whatever our role is in a school, most of us entered the education profession because we wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people. There is an unquestionable degree of altruism that comes hand-in-hand with being a teacher, and I know from experience that teachers take great pride in the outcomes their students achieve. The same can be said of most school leaders who I have encountered, although there is no doubt that the pressure of leading a school can sometimes cloud the judgement of headteachers.

I strongly believe that schools can achieve genuine, long-term, sustainable growth if they commit themselves to aspects that make the biggest difference. This means prioritising teaching and learning, establishing a school culture and climate where discretionary effort is high, and retaining an ethical values-based approach to school improvement. SecEd

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Five steps to staff wellbeing

After the year we have had, schools must be placing staff wellbeing at the top of the agenda – and it is not hard to do. ***Sophie Howells*** offers five easy approaches to get you started

As we head towards the mid-point of the final term of another extraordinary year, there are many reasons for teachers and school leaders to feel proud of all they have achieved during the coronavirus crisis.

But we know the mental health and wellbeing picture is stark for many. Our most recent YouGov/TeacherTrack polling, carried out as schools fully re-opened, found that eight out of 10 teachers (82 per cent) described themselves as stressed from work. More than four in 10 (46 per cent) said that pressures on their mental health and wellbeing have caused them to consider leaving the profession this academic year (Education Support, 2021).

What can schools do?

We know from our own research that teachers and school staff feel deeply appreciated by pupils, students, parents and colleagues – those they work most closely with.

In our report, *Covid-19 and the classroom* (2020), 61 per cent told us that they felt appreciated during the first stage of the pandemic by parents and carers and it is this appreciation which has helped keep many going through all the challenges of the past year.

Yet we also know that teachers and school leaders do not feel anywhere near the same levels of appreciation by important groups like education departments and government – the decision-makers with whom they do not have direct contact.

Before this academic year began, when we asked teachers and other education professionals if they felt their work has been valued during the pandemic, only 15 per cent said they felt appreciated by the government.

Teachers, school leaders and other school staff have not felt their concerns reflected. Instead they have felt the direct stress and anxiety of constantly changing government advice. The past year has exacerbated an existing feeling for a great many school staff of simply not being listened to or heard.

> *"All people feel appreciated if they feel heard. There may not be immediate solutions to every problem, but feeling listened to and understood are essential first steps to improved wellbeing"*

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Creating a culture of appreciation is essential for any school seeking to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of its staff.

Putting mental health and wellbeing at the heart of schools demonstrates real appreciation. It will make a mentally healthy workforce who are less likely to exit teaching. It will also support those who might be struggling to perform at their best – especially during the pandemic.

And of course, while external pressures cannot be controlled, schools can take steps to demonstrate appreciation for teachers and staff. Here are five top tips.

Listen to staff: All people feel appreciated if they feel heard. There may not be immediate solutions to every problem, but feeling listened to and understood are essential first steps to improved wellbeing. How can your school make sure staff feel heard? It might be a staff survey or regular ways to check-in informally with how staff are feeling.

Make a plan: Once you have listened to staff, you can demonstrate that you are taking action where it is possible. This shows that concerns are being taken seriously and that time and effort is being put into addressing them.

Create an open culture: Staff need to feel able to talk safely and openly about any challenges and issues they may have. School staff need to feel able to ask questions or disagree. A safe and open culture where that is possible can have a big impact on morale and individual wellbeing.

Invest in line managers' skills: Managers need to be supported to develop the skills needed to support others. They need to know how best to support their teams and have the necessary skills to feel confident when having conversations about mental health.

Support people when they're not at their best: This is the ultimate sign of appreciation. Staff need to know that their employer will support them in tough times. A recognition that we are human and all have times when we are not at our best can be the difference between a talented teacher staying at a school or leaving.

Conclusion

Finally, do not forget that Education Support's helpline can be a lifeline for those who are struggling. It is free, confidential and available 24/7 (see below).

Sophie Howells is from Education Support, a UK charity dedicated to improving the mental health and wellbeing of the education workforce. Read her previous articles for SecEd via ***http://bit.ly/seced-howells***

Further information & resources

- Education Support: For help or advice on any issue facing those working in education, contact the free 24-hour helpline on 08000 562 561 or ***www.educationsupport.org.uk***
- Education Support: *Covid-19 and the classroom: Working in education during the coronavirus pandemic*, July 2020: ***https://bit.ly/2HUrcQy***
- Education Support: *Mental health decline in schools could push more teachers to leave*, March 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3v9Y8Yn***
- *The SecEd Podcast*: Our podcast episode on staff wellbeing features advice from Education Support CEO Sinéad McBrearty among other experts (September 2020). You can listen for free via ***https://bit.ly/3m4Gwto***

Making Every Lesson Count: Six pedagogical principles

The education book *Making Every Lesson Count* describes six pedagogical principles – from challenging to modelling to feedback – that can give us a great framework for teaching. ***Helen Webb*** offers some ideas and tips for how these principles can work in practice

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

I recently started teaching at Orchard Mead Academy – a secondary school in Leicester that has a higher than average proportion of disadvantaged students and students with English as an additional language.

One strategy that has contributed to rapid school improvement has been to use Shaun Allison and Andy Tharby's book *Making Every Lesson Count* (2015) to inform our teaching and learning model. The book describes six interconnected pedagogical principles that provide a framework for great teaching: challenge, explanation, modelling, deliberate practice, questioning, and feedback.

Adopting this clear framework has given staff a common language to use when planning and delivering lessons and provided a focus when assessing and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Ultimately our teaching and learning model attempts to create a schema in the minds of our teachers about effective learning environments. This article offers practical ideas inspired by these six principles and our teaching and learning model.

Challenge...

...so that students have high expectations of what they can achieve.

It is key that students and teachers recognise that high expectations and challenge is not reserved for those in top sets or who are labelled as more able.

Challenge involves pushing students into the struggle zone where they need to think and where learning takes place. Reiterating the point to students that it is okay to get things wrong, but it is not okay to not try is really important – no blank pages please! Remember:

- Know your subject well: Articulating challenging aspects of a course or common misconceptions can be motivating when framed appropriately to students. We might say to key stage 3 students: "This is GCSE-level work you are tackling today!"
- It can be useful to refer to examiners' reports for aspects of your subject that many students find challenging.
- There should be an expectation for everyone to aim high and achieve the objectives of the lesson. Avoiding the use of "all", "most", "some" when sharing lesson objectives is a good starting point. Shift away from having multiple versions of worksheets and towards the inclusion of scaffolding strategies that work towards the same outcome. One simple tweak is to say to pupils: "If you know what you are doing, great – ignore me and carry on! I will go through another example with the rest of you."
- Expecting 100 per cent participation is another way of demonstrating high expectations. Three ideas: A hands-down policy and cold-calling (ask your question first, then pause to encourage all students to think before stating the chosen student's name); students can "find a friend" to get help with an answer, but they then need to repeat the correct answer back to you; mini-whiteboards or electronic versions (whiteboard.fi or spiral.ac) can increase engagement – so you are not just asking one student one question at a time.

Explanations...

...to enable students to acquire new knowledge and skills.

Subject knowledge is vital. Teachers with a strong subject knowledge are better equipped to give clear, understandable and varied explanations. They are also better at planning for and spotting misconceptions, providing analogies and giving a variety of concrete examples to help get their

explanations to stick. Teachers who can speak with confidence and share interesting anecdotes, are also much more able to inspire young people in their subject. Consider how teachers in your department are supported to improve their own subject knowledge. Some other suggestions:

- Draw upon a variety of revision guides and textbooks to select and construct the most coherent explanations of a particular topic. Also, complete yourself any activities you are setting so that you can pre-empt the pitfalls and address them in your explanations.
- Keep your explanations concise and relevant by paying close attention to exam board specifications and mark schemes.
- Script and practise giving explanations for tricky concepts ahead of your lesson. Can you give a great explanation without relying on your PowerPoint?

Modelling...

...so that students know how to apply knowledge and skills.

Useful questions to consider before you begin modelling include: What is the subject content or skills I want the students in front of me to learn? What does a grade 9 or A* answer look like for this task?

- When setting up an activity, share with students "what a good one looks like" either via success criteria and/or deconstructing exemplar pieces of past student or teacher-created work. Critiquing a less than perfect exemplar can help students to understand how to improve work.
- Display galleries of excellence in corridors, classrooms or via school social media accounts.
- Pre-teach and model Tier 2 formal vocabulary and Tier 3 subject-specific and academic language (see the work of Dr Isabel Beck). Highlight, define and refer to displayed key terms during your explanations.
- Encourage students to study worked examples prior to independent practice through an "I do, we do, you do" approach.
- Model your own thinking so students see how you solve the problem; breaking down the procedure into small step-by-step chunks or by articulating your choice of vocabulary or sentence construction for example.
- Provide sentence starters or phased examples of calculations as scaffolding.
- Encourage students to "say it before you write it" if they are struggling to get started.
- Pause the lesson to share (take photos, use a visualiser or read aloud) samples of brilliant work from multiple students that are in working progress to provide students the opportunity to compare and improve their own.
- When students are stuck, encourage them to reflect on prior knowledge and skills to help them tackle and deconstruct the problem.

Deliberate practice...

...so that key knowledge and skills become embedded.

Deliberate practice provides an opportunity for students to complete and receive feedback on learning activities that focus on well-defined, specific goals and which push students beyond their comfort zones. Deliberate practice should ultimately lead to the development of a mental model of expertise.

In my own subject (science), in order to ensure more time for deliberate practice, rather than spending time copying out notes students are given a summary of the teacher explanation in the style of a Cornell Notes page to stick in their book. Then, during the deliberate practice phase of the lesson, students will quietly and independently answer comprehension-style questions based on their understanding of the teacher explanation/Cornell Notes. They will then progress to a series of more complex ramped application-style questions. We might also provide sentence starters or vocabulary word banks to scaffold responses.

Elsewhere in science, my students complete weekly low-stakes 10-question multiple-choice quizzes and longer monthly quizzes with multiple-choice and short-answer responses. The content of these retrieval quizzes draws upon on a gradually increasing range of threshold concepts and key facts that students "must know" in order to develop a deeper understanding of, and fluency in, the subject.

Questioning...

...so that students are made to think hard with breadth, depth and accuracy.

Questions form a key part of our basic lesson structure at Orchard Mead:

- Lessons are introduced with a Big Question (rather than a simple title) to ignite curiosity and frame learning intentions from the outset.
- All typical lessons begin with five "Do Now" drill questions that assess knowledge from a variety of previously taught topics. This is a routine settling activity but allows us to introduce spaced and retrieval practice too.
- Drill questions are followed by a series of recap questions that revisit and activate prior learning and which directly relate to and scaffold the content of an upcoming lesson. This important activity enables you to check your students' current understanding and pitch your upcoming "explanation" much more appropriately.
- Hinge-point questions enable the teacher to know whether it is appropriate to move on, to briefly recap, or completely reteach a key concept before moving on to the next part of the lesson or to progress from surface to deeper learning.
- Questions are asked throughout the lesson that check for understanding, probe, challenge, promote oracy and encourage metacognition. For example: How do you know that is the correct answer? How did you work it out? What makes it a good answer? What might an alternative viewpoint be? Provide students with possible answers to choose from if their initial response is "I don't know." Don't forget to give students adequate thinking time for challenging questions.

Feedback...

...so that students think about and further develop their knowledge and skills.

The key to making feedback effective is in the quality of what you say or write. Feedback should be goal-orientated, understandable, actionable, specific and personalised. Can students improve as a result of what you have said to them? Is the language you use simple, clear and understandable? For example,

- "Your answer is too vague." Do students know what vague means?
- "Add more detail." Such as what? Consider including an exemplar in your feedback.

High-quality feedback is much easier to construct if the success criteria is explicit from the start. If the goal is clear, it is then much easier to see the gap between where the student is now and what they need to do to get there.

And remember – feedback does not have to be written down. A lot of great feedback happens while you are circulating your classroom: Mohammed, you may want to check your response to Q1 again; Sarah, what about your units?

Other feedback ideas and tips include:

- Quickly draw students' attention to errors using red dot, yellow box, symbol or margin-marking strategies.
- Ask a student to read their response aloud/or place on a visualiser. Provide this student with detailed verbal feedback in front of the whole class, then ask the class to amend their responses if the same feedback applies to them. Repeat with a more or less able student to provide a variety of feedback.
- Use codes, comment banks, rubrics and checklists to deliver detailed feedback against success criteria.

Other ideas for quick, effective feedback include:

- Use self-marking Microsoft Forms/Google Quizzes for low-stakes testing to quickly diagnose misconceptions and gaps in knowledge and to provide more time for focused feedback.
- Provide DIRT (Dedicated Improvement and Reflection Time) tasks for students to respond to the feedback they have been given.
- End lessons with an exit ticket – a short explicit assessment of your objective that is then used to evaluate your (and your students') success. A quick flick through the responses help you to determine your next steps as a teacher – move on, or reteach. SecEd

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Further information & resources

- Allison & Tharby: *Making Every Lesson Count: Six principles to support great teaching and learning*, Crown House Publishing, 2015.
- *The SecEd Podcast*: *The Secrets to Quality First Teaching* (featuring Helen Webb), April 2021: ***https://bit.ly/2R5PIT8***

Doorstep disadvantage: Beyond the Pupil Premium

Do you understand the barriers to learning that poverty creates in your school's community? Doctoral researcher and teacher, ***Sean Harris***, reflects on some of the lessons he has learned as a school leader, researcher and as somebody who has experienced poverty himself

Fresh out of a leadership development programme and into senior leadership, I was convinced that if I had unwavering moral purpose then I would be able to turn the tide on socio-economic disadvantage. It turns out that the complexity of poverty in schools needs a little more than this to overcome.

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Beyond the Pupil Premium champion

In my first week as a senior leader, I recall an executive headteacher introducing me as the "Pupil Premium Champion", explaining that the performance of disadvantaged pupils was my sole responsibility.

I should have strutted out in Spiderman spandex and told the entire school community that "with great power, comes great responsibility". I might have had more impact.

My main takeaway working as this so-called "champion" was that poverty is more complex than I had ever understood as a teacher or school leader – arguably more complex than any other issue we face. You cannot "fix it" through the work of one chosen champion.

There is no silver bullet – yet there are principles that might inform our approach to addressing local (doorstep) socio-economic disadvantage in our schools.

What are we trying to fix?

We need to start by understanding the problem. Rowland (2021) states: "Pupils are not at risk of underachievement because of any particular label, such as Pupil Premium. Rather, it is because of the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on their learning." He adds: "Be an expert in your students, not in Pupil Premium."

Commentators have highlighted the limitations of using Pupil Premium as a core proxy for identifying and responding to socio-economic disadvantage in schools (Gorard, 2014; Holloway et al, 2012; Noden & West, 2009; Montacute & Cullinane, 2021).

Sobel (2018) stresses the need for teachers in schools to place further emphasis on "understanding the attainment gap in the context of a school embedded in a community and producing community-focused solutions that make sense in that context".

It follows then that one of the biggest levers to tackling doorstep disadvantage in your community is to understand the specific needs of that community first. This needs to be more forensic than preconceived ideas or "pain points" that we know existed historically in the community, or what one vocal member of a parent Facebook group posts during lockdown.

Listening to local need

Rowland (2021) reminds teachers and leaders that "making assumptions about the needs of pupils risks a 'supermarket sweep' approach to addressing disadvantage". Evidence of need must be based on forensic assessment, and this is more than a classroom examination of a pupil.

Shayne Elsworth, vice-principal at Bede Academy in Northumberland, shares this conviction and continues to look for ways to better read the local landscape of the community the school serves.

He explained: "We regularly listen to pupils, carers and parents, but we cannot become complacent. Currently we are working more closely than ever with community leaders to ask on a regular basis what they are hearing from all avenues in our community about the 'pain points' for local people."

Bede Academy serves the coastal town of Blyth, an area with rich history and scenic beauty but which faces growing levels of disadvantage, like many other coastal towns.

Research highlights how many seaside towns are among the most deprived communities in the UK. Sargeant (2019) warns that while rural and coastal towns such as Scarborough provide a haven for tourists, they experience significant hardship; poverty reduces both the quality and length of life. It is bigger than just pupil exam outcomes.

Shayne and the senior leadership team have been working closely with local organisations to think beyond the immediacy of issues caused by the pandemic in their area: "We want to make a habit of talking with our families and with other groups working in the community to discover first-hand what the local difficulties are. It's why we want to help community leaders set-up a community hub to understand and respond to local need. This has to lead to changes which are more empowering and sustainable, and which go beyond meeting immediate needs, such as the support we provide to the local food banks."

In this approach to understanding local need, the school is working alongside other schools and networks to renew what they mean by "in-school poverty and disadvantage". Senior and curriculum leaders are also reviewing their internal CPD

programmes to consider how they can develop teacher-education around the poverty agenda.

Sense-check with local leaders

As leaders and teachers, we are used to facing and fixing problems. One of the toughest challenges I encounter as a teacher who is also researching doorstep disadvantage as part of my doctoral studies is resisting the temptation to implement research findings the moment you discover them.

Research evidence needs to be sense-checked and we need to use it to challenge assumptions. Rowland (2021) helpfully states: "Research evidence without the right school culture, values, professional judgement, teacher agency, and consideration of the needs of pupils and families is unlikely to be helpful."

A key strategy I find helpful, as a school leader and an "edu-researcher", is the opportunity to "sense-check" with other professionals what I am reading. For example, I am part of a WhatsApp group called "Demolishing Disadvantage". Its aim is to bring together practising educators from the local area to facilitate discussion about research and strategies linked to tackling disadvantage.

Group member Alex Fairlamb, assistant headteacher and #WomenEd advocate, explained: "We have a common aim – to help our schools get better at understanding the needs of the children that we serve. It is helpful because each member of the group serves in different contexts and roles. We each have our own professional and personal experiences of poverty that we bring to our roundtable events – we are never looking at the issue of doorstep disadvantage through the lens of only our school."

Understand poverty-proofing

The idea of "poverty-proofing" organisations has been around for some time and has been defined as the process by which system-leaders "assess policies and programmes at design, implementation and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they have or have had on poverty and on inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty with a view to poverty reduction" (National Anti-Poverty Strategy, 1999).

In recent years, the poverty-proofing agenda has been applied to schools by the work of charities such as Poverty Proofing the School Day, launched more than 10 years ago by Children North East (for more, see *SecEd*, 2019).

The charity works alongside schools and organisations to help diagnose poverty in relation to the school community, considering the structural barriers that face disadvantaged families and ways in which schools can overcome them.

Recently, the charity linked up with the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) to develop the Turning the Page on Poverty resource, which is based on their experience of working directly with schools.

The resource is freely available to all schools and is a practical guide for teachers and system leaders, with information on poverty and how to reduce the costs of the school day (see further information).

Contribute to research

In the last few months, researchers at Newcastle University have worked alongside the aforementioned charities to find out what the younger generation thinks, needs and wants during the Covid-19 pandemic.

With this in mind, the VOICES project has been launched to cover the entire North East region and is working with more than 1,000 children in online focus groups delivered in schools and other community organisations.

Children are given the opportunity to describe their experiences and insights through media including writing, drawing and photography. The 12-month project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of UK Research and Innovation's response to Covid-19.

Back at Bede, Shayne Elsworth explained: "We are delighted to be part of the project and it is challenging us to listen more carefully to our students about their actual experience. Our involvement in the project is invaluable. It's something every school should do."

The 'persistent problem' of doorstep disadvantage

School leadership is arguably far more complex than it ever was, pandemic-management notwithstanding. Kennedy (2016) asserts that teacher-educators have never agreed on a curriculum for effective teacher education. Kennedy argues for "far more attention to the persistent challenges that comprise teaching and to how our knowledge and recommended core practices can address these problems".

For Kennedy, there is a need for all classroom educators and school leaders to "understand the persistence of these problems" and to think more analytically about them.

> *"We want to make a habit of talking with our families and with other groups working in the community to discover first-hand what the local difficulties are"*

We need a renewed understanding of the persistent problem of poverty in our schools – one that moves from broad brush strokes to forensically understanding the doorstep disadvantage in our local communities. The time is now. SecEd

*Sean Harris is a doctoral researcher with Teesside University investigating the ways in which system leaders can help to address poverty and educational inequality in schools. He is also a teacher and middle leader at Bede Academy in Northumberland and writes regularly for SecEd. You can follow him **@SeanHarris_NE**. Read his previous best practice articles for SecEd via **http://bit.ly/seced-harris***

Hear more from Sean Harris

- As part of his research for post-doctoral studies, Sean Harris sends out a weekly round-up of research, blogs, tweets and news items that focus on agendas such as poverty and disadvantage. Drop him a tweet at ***@SeanHarris_NE*** to be added to this list.
- Poverty podcast: Sean Harris and the CPAG are due to be among the guests on a forthcoming episode of *The SecEd Podcast* focused on poverty in schools. This is due out on June 2, when you can listen via ***www.sec-ed.co.uk/podcasts/***
- Curriculum Design Online Conference: Sean Harris will lead a keynote session entitled Planning your curriculum with poverty in mind at the *SecEd* two-day curriculum design conference taking place online on July 6 and 7. Visit ***www.curriculumconference.com***

Further information & resources

- CPAG: Turning the Page on Poverty: A new resource for teachers and school staff: ***https://bit.ly/3ajVSpN***
- Gorard: *The link between academies in England, pupil outcomes and local patterns of socio-economic segregation between schools*, *Research Papers in Education (29, 3)*, 2014.
- Holloway et al: *At what cost? Exposing the impact of poverty on school life*, Children's Commission on Poverty, The Children's Society, 2014.
- Kennedy: *Parsing the practice of teaching*, *Journal of Teacher Education (67, 1)*, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2016.
- National Anti-Poverty Strategy: Social Inclusion Strategy: Annual Report of the Inter-departmental Policy Committee, 1999.
- Noden & West: *Attainment gaps between the most deprived and advantaged schools: A summary and discussion of research by the Education Research Group at the London School of Economics*, Sutton Trust, 2009.
- Montacute & Cullinane: *Learning in lockdown: Research brief*, Sutton Trust, January 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3bbqmuy***
- Rowland: *Addressing educational disadvantage in schools and colleges: The Essex Way*, Unity Research School & Essex County Council, 2021.
- Sargeant: *Life in times of change: Health and hardship in North Yorkshire*, North Yorkshire County Council and Health and Wellbeing Board North Yorkshire, 2019: ***www.nypartnerships.org.uk/DPHAR***
- *SecEd*: *Poverty-proofing the school day*, Emma Lee-Potter, February 2019: ***https://bit.ly/3swnXAb***
- Sobel: *Narrowing the Attainment Gap: A handbook for schools*, Bloomsbury, 2018.
- Voices Project: The VOICES website has more information for schools, colleges or community groups in the North East who would like to get involved. Visit ***www.voicesproject.co.uk*** or contact ***lydia.wysocki@ncl.ac.uk*** or ***luke.bramhall@children-ne.org.uk***

Tough choices? Navigating the CPD marketplace

With so many experts, partners, consultants and providers, how can school leaders better navigate the CPD marketplace? ***Maria Cunningham*** looks at new research into quality-assurance, and its implications for your school's CPD commissioning

In April, a consortium of the Chartered College of Teaching, Teacher Development Trust (TDT) and Sheffield Institute of Education launched a report in which we shared the outcomes of a project commissioned by Wellcome to design, develop and pilot a system for quality-assuring teachers' CPD (Chedzey et al, 2021).

The aim of the project was to first and foremost design a system which enables school leaders to make decisions about CPD more easily. When we held consultations with school leaders, they said things like:

- "Personally I feel there is a lot of pressure on me to make the right decision, and a lot of money being spent. A tool would improve that and put me at ease. I would find it really valuable."
- "At our school, we really care about outcomes. What is the impact on that person going on CPD, and what will the long-term impact be on our young people? But not all CPD providers offer these things in their marketing."
- "If providers did want to gain a badge it would make a lot of schools' lives easier. We spend a lot of money ... it is a minefield, and trying to prioritise high-quality CPD is very difficult."

Our learning suggests that the quality-assurance system we have developed has the potential to be robust, fair and valuable for school leaders and the wider system. This is a huge development in the landscape, as we know that not all CPD available to schools is equally effective – with huge variation in quality of design, service and delivery.

This is a significant issue when you consider that teachers in England only spend an average of four days per year of their precious time on professional development (Chedzey et al, 2021).

However, it is also important to remember that the existence of a quality mark only provides one side of the story. A CPD programme might meet all the criteria that research suggests indicates quality, but if the content is not relevant to your organisation, staff or students right now, or if in-school factors such as unmanageable workload prevent colleagues from fully engaging, then that programme is unlikely to have the same impact it would in a school where working conditions are optimal (see Cunningham, 2021) and the expert input is closely matched to specific pupil needs.

Before selecting partners, consultants, providers or experts to work with, you need to be able to present your needs as clearly and specifically as possible, and ensure that colleagues within your school have a basic understanding of the principles of effective CPD so that they can meaningfully contribute to evaluation of whether the input or training has met its intended purpose.

Here is some guidance that we developed alongside the CPD quality-assurance project to help you do exactly that.

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Who or what is the target of the CPD?

Before selecting a provider to work with, you need to be able to present your needs to a provider of expertise as clearly and specifically as possible. A CPD quality mark might confirm that provider has systems in place to support participants and/or school leaders in identifying CPD needs and requirements and to ensure that the content presented is suitable, but success also relies on you as a leader identifying in advance:

- What depth of expertise should the CPD programme be aiming to achieve (e.g. a webinar to raise awareness against an extended approach over time with expert input to secure entrenched practice)?
- How does the intended CPD contribute or relate to your school improvement plan?

What will success look like for pupils?

The blueprint we lay out for a CPD quality-assurance system (Chedzey et al, 2021) uses criteria that provide an indication of what makes high-quality CPD based on the latest available evidence and looks to assess various factors that are most likely to contribute to this.

While one of these criteria is that the provider "undertakes robust evaluation of the effectiveness of their programmes", our proposed system does not involve assessors relying on evidence of pupil outcomes to inform their judgements about whether the CPD is high-quality or not.

Any badge or means of accrediting CPD should not be taken as a failsafe road to raising attainment.

How will I evaluate the impact?

When we at the TDT do our CPD diagnostic reviews of schools, a common misconception we come across is that evaluation of professional development must mean lots of feedback forms!

While collecting participants' immediate responses to a professional learning activity is an

important way to work out whether the content felt relevant, the delivery was effective or whether they enjoyed the experience, research also shows that whether teachers are "conscripts" or "volunteers" does not matter as much as a positive learning environment, provision of sufficient time, and how the professional learning fitted in with their classroom and school context (*SecEd*, 2017).

As such, the proposed CPD quality-assurance blueprint does not take into account customer reviews, nor does it incorporate any sort of satisfaction ratings. However, it will check that providers actively seek feedback from participants and their schools and draw upon this to improve their on-going quality and effectiveness.

Ideally this will align with your in-school processes and use of on-going tools or frameworks to gauge sustained impact on students over time – which as Thomas Guskey recommends (*SecEd*, 2016), are best identified at the planning stage. Evaluation is not just something that "comes at the end".

Greatest value for money?

CPD programmes that are quality-assured should have had to demonstrate that value for money for schools has been considered in the design process, but as a leader it is up to you to make a judgement as to whether the price of the service can be justified within your budget, or if there are other genuinely equivalent services, experts or courses which might provide similar for less, or indeed better value for money.

> *"If you are commissioning CPD for individuals or teams other than yourself, make sure to include them in the process to ensure it is fit-for-purpose"*

Some top tips

Finally, we spoke to school leaders in TDT Network member schools, who shared their top tips for finding the right provider for you and your school:

Pick up the phone: Use the criteria above to identify your needs, clarify some minimum expectations and be a discerning customer – if you are paying for a programme of development, do not feel that you cannot have a conversation about it.

Look for opportunities to adapt: Many providers will arrange a meeting, send a form or survey in advance in order to better understand your needs. Check that this is available to you if you do not think something "off-the-shelf" will achieve your aims.

Ask to be put in touch with other users: Many leaders say it is more helpful to hear testimonials directly from past participants – providers should be happy to arrange this.

Involve participants: If you are commissioning CPD for individuals or teams other than yourself, make sure to include them in the process to ensure it is fit-for-purpose. Do they require a facilitator with specialist experience? Can subject leaders corroborate the content and research used to inform specific programmes? SecEd

Maria Cunningham is director of education at the Teacher Development Trust. A school governor and former primary teacher, Maria has led and contributed to national programmes including the DfE-funded CPD Excellence Hubs, Wellcome CPD Quality Assurance Project and Nesta EdTech R&D Programme. Read her previous articles for SecEd via ***http://bit.ly/seced-cunningham***

Further information & resources

- Chedzey et al: *Quality Assurance of Teachers' CPD: Design, development and pilot of a CPD quality assurance system*, April 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3xjvC8S***
- Cunningham: *CPD: Creating the right conditions for professional learning*, *SecEd*, February 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3dRv7LZ***
- *SecEd*: *Teacher choice in whole-school CPD*, Clay, February 2017: ***https://bit.ly/3n9CdxP***
- *SecEd*: *Five principles to help you evaluate your CPD*, Clay, April 2016: ***https://bit.ly/3va9743***

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Ofsted: Curriculum impact

As part of Ofsted's focus on curriculum impact, evaluating the pace of pupil progress, pupil outcomes, and their preparedness for their next steps are vital considerations – as is the 'performance development' of teachers. ***Matt Bromley*** advises

In September, I wrote a two-part article on the subject of curriculum impact (Bromley, 2020a; 2020b). In those pieces, I argued that test and qualification outcomes are no longer the sole lens through which a school's "impact" should be viewed.

I argued that the purpose of education is not solely to get pupils qualifications, though these are clearly important; but rather to genuinely prepare pupils for what comes next – be that the next stage of their education, employment or life.

In practice, this means that schools need to provide for a pupil's broader development, enabling them to discover and develop their interests and talents.

It means that our school curriculum needs to develop pupils' character including their resilience, confidence and independence, and help them keep physically and mentally healthy.

It means that at each stage of education, our school curriculum needs to prepare pupils for adult life by equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society, developing their understanding of fundamental human values, their understanding and appreciation of diversity, celebrating what we have in common and promoting respect for all.

It stands to reason, then, that if the purpose of education is to prepare our pupils for the next stage of their education, employment and lives, the way we measure our "impact" must go beyond mere outcomes.

Indeed, if we are to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that is ambitious for all and tackles social justice issues, then we should measure the impact of all of this. As such, I believe that the purpose of "impact" is at least threefold:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the way in which the curriculum is designed.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the way in which the curriculum is taught.
- To evaluate the pace of pupil progress, pupil outcomes, and pupils' preparedness for their next steps.

In those earlier articles, I explored the first two of these purposes. In this article, I would like to explore the third and final purpose...

Pupils' preparedness for their next steps

In order to evaluate the extent to which our school curriculum prepares pupils for the next stage of their lives, we need to understand where pupils go next and whether or not this represents a positive step in the right direction and is ambitious and challenging. Here, we might review our provision for character education, RSE, PSHE, and fundamental human values. Enrichment opportunities such as the Duke of Edinburgh award and other outward-bound schemes, as well as the development of oracy skills, perhaps through debating societies, might also form part of this picture.

However, when considering the kinds of experiences young people should be afforded through our school curriculum, we need to avoid it becoming a box-ticking exercise. Here are some further considerations...

The hidden curriculum: Although it is tempting to focus on how the taught curriculum (in other words, that which takes place in planned lessons) helps pupils prepare for the next stage of their lives, we should not forget that pupils are also informed by messages sent through the "hidden" curriculum, those parts of the educational experience that occur in the spaces between lessons. In other words, we need to consider what the words and actions of all the adults in our school say to pupils about what values and attitudes matter most in life, and about how to behave as a citizen and employee.

Explicit or implicit: We should also consider whether or not the skills that pupils need in order to be prepared for the next stage of their lives should be taught explicitly or implicitly, which is to say in

isolation as "transferable skills" or through a subject discipline as a domain-specific skill. Critical thinking is not, for example, a transferable skill because it is impossible to be critical about something on which you have little or no background knowledge. You must first acquire deep knowledge on a subject before you can be taught how to think critically about that subject. However, a school may decide that some skills are indeed transferable because they are used in many subjects across the curriculum and in similar ways. Take, for example, structuring an argument, working in a team, giving feedback to a peer, internet research, note-taking, and so on.

Careers & pathways: Information, advice and guidance including impartial careers guidance is vital. If pupils are not appropriately and expertly advised about the paths they can take, how can they be expected to take the right paths and be prepared for whatever awaits them?

Transitions: We need to consider how our school curriculum helps pupils adjust to all the changes they face while in education. This includes the transition between schools as well as between the various phases, stages and years of education.

Creating the culture and systems

All of the above advice is contained in my book, *School and College Curriculum Design 3: Impact*, the third book in a series. The first book is about "curriculum intent", all the planning that happens before teaching happens. It explores the why? and the what? of education. The second book is about "curriculum implementation" – all the teaching that happens next. It explores the how? of education – the way in which teachers translate curriculum plans into classroom practice.

This final book is about "curriculum impact" – the "how successfully?" of education. In the book, as well as considering how we evaluate the effectiveness of our curriculum planning and teaching, I also set out how schools can develop the culture and the systems required to make all of this happen.

Part of this is what I call my "golden triangle", the three apexes of which are: quality improvement, performance development, and professional development. The second apex is performance development, a term I prefer to the more commonplace "performance management".

Performance development

For too long and in too many cases, teacher performance management was synonymous with an annual lesson observation. The lesson judgement – which usually took the form of a single number from 1 to 4, modelled on the Ofsted rating system – determined whether or not a teacher successfully passed their appraisal cycle and thus could escape the sanctions of "capability" and instead – where relevant – be rewarded with pay progression.

Thankfully, this is not as commonplace today as it was, say, five or 10 years ago. But it is still not unheard of and, even if graded lesson observations have ended, for too many teachers, appraisal cycles are still won or lost in a lesson observation.

This is problematic because lessons observations alone – no matter how professionally and pragmatically they are carried out – do not enable us to accurately judge a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom, let alone their entire professional contribution.

To do that, or at least to do it better, we would need to triangulate what we see and hear in classrooms with other sources of information, not least our teachers' professional judgement.

In other words, we should measure the quality of teaching – if we need to measure it at all – in a holistic rather than an isolated way. And even then, we must accept that we will not come close to doing it justice because teaching is highly complex and judgements about its relative quality are fraught with difficulty.

> *"Although it is tempting to focus on how the taught curriculum helps pupils prepare for the next stage of their lives, we should not forget that pupils are also informed by messages sent through the 'hidden' curriculum"*

My argument is simple: we should move away from performance "management" and towards performance "development". In other words, we should avoid instigating a pass/fail system of appraisal that assumes teachers are either good or bad. Instead, we should strive for a system that recognises the complexity of the job, accepts that people have good and bad days, that many more factors affect pupils' progress and outcomes than an individual teacher, and that the goal is to help everyone – no matter their career stage – improve over time (while acknowledging that everyone is human, and no one is perfect). In summary, performance management should:

- Recognise the fact that teaching and learning are highly complex and cannot be reduced to a checklist or rubric.
- Accept that a teacher's performance is not uniform – they have good and bad days and an ineffective lesson does not mean failure.
- Acknowledge that pupil outcomes are affected by many factors beyond a teacher's control.
- Aim to help every teacher to improve, no matter their career stage or training needs.
- Promote collaboration rather than competition, and incentivise team-working and joint practice development.

Performance management – if it is to "measure" anything – should measure a teacher's willingness to engage in professional development activity and improve over time. As a natural progression from this, it is reasonable to assert that an appraisal system could consist simply of one CPD target per year and be reviewed at the end of the cycle on the extent to which a teacher has engaged in CPD activity, tried new approaches and evaluated impact.

I accept that most schools want more than this and so I explore other possible methods in the book including the professional portfolio approach and the balanced scorecard. I also explore various frameworks for summarising the job of a teacher.

Professional portfolio: This method is not to be confused with a tick-box approach which mandates subject teams or teachers to self-assess against a fixed set of criteria, often feeling the need to engineer evidence where none exists. Rather, it is about teams and staff taking genuine responsibility for their own development and taking their professional practice seriously. A portfolio should be a living document, added to throughout the academic year so that it becomes a true record of developing practice as well as a means of reflecting on that practice, rather than being hurriedly compiled the day before an appraisal meeting.

Balanced scorecard: This works when criteria are quantifiable rather than qualitative and a means of aggregating a range of data – the wider the net is cast, the more accurate, fair, and holistic the picture of the quality of the provision will be.

Of course, such systems are premised on the understanding that no measure of teaching, learning and assessment is perfect because education is complex, and that data is more than a spreadsheet; it is a conversation. In other words, the data recorded in a portfolio or scorecard is the start of a discussion not its conclusion. Through discussion, data can be converted into meaningful information that will support improvements in teaching, learning and assessment – and thus outcomes for pupils. SecEd

Matt Bromley is an education advisor and author with more than 20 years' experience in teaching including as a secondary headteacher and MAT director. Visit ***www.bromleyeducation.co.uk*** *and for Matt's archive of best practice articles, visit* ***http://bit.ly/seced-bromley***

Further information & resources

- Bromley: *Curriculum impact: The right end-points?* September 2020a: ***https://bit.ly/351YRBo***
- Bromley: *Curriculum impact: Assessment, pace, progress & outcomes*, September 2020b: ***https://bit.ly/2GE7k3f***

School & College Curriculum Design: Impact

This is the third book in a three-volume series from Matt Bromley. It comes after book one on "curriculum intent" and book two on "curriculum implementation". Access resources related to this series of books at ***http://bit.ly/CurriculumCentral*** and for the book itself, visit ***http://bit.ly/SCCD21***

Curriculum Design Online Conference

Matt Bromley will be chairing and presenting at the *SecEd* two-day curriculum design conference taking place online on July 6 and 7. Visit ***www.curriculumconference.com***

The three Ms of effective remote learning

We hope that national lockdowns are now behind us, but remote teaching and learning will continue for some pupils and groups in the months to come. Drawing on all we have learned, ***Matt Bromley*** offers his three principles of effective remote learning

Despite the end of the third, and hopefully the last, national lockdown, it is inevitable that some pupils will still have to resort to home learning in the coming weeks and months due to self-isolation, local lockdowns or even non-Covid reasons such as flooding or snow days.

It would be short-sighted, therefore, to consign all we have learned about home learning to the history books.

If nothing else, we should now harness this good practice to improve the effectiveness of homework and other forms of independent study such as exam revision.

So, what have we learned? I think effective home learning can be summarised with three Ms: mechanisms, mode, and methods.

Mechanisms

By "mechanisms", I mean should home learning be online or offline? Spoiler alert: my answer is "both".

I think that some home learning should be carried out online, and some offline. Why? Well, it is my belief that we should provide some offline learning because...

First, we need to manage pupils' screen-time. Excessive amounts of screen-time can have a detrimental effect on pupils' health and wellbeing. Staring at a backlit device for lengthy periods of time can be harmful to pupils' eyesight, leaving their eyes dry and potentially leading to retinal damage and blurred vision. Too much screen-time can also inhibit sleep and interfere with sleep patterns, leading to a number of physical and mental health issues.

Second, we need to be mindful of the digital divide. Many pupils do not have access to a device or broadband internet and thus are at a disadvantage when learning online. Even families we might not ordinarily consider to be disadvantaged may struggle to provide devices to all children and adults in the house and/or may find wi-fi speeds prohibitive.

Taking part in online lessons, particularly live lessons, requires a quiet workspace in which pupils can concentrate – and many households may not be able to provide this either.

So, some offline learning is important but, whereas a diet of online learning alone is not ideal, it is still beneficial as part of a blended approach. In particular, I think we should provide some online learning because...

First, relying solely on offline resources such as textbooks or worksheets makes it more difficult to monitor pupils and assess them and provide feedback. Even if paper-based work is submitted somehow, this takes more time and prevents timely feedback from being given. Progress is more visible when there is some live – therefore online – interaction.

Second, it is harder to motivate pupils when they are working entirely offline and it is more difficult to promote a positive work ethic offline because the pace of their progress and the amount of time that they commit to their studies is not, or at least not as immediately, visible to their teachers. If work is entirely offline, teachers may assume that the work they set is being completed on time but have no easy way of checking this. And pupils have no easy way of getting feedback and of asking for help.

And thus, I would advise we plan learning activities that make use of both online and offline mechanisms.

For example, we might offer a carefully planned blend of live lessons delivered through video-conferencing software, pre-recorded lessons whereby pupils can access clear and concise teacher explanations and modelling at a time which best suits them and as often as they need (pausing and rewinding the videos so they are able to process the information effectively), and textbooks or worksheets, together with physical activities such as exercise.

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Modes

By "mode", I mean should home learning be synchronous versus asynchronous?

Synchronous learning is "live" in that the teacher and their pupils are present at the same time and in the same online place. The most common form of synchronous learning is a live lesson delivered using video-conferencing software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and so on. So, what are the advantages of synchronous learning?

First, it promotes engagement because the teacher can encourage – and indeed compel – pupils to contribute to the lesson just as they would in the classroom.

Second, it provides a means of supporting pupils in their learning by answering questions, explaining difficult ideas, offering encouragement and praise, and listening to pupils' concerns.

Third, it proffers a means of assessing pupils and giving them timely feedback. Although work completed asynchronously and offline can also be assessed, this is not usually as timely and tends to be more formal – written comments on pupils' work, say – rather than live low-stakes assessments which are conducted as an integral part of teaching, such as in the form of retrieval practice activities, class questioning, and the sharing of worked examples. Feedback can be more impactful when given live, too, because it can be acted upon immediately, while the teacher is present.

Finally, synchronous teaching allows pupils to interact with each other, as well as with the teacher, and thus provides the opportunity for peer-assessment and feedback, for passing questions around the class whereby pupils can comment on and add to each other's responses. And synchronous teaching enables social interactions which are crucial to pupils' motivation, engagement and general health and wellbeing.

All of which is not to suggest that synchronous learning is the gold standard, of course. Rather, synchronous teaching should form just one part of home learning and indeed only a part of online learning…

Asynchronous learning – while also sometimes taking place online – does not require real-time interactions and does not occur at the same time and place. The advantages of asynchronous learning are as follows.

First, pre-recorded clips – whereby the teacher films short instructional videos and uploads these to the cloud sharing platform for streaming at a later time – allow the teacher to deliver high-quality – clear, concise and chunked – explanations of key concepts. These can be streamed at a time and, crucially, a pace that suits each pupil, and as many times as they need to.

Thus, pupils' access to a device and to broadband internet can be better regulated and managed within the family. A quiet space can more easily be found when the timing is flexible. And pupils can manage their own learning more effectively when in control of the video content rather than constrained by the timing and pace of a live lesson.

Second, pre-recorded videos which show worked examples can also harness the power of teacher modelling, whereby the teacher deconstructs examples of excellence for pupils, showing them how to emulate excellence themselves, rather than presenting "here's one I made earlier", which is often unhelpful for pupils who are left with little clue as to how to get from where they are to the finished product.

The best models involve the teacher "thinking aloud", making their decision-making and other thought processes visible to pupils, and pre-recorded videos allow teachers to do this and allow pupils to listen to those thought processes as often as they need to.

Third, pre-recorded videos can be used for the purposes of reteaching and recapping on key ideas, such as threshold concepts, that enable pupils who are progressing at different speeds to fill in any gaps in their knowledge and address any misconceptions or misunderstandings, and thus move forwards in their learning.

Asynchronous learning does not have to be entirely online, of course. Indeed, as I have already argued, it is advisable to balance pupils' screen-time with work set and completed offline.

So, what might offline learning look like? One answer, though certainly not the only one, is to use textbooks…

Quality textbooks can be highly effective because they provide ready-made lessons with accompanying reading materials, worked examples, retrieval practice activities and tests. The reading materials tend to be well-selected and the presentation of the materials well-thought-out.

Textbooks are written by experts in their field and in a language that is appropriate to the age of the pupil. Textbooks are also logically planned and thus learning is sequential.

Textbooks are also easy to manage in the home – certainly easier than online resources. Many textbooks have answers at the back which makes the task of monitoring progress and giving feedback easier – and less stressful – for parents and carers.

Textbooks also provide time away from the screen and, as well as being good for the eyes, they help limit the number of distractions a pupil is faced with, such as social media and gaming.

Methods

By "methods", I mean how do we plan, teach and assess home learning? I haven't the column inches here to explore all of this, so I shall focus on teaching tips for online lessons.

It is helpful, I think, to start every live lesson with an orientation screen, perhaps in the guise of a presentation slide we can display to pupils by sharing our screens via video-conferencing software. Such a slide might contain the learning intentions for the session, instructions for engaging and interacting with others during the session, and a list of tasks. It might also contain reminders regarding mics and cameras, and the use of "chat" functions and so on.

Starting each live lesson with the same screen is a good way of reinforcing rules and routines, and will eventually automate some of these instructions, thus establishing good learning habits.

Along similar lines, we may get into the habit of setting a starter task as soon as pupils join the live lesson, perhaps in the form of a retrieval practice activity, such as a multiple-choice quiz, in order to activate prior learning, assess pupils' knowledge, and get the lesson off to a quick, purposeful start.

To ensure starter tasks are effective and engage all pupils, it is advisable to establish habits regarding how pupils will be assessed. For example, if you begin with a short multiple-choice quiz, you may ask pupils to type their answers into chat but only press enter when instructed to do so in order to ensure that every pupil takes part and does not simply copy their peers' responses.

Or you may "cold-call" on some pupils to answer questions, thereby ensuring every pupil knows they must be prepared to answer when asked.

In classroom learning, we use pupil names often. Live online lessons should be no different. It helps to develop engagement and motivation to use pupils' names online as much as possible, both verbally but also in the chat function. Targeting questions in chat at named pupils ensures they all remain in readiness and helps to assess individual progress, rather than repeatedly hearing feedback from the most loquacious pupils in the group.

> *"The best models involve the teacher 'thinking aloud', making their decision-making and other thought processes visible to pupils, and pre-recorded videos allow teachers to do this"*

When asking questions, either verbally or via a slide or the chat function, it is helpful to allow sufficient take-up time for your pupils, just as we would build wait time into our classroom questioning. Take-up time not only allows pupils time to think through their responses and then consider how to articulate those responses, but it also helps ensure that more pupils can answer the question and thus leads to more varied answers being given.

In some ways, the unfamiliar nature of online learning hinders pupils' cognition and so there is an argument for allowing more take-up time online than we would ordinarily do in the classroom. SecEd

Matt Bromley is an education advisor and author with more than 20 years' experience in teaching including as a secondary school headteacher and MAT director. Visit ***www.bromleyeducation.co.uk*** *and for Matt's archive of best practice articles, visit* ***http://bit.ly/seced-bromley***

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

The First 100 Days: Lessons from football

Headteacher ***Phil Denton*** has spent the last 30 months talking to Premier League managers about the lessons we can draw from the high-pressure, unforgiving world of football management, especially when it comes to tackling the first 100 days in post...

For the last two-and-half years, I have been on an incredible, often surreal journey talking to Premier League managers.

It all started when I met the then Tranmere Rovers manager, Micky Mellon, in a hotel gym in Stevenage. We quickly began talking about football, education, leadership and how all three had so much in common. That led to meeting up over dinner in Liverpool with a couple of other football people and talking about how we could work together. From there, the idea for a book was born: *The First 100 Days*.

The book was published on March 25 (all proceeds to the Len Johnrose Trust, which supports the MND Association in its fight against motor neurone disease). Co-writing the book has been a learning experience that has made me a better person, father, husband and headteacher.

So, to whet your appetite – before you rush out and buy the book – here are some of the lessons I have learned during the past 30 months about how you can successfully navigate your first 100 days as a teacher or leader in schools.

Pre-match

You would imagine that a book about the first 100 days of leadership would start on day one – in fact some of your most important work happens before you actually begin in post.

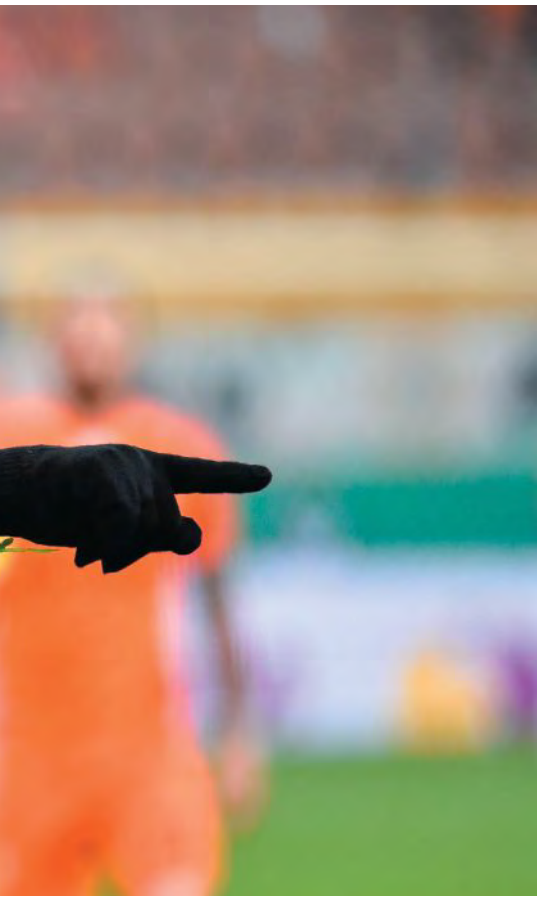
Before you enter into your new role, being aware of the challenge that awaits you will help you adapt and adjust your approach. Each challenge will be different and require a bespoke approach that meets the needs of the situation.

For example, when Ole Gunnar Solskjær entered Manchester United as the interim manager, he needed to be unifying and authentic. He needed to bring back tradition and the values of the club that had arguable been lost since the departure of Sir Alex Ferguson.

If that means nothing to you, he basically needed to bring peace where there had been war. He did this by getting to know people, putting a smile back on the face of the people at the club, and ensuring that values centred around hard work, family and respect became central to everything he did.

In new leadership situations, there is sometimes a crisis of performance to deal with. When facing just such a situation, headteacher Tuesday Humby (who is now the national director of teaching and training at the Ormiston Academies Trust) gave her staff a very clear step-by-step plan which detailed how they would move away from the current situation and to a brighter future.

She set out specific behaviours that needed to be adopted by staff and students. She established principles and was uncompromising in her drive to deliver the urgent improvements that were required.



This is exactly the same approach that Sam Allardyce has taken at Crystal Palace, Sunderland, Everton and other clubs to help them turn around challenging seasons.

Whatever your role, understand what you are entering into, remain authentic but adapt your approach to reach the short term goals that you will need to achieve to get points on the board and start winning hearts, minds (and matches). We explore models and structures to help you achieve this in the first three chapters of the book.

The big kick-off

Even the most thorough preparation prior to day one in your role will not allow you to fully understand the job at hand. To get to grips with this, the best leaders talk to people, they watch and most importantly they listen.

As Stephen Covey describes in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989): "Seek first to understand before being understood."

Sean Dyche, the manager of Burnley, gave a questionnaire to players which asked them to reflect on their own performance, fitness and contribution to the team. You can do this either in a questionnaire or simply by speaking to people and gaining an understanding of what you need to do in order to bring out the best in them.

For some people, it can be finding their motivation. Dan Pink, author of *Drive* (2009), suggests that this will involve "mastery, autonomy and purpose". As a headteacher, it is not about being the brilliant mind or the master of the universe. You are there to represent the school and create an environment that allows children and adults to thrive.

Of course, leaders will have their own vision of how things should be. However, these visions fall down if the rest of the people involved in making this happen do not see how this vision will benefit them or what their part in it is.

Brendan Rogers, manager of Leicester City, believes that football players walk around with an invisible sign on their head saying: "Make me feel special." While 20-year-old millionaire footballers may wear this sign more prominently than teachers, to a degree we could all benefit from this kind of affirmation.

Goals win matches, culture wins trophies

Throughout my work with managers, I really began to understand that the best teams are built from a sense of collective success that, as a consequence, delivers individual gains.

Vision established in the context of the environment and the people, as well as a winning culture, is crucial for sustained success. Culture is the way we do things around here.

Micky Mellon, the manager with whom I co-authored the book, asked his Tranmere Rovers side what they wanted to achieve. They talked about non-specific, subjective ideas. Micky asked them: "How about we win the league?"

They all nodded in agreement. He asked them if he could start to treat them like champions. They agreed – they had to really. So the standard was set. All of the expectations for team and individual behaviours were laid out. Now the team had collectively bought into a culture which had the highest of expectations because they saw the prize for them as a group and individual players.

> *"When Ole Gunnar Solskjær entered Manchester United as the interim manager, he needed to be unifying and authentic. He needed to bring back tradition and the values of the club"*

In your first 100 days, when you are establishing the culture of a year group, department or entire school, consider what the team wants to achieve. Then be specific about the behaviours that will achieve this goal. Write them down and agree upon the rewards and consequences of behaving in that way or otherwise.

Kick-on with Hansei and Kaizen

In my early discussions with Micky, we spoke a lot about his fascination with Toyota. Toyota has a unique approach to delivering consistent progression that has resulted in global sustained success. There were two key concepts which resonated with me and which had clear links to school leadership.

- The first was Hansei: This Japanese phrase means to understand your mistakes and to pledge your determination to improve.
- The second is Kaizen: An extension of the first concept as it refers to a continuous improvement day-to-day.

Football does not stand still and neither does education. The changes in context and expectation from policy-makers and Ofsted can be stressful and difficult to keep up with.

However, these Japanese concepts gave me a sense of empowerment. I can now address internal and external changes within the parameters of a culture which embodies Hansei and Kaizen.

I have not used these phrases specifically with colleagues at my school, but the premise is something that is now engrained in our culture. We are always looking to reflect and improve. There is no complacency but rather a determination, driven by our fantastic middle leaders, to make the school a world class institution.

For example, the analysis at a football club after each game, training session and season is something which I have brought to our school in the form of case conferences and systematic analytics of student performance and behaviours.

Managing yourself

During the writing of the book, I spoke with some brilliant people in sport and education. People like Patrick Otterly-O'Conner, Paul McGee and Drew Povey exude a passion for wellbeing and self-care.

I struggled to balance family and work during my first 100 days in post. However, by utilising some key principles of wellbeing and perspective, I managed to get through it (to judge how successfully, you would need to ask my wife).

This part of the book was quite revealing in terms of the ways Premier League managers cope with the pressures of their role. It is easy to forget that when things are not going well for them, they hear about it on the radio, their name is in the news, their children are picked on at school and, as a result, many decide to lead lives that become quite isolating.

As a headteacher, I am sure many colleagues can relate to that sense of loneliness. Self-care must be a priority alongside your new role.

The final whistle

Whether it is your first 100 days or you want to rejuvenate yourself, I hope that you can benefit from the sort of things that have helped me. Remember – be authentic, open, honest and reflective and you won't go far wrong. SecEd

Phil Denton is headteacher of St Bede's Catholic High School in Lancashire. Read his previous articles for SecEd at ***http://bit.ly/seced-denton***

Further information & resources

- *The First 100 Days: Lessons In leadership from the football bosses*, written by Phil Denton and Micky Mellon, is available now, published by Reach Sport. Visit ***https://bit.ly/2ORmUwE***

The mental health lead

The government wants every school to have a designated mental health lead in place by 2025 and has begun to fund training to support this goal. In light of the pandemic's impact, the role could well be a crucial part of recovery. ***Sam Preston*** looks at what it will entail

Did you cope, thrive, or shine during lockdown? There can be no doubt that the entire nation's mental health took a knock as lives and routines were increasingly restricted.

However, it took this global pandemic to catalyse a positive change, breaking the silence and taboo surrounding mental illness.

The government is working on a funding allocation in order to train a Designated Mental Health Lead (DMHL) in every educational setting in England by 2025. The aim is to drive the cultural transformation, early intervention and support strategies required for students experiencing poor mental health to help them cope and succeed.

The DMHL role: Where are we now?

The DMHL was first mooted in the 2017 Green Paper, *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision*, and in the subsequent consultation response from the Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care (2018). Two core proposals were:

- "To incentivise and support all schools and colleges to identify and train a designated senior lead for mental health with a new offer of training to help leads and staff to deliver whole school approaches to promoting better mental health."
- "To fund new Mental Health Support Teams, including supervision by NHS children and young people's mental health staff, to provide specific extra capacity for early intervention and on-going help."

Progress is being made on the Mental Health Support Teams. Fifty-nine were set up in March 2020, and earlier this year the DfE said that by April 2023 around 400 such teams will be in place.

And after halting the mental health lead training in light of the pandemic, as *SecEd* went to press, the DfE had finally announced the first tranche of funding (£9.5m) to help train "thousands" of DMHLs. Up to 7,800 schools and colleges in England will be offered funding to train a "senior mental health lead from their staff in the next academic year" (DfE, 2021).

While the DMHL role is not mandatory, the DfE has pledged to offer training for a lead in every school by 2025. Its consultation response states: "We want every school and college to have a designated lead in mental health by 2025. The designated lead will be a trained member of staff who is responsible for the school's approach to mental health."

In its Green Paper response, the DfE said that the DMHL role should not be filled by a mental health professional but, at the same time, education staff should not be diagnosing mental health conditions or delivering mental health interventions: "The focus of the lead should be strategic, putting whole school/college approaches in place, ensuring a coordinated approach." The duties outlined by the Green Paper response include to:

- Oversee the help the school gives to pupils with mental health problems.
- Help staff to spot pupils who show signs of mental health problems.
- Offer advice to staff about mental health.
- Refer children to specialist services.

A fresh perspective for schools

The DMHL role ensures that the safeguarding of students' emotional wellbeing is a priority and equally as important as protecting their physical health. It will bring fresh perspectives to the table, acknowledging and tackling mental health difficulties with the same vigour and commitment applied to improving academic performance.

According to a survey by YoungMinds in January 2021, 67 per cent of young people with mental health problems believe that the pandemic will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health. The feelings of fear, shame and guilt associated with mental illness, can have the same psychological effects as those associated with abuse or trauma.

At the peak of social and emotional development, secondary students' mental and physical wellbeing are particularly affected by disrupted eating, sleeping and exercise routines. Combined with the intense physiological changes of adolescence, and stress of exams, every student is at potential risk.

All professionals working with young people have a role to play to help improve mental health. And as educators, we know that intervention is most successful when signs of mental illness are spotted early. However, reduced budgets and finite resources have made this a tough task. The DMHL role will enable schools to put the much-needed protocols in place to promote good mental wellbeing as well as recognising and effectively supporting pupils when difficulties are suspected or known. Ultimately, it is important for all staff to feel confident in undertaking their duty of care and this especially applies to safeguarding the mental health and wellbeing of pupils.

Staff in educational settings are not expected to be mental health professionals and they should never attempt to make a diagnosis of a mental health problem. However, due to their frequency of contact with children they are well placed to identify behaviours presenting as worrying or identify children who may be at risk of developing mental health issues.

Crucially, the DMHL role is focused on facilitating best practice for identifying and seeking the right therapeutic intervention for individuals, rather than simple knowledge-sharing. So, what values and expertise should your DMHL offer?

The identification of issues

A core challenge is identifying children with possible mental health problems. The DMHL should bring a thorough and up-to-date understanding of the identification and measurement tools schools should employ in order to identify mental illness in its infancy. Knowledge surrounding adverse childhood experiences and how these might interlink with mental wellbeing is also crucial.

IMAGE ADOBE STOCK

Identifying groups at higher risk

Each DMHL should be acutely aware of the groups known to be at a higher risk of developing mental health difficulties and ensure both policy and practice is robust in supporting them.

For example, students with SEND are at high risk of experiencing mental health difficulties. Appointed DMHLs will work collaboratively with their designated safeguarding leads and SENCOs to ensure mental health and wellbeing needs are identified and addressed. Other such at-risk groups include:

- Looked-after and adopted children.
- Children in Need.
- Children with a social worker.
- Children in care or who have left care.
- Children affected by poverty.
- Those exposed to thematic and/or contextual safeguarding risks, such as child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, county lines, female genital mutilation.

Support and collaboration

Providing support and collaborative working will be crucial. The DMHL will devise and lead on a joined-up strategy and approach inside school and extend and communicate this to parents/carers and the local healthcare system. This includes developing specific classroom support as well as school-based mental health or therapeutic support.

Culture and evidence

Developing a positive mental health culture takes time. A DMHL will help create a culture that frees the whole school community to value mental health in the same way as physical health, encouraging everyone to care for their own mental health and that of others.

Culture will be underpinned by a therapeutic intervention approach. Not simply intervening as an issue arises, the DMHL will champion the latest mental health and wellbeing knowledge, training and approaches and become the vital link between the school, families and the wider education and healthcare system.

Family links are hugely important to help teachers better understand the lives students have at home. The DMHL will help parents and carers seeking answers to questions about mental health and mental illness so they can be better prepared to support their children at home.

Most importantly, the DMHL's practice must be guided by research and high-quality training undertaken to tailor provision appropriately. Therefore, if DMHLs are to lead the way, schools must invest in their CPD and on-going support.

The DfE has said that because of the nature of the role, the training must be "substantial and appropriately long-term – it should provide both knowledge and a basis for reflective practice" (DfE, 2018).

Next steps

So, with a better understanding of the role and skillset required, what are the next steps? Should the appointment come from within, or should headteachers look externally for the right candidate? This decision will be different for every school, influenced by budgetary constraints and existing skills within the staff team. A great place to start is to evaluate the skillsets of staff already working in relevant areas and begin identifying strengths and missing gaps.

This new role is an exciting development for the education sector, allowing schools to take a lead in the safeguarding of young people's mental wellbeing.

Although the government has set a target of 2025, now is the time for every school to set out the skillsets for this new role and to support staff to develop the attributes needed to help build an inclusive mental health and wellbeing culture that nurtures and helps every student to thrive. SecEd

Sam Preston is safeguarding director at SSS Learning, Visit ***www.ssslearning.co.uk***

Further information & resources

- DfE & DHSC: *Government response to the consultation on Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: A Green Paper and Next Steps*, July 2018: ***http://bit.ly/2nOHFel*** (see also *Consultation outcome: Quick read: Transforming children and young people's mental health provision*: ***https://bit.ly/3gvkjEA***).
- DfE: *Schools and colleges to benefit from boost in expert mental health support*, May 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3ezMqRs***

Two-day online conference: Curriculum Design & Delivery

From Covid-19 to curriculum diversity, *SecEd* and *Headteacher Update*'s latest best practice event offers a range of advice, ideas and case studies to help schools design and deliver an effective curriculum.

Running on Tuesday and Wednesday, July 6 and 7 (2pm to 6pm daily), the event will be streamed live online, with all sessions and resource downloads available for delegates on-demand for three months after the event. There will be 12 presentations delivered live and the event offers a further three sessions as on-demand downloads.

The event has a number of core themes and aims to offer solutions, ideas, practical reflections and advice. Key themes include:

- Covid-19: How should schools adapt their curriculum in light of the varying challenges presented by Covid-19 and the disruption caused by a year of lockdown and self-isolation?
- Diversity, inclusion, equality: How should schools respond to the Black Lives Matter revolution and how can we ensure our taught curriculum is diverse, inclusive and reflects the communities we serve? How can we "decolonise" our curriculum?
- Inspection: How should schools continue to prepare for Ofsted's 2019 inspection framework and its overarching focus on curriculum intent, implementation and impact?

Keynote sessions

- Planning your curriculum with poverty in mind: The consequences of disadvantage for how you plan and deliver your curriculum.
- Creating a diverse school curriculum.
- Curriculum implementation and impact – two of Ofsted's infamous I's and how schools should prepare themselves.
- Designing a curriculum from Reception to GCSE – a case study of coherent and effective curriculum design.

Workshop sessions relevant to secondary education

- A Covid recovery curriculum for the secondary school: What should our curriculum look like from September in the context of the pandemic?
- Curriculum congruence: Aligning values, ethos and what is taught
- Decolonising the secondary curriculum: A case study of curriculum revision in the context of diversity, inclusion and equality
- Case study: How to conduct a full curriculum review
- On-demand: A case study of curriculum diversity
- On-demand: Equality, inclusion and diversity in the curriculum

- *Delegate places at the event cost £99 plus VAT, which includes access to all the on-demand features, conference networking and partner sessions. For full details, visit* ***www.curriculumconference.com***

Earth Prize

Young people aged 13 to 19 are being invited to take part in a global environmental sustainability competition that aims to find great ideas and help make them a reality, with $200,000 in prize money.

The Earth Prize is a worldwide competition. Bespoke sustainability education content is provided for schools and participating students can access a pool of university student mentors to help research and inform their ideas.

Run by The Earth Foundation, 10 finalists will be selected and partnered with a high-profile ambassador to conduct a social media campaign to raise awareness of their idea before the final winners are chosen.

The winning team and school will receive $100,000 and three finalist schools will receive grants of $25,000 each. The remaining $25,000 will be awarded equally to The Earth Prize Mentor of the Year and The Earth Prize Educator of the Year.

Winners will be announced in March 2022.

- ***www.theearthprize.org***

Are vaccines safe?

The Stephen Hawking Foundation has launched free critical-thinking learning tools that aim to support discussion about vaccinations and address vaccine hesitancy.

The resource – which includes an assembly and lesson plan – has been endorsed by the National Education Union and Runnymede Trust. It focuses on the Covid vaccine and tackles head-on conspiracy theories that have led to limited uptake in some communities. Over the course of 46 slides, *Are Vaccines Safe?* provides accurate, up-to-date scientific information on a range of FAQs about the vaccination programme. Teaching staff are provided with additional notes and references.

It is the brainchild of Ed Stubbs, a teacher at Morpeth School in east London, and the Stephen Hawking Foundation has worked with staff at the school after they initially devised the materials for assemblies and classrooms. The tools have been further developed with Queen Mary University of London and the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and will continue to be subject to revision to keep pace with the science and the public conversation.

- ***www.stephenhawkingfoundation.org/vaccines***

Cash for Toner

sponsored

One of the toughest aspects of modern life is that we always seem to be running to keep up with the latest technological advances. New devices spring up at us constantly, and even the old familiar ones are regularly being superseded by improved versions – faster, better, shinier. As technology moves on, some of the peripheral elements can easily get left behind.

Toner cartridges are a prime example. When was the last time you bought a brand new printer that used the same consumables as the old one? There are literally tens of thousands of unused toners sitting in stationery cupboards across the land, unloved and unwanted purely because they won't fit into the new office printer or copier.

So, what do you do with them? Simply throwing them away is a terrible idea for both environmental and economic reasons, while recycling perfectly usable (and significantly valuable) toners is a waste of energy, resources and potential income.

The best idea is to sell your unused toners to someone who will not only pay you a good price, but will ensure they are put back into the distribution channel where they can quickly find their way to someone who can make full use of them.

Cash for Toner is a UK organisation that has been purchasing unused surplus printer toners and ink cartridges for more than 10 years. They buy any OEM-branded toner cartridges. It doesn't matter if the original packaging is damaged or missing, they can still buy them and help them find a new home. So have a root through your stationery cupboards for those dusty old printer consumables and drop Cash for Toner a line. The money you make might just help to offset part of your next tech upgrade.

- ***www.cashfortoner.co.uk***

The SecEd Podcast: Best Education Podcast 2021

The SecEd Podcast – which recently celebrated its one-year anniversary – has been awarded the title of Best Education Podcast 2021.

The award has been given by Learning Ladders and was judged by a panel of teachers, school leaders, edtech entrepreneurs and others.

The judging panel, which included Learning Ladders' founder, Matt Koster-Marcon, who is also chair of the EdTech Special Interest Group at the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA), produced a final winning shortlist of 47 podcasts. The award comes as *Headteacher Update*, *SecEd*'s sister primary magazine, last month launched its own podcast focusing on best practice across the primary school.

The SecEd Podcast launched in April 2020 and focuses on best practice advice both in the classroom and across the school. Since our launch, we have published 31 episodes and counting. Episodes are fortnightly and focus on important areas of classroom and/or whole-school practice. Each one features a panel of two to four guests including practising teachers and school leaders as well as other experts. Since the podcast launched, our most downloaded episodes have been:

Teaching students with SEND: We consider what effective teaching for SEN students looks like in the mainstream classroom, offering practical advice for teachers on pedagogy, interventions, the graduated approach, common barriers to success, the use of teaching assistants, Cognitive Load Theory and more: ***https://bit.ly/39iExNI***

Effective Pupil Premium practice: Advice and ideas for how schools might close the attainment gap. We cover the causes of academic disadvantage, and some solutions for schools, including tackling the vocabulary gap, improving quality first teaching, and putting in place targeted interventions and support: ***https://bit.ly/3mzUymK***

Curriculum design: In this two-part episode, Matt Bromley, a former school leader and author of *School and College Curriculum Design*, takes us through his six steps for coherent curriculum design, focusing on Ofsted's requirements as well as general best practice: ***https://bit.ly/3cl68fY***

Using metacognition in the classroom: Ideas for how teachers can make use of metacognition strategies to support students' learning, helping them to become effective independent learners. Lots of advice and tips for teaching staff: ***http://bit.ly/2LK0Ger***

Effective middle leadership: We consider the skills, traits and approaches that effective middle leaders employ, offering a range of ideas/reflections. Topics include tricky colleagues, professional boundaries, workload, morale, and developing a culture of mutual trust: ***http://bit.ly/3rHkQWm***

Quality first teaching: Three experienced teachers dissect what quality first teaching looks like. We tackle teacher CPD, subject knowledge, research-led teaching, the environment for learning, effective pedagogy, high expectations, explanations, modelling and more: ***https://bit.ly/2R5PIT8***

- *You can download The SecEd Podcast from your streaming service of choice or you can listen via the SecEd website at* ***www.sec-ed.co.uk/podcasts/***
- *The full list of Learning Ladders' winning podcasts covers topics such as edtech, EYFS, and SEND can be found via* ***https://bit.ly/3vkEKrK***
- *You can find The Headteacher Update Podcast via* ***www.headteacher-update.com/knowledge-bank/podcasts***

Bereavement policy support

A charity has published a bereavement policy for schools to help them support pupils dealing with the unexpected death of a loved one.

The resource has been created by charity Sudden, which offers emotional and practical support to people bereaved unexpectedly, and is based on its experience working with children during the pandemic.

It has been produced in conjunction with clinical psychologist Dr Laura Williams and aims to help schools support the emotional and physical wellbeing of pupils and their families from the early days of an unexpected bereavement onward.

It covers suggested procedures to enable schools to communicate and support pupils and their families, both before and after a child's return to the classroom.

The document offers practical advice, such as establishing a core group of staff responsible for communication with the family, suggestions around when and how to inform other pupils, and signposting appropriate training for teachers. Sudden also offers free books and other resources for schools.

- ***www.sudden.org/schoolpolicy***

School Diversity Week

A free toolkit of LGBT+ inclusive teaching resources, covering all key stages and curriculum areas, has been published by Just Like Us, a LGBT+ young people's charity.

It is available for all teachers and schools who sign up to take part in School Diversity Week 2021, the charity's annual celebration of LGBT+ equality in education, which this year takes place from June 21 to 25.

The online toolkit contains teaching resources including lesson plans for all key stages and curriculum subjects, as well as posters, assemblies, book recommendations and "inspiring ways to make learning LGBT+ inclusive". Examples of resources include "My Family" in three different languages for key stage 3, "Religion and being LGBT+" for key stage 4, and "Queer Eye and Probability" for key stage 4 maths.

- ***www.justlikeus.org***

Just One Kind Word: Anti-Bullying Week 2021

Kindness fuels kindness and in a polarised, online world it is becoming more and more crucial. Could 2021 be the year when we see the importance of kindness? Anti-Bullying Week is leading the way

Martha Evans
Director, Anti-Bullying Alliance (organisers of Anti-Bullying Week)

> *"One Kind Word can be a turning point. It can change someone's perspective. It can change their day. It can change the course of a conversation and break the cycle of bullying"*

Further information

- ABA: *Anti-Bullying Week: What is it and what does it achieve*, accessed May 2021: ***https://bit.ly/3eujA4O***
- For full details on Anti-Bullying Week 2021, including resources, visit ***www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/anti-bullying-week*** or follow on Twitter @ ***ABAonline*** and ***#AntiBullyingWeek***

Does anyone remember the film *Be Kind Rewind?* Set in a video rental store, the title takes its name from the label often found on rented VHS cassettes. The viewer was asked to kindly rewind the tape after use, thus saving the next person from the hassle of having to do it themselves.

While technology has moved on, kindness is more important today than it has ever been.

The isolation of the last year has underlined how little acts of consideration and charity can break down barriers and brighten the lives of the people around us.

Kindness is more relevant than ever.

This was one of the reasons, that "One Kind Word" was chosen for the theme of Anti-Bullying Week this year – which is due to take place from November 15 to 19.

Following the success of the campaign in 2020 – when a jaw-dropping 80 per cent of schools marked the week in one way or another – the Anti-Bullying Alliance (which coordinates the campaign each year in England and Wales) asked more than 400 young people, teachers and parents what they wanted from this year's Anti-Bullying Week.

Again and again, the young – and not-so-young – told us that they wanted anti-bullying work to be about hope and the positive and kind things we can do to halt hurtful behaviour in its tracks.

Our research shows that 30 per cent of children will have been bullied in the last year alone, while one child in every classroom will experience bullying everyday (ABA, 2021).

One Kind Word can be a turning point. It can change someone's perspective. It can change their day. It can change the course of a conversation and break the cycle of bullying. Best of all, one kind word leads to another. Kindness fuels kindness.

We can all play a part in a chain reaction that powers positivity. We think this upbeat message will resonate with children who know all too well how unkind words can hurt and undermine them.

So how will the theme of kindness be reflected in Anti-Bullying Week 2021?

As usual, schools will be able to download free teaching resources and themed assemblies, geared to different key stages, in the autumn.

These will focus on the activities we can all take, from playgrounds to Parliament, from our phones to our homes, to spread kindness and prevent bullying behaviour. Last year our resources were downloaded more than 50,000 times.

And Anti-Bullying Alliance patron Andy Day, the CBBC and CBeebies star, will once again be right behind the campaign with his band Andy and the Odd Socks.

The group traditionally creates a toe-tapping tune released to mark the event and, while I cannot say too much, if last year's songs and videos are anything to go by, it will be a show-stopper!

Andy will highlight Odd Socks Day on the first day of Anti-Bullying Week. There is a serious message behind the fun: let's pull on odd socks to show that we are all unique and different, and let's be kind to each other and respect each other's individuality.

For older children, the buzz on social media is an important part of Anti-Bullying Week, and a great opportunity for schools to share with the education community how they have embraced the anti-bullying message.

Last year, your support and inspiration helped #AntiBullyingWeek trend at number one on Twitter, reach more than 44 million users on TikTok, and get almost 600,000 views of Odd Socks Day videos on YouTube.

Similarly, the coverage in national media makes sure that vital conversations and debates about how we can minimise the impact of bullying on children's lives are happening right across the country. And, with your help, we are hoping for an even bigger splash this year.

However, what makes us really proud is the fact that Anti-Bullying Week helps raise awareness of bullying among the children and young people themselves.

As one child put it when we spoke to them: "Anti-Bullying Week literally saved my life."

This is only possible through the support of schools that want to tackle the bullying they know is taking place both online and face-to-face.

It makes us so proud when we read the supportive comments of teachers taking part in our online consultation on the campaign.

Following their work on Anti-Bullying Week, one teacher told us: "There was more awareness of what bullying consists of for the pupils and how they can help reduce their own and other's bullying behaviours."

That is the right way of putting it. Bullying is a behaviour, and one that can be changed.

Another teacher added: "Thank you for promoting such a great cause – this is one of the highlights of our year."

So, this year please join us to celebrate how kindness can be part of the solution.

To paraphrase Michel Gondry's film, it is time to rewind and be kind – starting with just One Kind Word. SecEd

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AT THE CHALKFACE

Build back better: We can't go back

I GAZE at bluebells... Lovely... I gaze at blossoms... Lovely... I gaze at a TV... Unlovely!

The prime minister is tweaking his vote-winning tresses, bumbling and buntering merrily along under a couple of flags. The subject seems to be schools. Too many children have been suffering in the pandemic. Fear not. Bunter is on it. Something or other will be done. It will be massive, big, amazing and easily world-beating.

Hurrah!

I get a rush of breezy optimism. Or maybe I'm just high on those bluebells and blossoms – or the vaccine. I forget for a moment the irredeemable tragedy of the plague.

"We're going to build back better!"

Could this be a 1945 moment? A Post-Covid Dream? We certainly need a sea-change. We can't go back to the old normal. The plague has surely caused some enlightenment.

Much of the present curriculum has to go. We need a kinder culture, a real creativity and proper critical thinking. We need to address the racism, sexism, misogyny and Very Bad Manners which seem to be festering in some schools. We must stop the exodus of unhappy teachers. My chums, albeit a bubble of effete, woke, metropolitan snowflakes, all agree.

I look at some cherry blossom. Teaching really could be the best job on earth like it was for me. I consult a newspaper. Our whip-smart Minister of Education is also banging on about the future. What dazzling insights does he have for us?

"The traditional teacher-led lessons with children seated facing the expert at the front of the class are powerful tools for enabling a structured learning environment where everyone flourishes."

My optimism is drained. Every cliché, every cadence crushes. I am not an expert. Everyone doesn't flourish. Lessons aren't tools. "Learning" isn't barking rote facts at empty vessels – rather the classroom is dynamic, the teacher a forcefield of energies.

We've moved on. Gavin hasn't. He plods on.

"Now, more than ever..."

This had better be good.

"...we need schools to create an environment which makes it easy to behave and hard not to."

The sentence drifts into mere incoherence. "Behave" is always a dodgy concept. He means "acquiesce".

Don't protest – it's all the go. Maybe this is the dominant thinking – if we can dignify it as such.

Whatever, we are surely at a tipping point. Teachers must reclaim the classroom or we'll lose it for good. When our NHS was trusted this last year, it did wonders. If teachers are trusted they can do the same. Future classrooms could be various, online, offline, child-centered, genuinely. inclusive, holistic. Trainee teacher applications have surged by 65 per cent during the plague. Give them time and money and let them loose to build the New Jerusalem.

Or am I still high on those blossoms?

It really is now or never. I gaze at those bluebells. Are they beginning to fade? SecEd

Ian Whitwham

...is a teacher of English, now retired, who spent many years working in the state school system of inner city London. He has written for SecEd since 2003. Read his most recent articles at http://bit.ly/seced-whitwham