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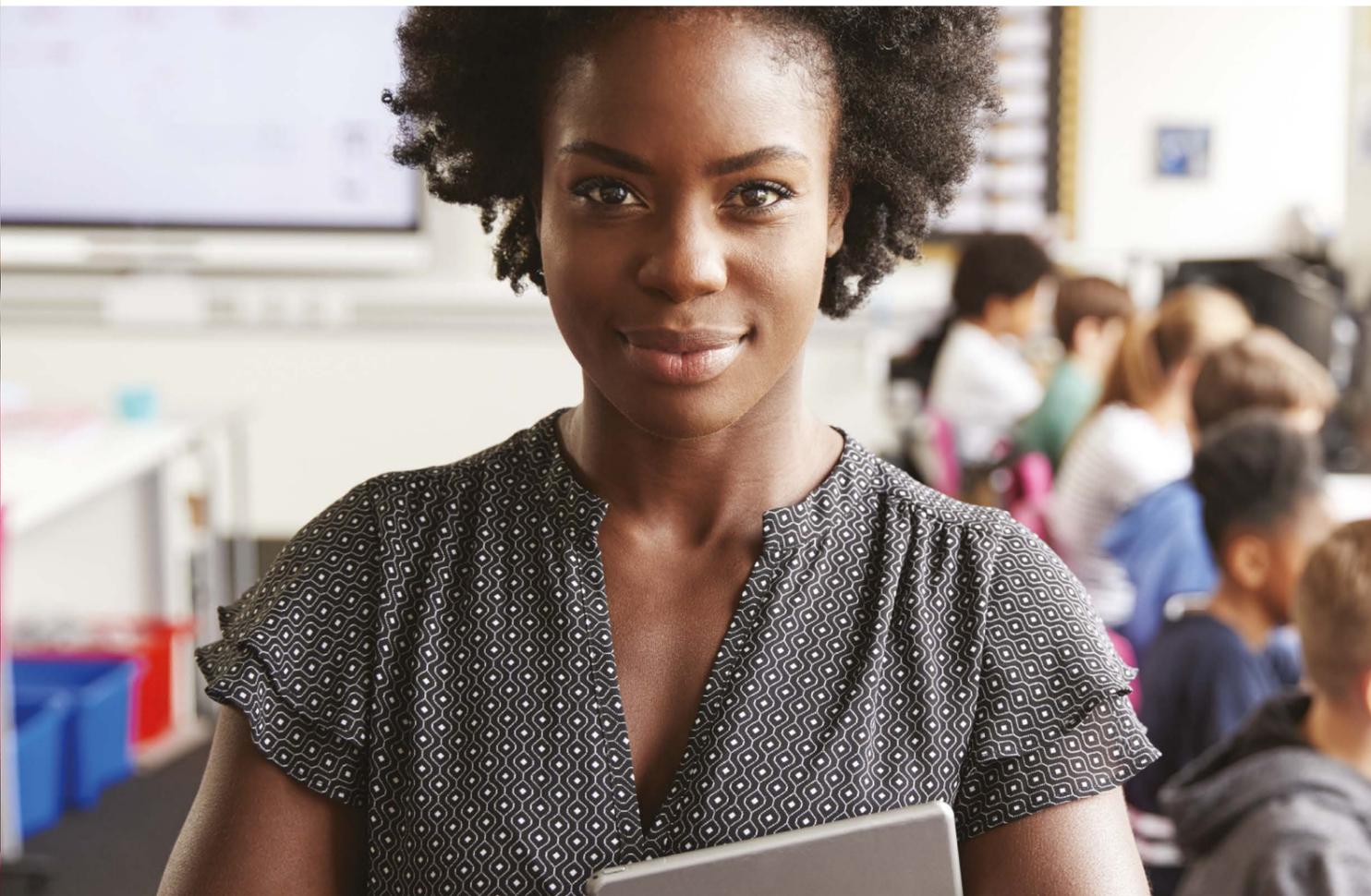
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BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDE 2/4 July 2020

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Back to School: Staff support and wellbeing

The *SecEd* and *Headteacher Update* Back to School guides offer advice ahead of September and the wider opening of schools. In this guide, we consider how lockdown has affected the wellbeing and mental health of school staff and offer practical advice and ideas for promoting wellbeing and supporting colleagues, both now and this autumn

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Build wellbeing into the plan

With so many unknowns and a huge number of things to plan for in September, staff wellbeing might be easily overlooked or glossed over – this would be a devastating mistake

Congratulations! You have almost made it to the end of the school year. And now you are trying to make sense of Department for Education guidance for September (DfE, 2020), even though it is impossible to know what life will be like then.

We know schools will be providing education. We know pupils are better off in school. We have to work out how to do this safely. Staff wellbeing and mental health are often last in the planning. And yet wellbeing is a key part of health and safety planning, and those risks need to be managed. Wellbeing is more than individual resilience, it is an organisational responsibility. Here is one way of building it in, based on the National Education Union's "five Cs", which have formed our principles for learning during the pandemic (NEU, 2020).

Care

As schools return, anxiety is understandable. Staff, including leaders, will be dealing with loss and bereavement, lost relationships or income, lost freedom. You have to focus on the recovery process for staff as well as pupils. This is more than asking how people are or reminding them of external support services (although those are important).

It needs a structure where line managers know what their colleagues are dealing with, where open conversations happen, with flexibility to meet people's needs.

This does not happen overnight, and if you are working in a school where structures are less supportive, you might need to start by building your own care structure, perhaps within your department or through your union.

Leaders can demonstrate practical care by making sure that there are designated spaces for staff to take breaks and eat lunch safely, without unnecessary mixing.

Context

A school with wellbeing at its heart knows that it cannot just go "back

to normal" in September, expecting pupils to get back to learning, and teachers to teaching, as if lockdown had never happened.

Designing for wellbeing means looking at your workload policy in this new context, thinking about what to stop doing so staff have time to plan, to assess, and to support pupils with school behaviours and learning "fitness".

Is there time to plan for different scenarios, sudden lockdowns or periods of self-isolation, and to build blended learning? Who is looking at the school behaviour policy, SEND and welfare support, to make sure that staff are supported with any new challenges?

Staff have been working hard throughout this period, at home and in school, many throughout holidays as well. Has your school planned any additional INSET for September? A slower start will enable staff to re-adjust and to re-establish routines and relationships.

Connections

Wellbeing depends on healthy connections between people. On-going health and safety restrictions will make them even more difficult to build. But they can be designed in by providing time for collaboration, planning together (virtually) and discussing the needs of pupils.

CPD can focus on both professional learning and fostering strong connections. Does your school have a plan for mentoring, peer support and coaching, particularly for new staff, NQTs, recently qualified staff, and those who have found lockdown especially difficult or who are still shielding? Can you develop stronger and more transparent connections between staff and leaders?

Staff and pupils will have been affected by their experiences of Covid-19 and leaders should recognise and acknowledge this. For some, September may be their first prolonged interaction with people outside their home, and

staff will need a safe environment to talk and share their experiences.

Creativity

Schools where wellbeing is prioritised are also open to creative and flexible thinking. In this new period, schools that can be creative will be better able to find new solutions to new problems and will try things out knowing that they can quickly change tack if things are not working.

Creativity is enhanced by diversity, finding new ways of sharing ideas and new people to learn from, through online resources, CPD, TeachMeets and webinars, or by making time to read good quality research and to discuss what you learn. Not only does this encourage staff wellbeing, by empowering and supporting staff, but it will lead to improved teaching (and better learning by pupils).

Community

Community will be vital to wellbeing, especially when so many have been isolated. This pandemic may have brought to light many new issues within the school community; it will have enhanced some relationships and damaged others. It has disrupted pupils' relationships with each other and with staff, and the relationships of staff with each other. A plan for re-engaging pupils needs to give clear time for staff to do the work, and identify support networks.

The school is also a professional learning community, where learning and wellbeing go hand-in-hand. A strong professional community has open dialogue, and a leadership that engages staff in decision-making rather than imposing from on high; it is a place where NQTs and old hands alike are encouraged to ask for and to give support.

During this period of uncertainty there will be many questions, and leaders need to be open and transparent, answering questions where that is possible and being honest about what is unknown.

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This will create and maintain a sense of trust and confidence across the school.

If that does not (yet) feel like your school, then perhaps your union, departmental colleagues or a few like-minded souls will provide enough space to begin with. And if you are a school leader, then working together with staff and other leaders opens possibilities for solutions to problems that no-one has had to solve before.

Staff wellbeing needs to be a leadership priority, with leaders and governors showing their commitment with practical support and open conversations.

Government has responsibilities too: to provide guidance in plenty of time; remove high-stakes tests and inspection that impact negatively on staff wellbeing (and pupil learning); and to provide resources to support pupils with learning and with their own wellbeing.

As we move into an uncertain future, it is more important than ever for wellbeing to be built into the plans. That starts with staff. As they say on aeroplanes (remember them?), you need to put on your own oxygen mask before you can support anyone else.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ DfE: Guidance for full opening – schools, July 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/38tdOfd>
- ▶ NEU: For advice related to Covid-19 and the full re-opening of schools, visit: <https://neu.org.uk/advice/coronavirus>
- ▶ NEU: Supporting learning during coronavirus: Five Cs, 2020: <https://bit.ly/38owMDT>



Coping with the unknown

Schools must give staff control, help them cope with change and the unknown, support those touched by bereavement, and let them know that it is okay to be vulnerable...



Education Support

...is a UK charity dedicated to improving the mental health and wellbeing of the education workforce. Visit www.educationsupport.org.uk

Dealing with feelings around bereavement and loss can be particularly difficult for people in leadership positions. It can be easier to carry on managing the current situation than reflecting on difficult feelings of loss and grief. However, this may not be helpful in the long-term. If we do not allow ourselves to have outlets for our emotions, then this can lead to a variety of symptoms such as a loss of concentration and/or problems sleeping.

More generally, show how you make your own mental health a priority, share how you do this and make it clear that all our mental health has to come first. It is important that school leaders model that we should be discussing our mental health if we need and want to.

Any teachers, school leaders and other school staff who are feeling stressed and anxious during these uncertain times can call Education Support's confidential helpline. Available to anyone working in education, it is open 24/7. No matter what you are going through, you can talk to a trained counsellor.

In ordinary times, the start of a new school year heralds great apprehension, anticipation and anxiety. Regardless of our skills and experience, our readiness to cope is about how well prepared and resilient we feel – both mentally and physically – to deal with the unknowns and demands of the school term that lie ahead.

Given that this September will be anything other than ordinary, with a great many unknowns, the anxieties and pressures will be heightened to a totally different level.

Added to that, having already coped with the pandemic for several months may mean that our resilience is worn down and lower than usual.

A recent YouGov poll revealed that teachers are more likely than any other key workers to experience anxiety, issues with concentration, and feelings of hopelessness during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The survey found that half of education staff (55 per cent) reported feeling "very" or "fairly" anxious as a result of their work as the crisis has continued – ahead of healthcare workers on 53 per cent. As such, mental health support will be an absolute priority for school leaders and staff alike in September.

So, what should leaders be looking for and aware of and how can we support staff in the autumn term?

A lack of control over situations or an inability to change them is a key driver of stress. Change and feelings of uncertainty can also trigger anxiety. That is very much the case at present in all our lives and it is important as leaders that we let staff know that these feelings are normal and are to be expected.

High levels of stress can make any of us feel less able to cope and when we feel there is little support from managers, colleagues, peers, friends or family, it is far more likely that we will find the stress we are experiencing to be unmanageable.

On top of this, many of our usual coping mechanisms that can help to give a sense of structure and familiarity, such as freely seeing close family and friends and the ritual of going to work, are either not possible at the moment or they look very different.

Leading, motivating and supporting staff is difficult in this time of crisis, when leaders are also struggling themselves, but it is important to let staff know that it is okay to feel vulnerable and that there are ways we can ease this.

Encourage staff to share how

they feel with others, in the workplace or at home. For those members of school teams who may have lost someone or are affected by another's loss, be aware of this and remind staff and colleagues that help is out there.

Teachers and other school staff may be dealing directly with grief and loss, where someone close has died or lost a loved one to coronavirus. They may also be supporting students who have been touched by bereavement.

In a specially commissioned video, entitled *Coping with Bereavement*, Dr Erin Hope Thompson, director of the Loss Foundation, tells us: "Loss is everywhere and it makes us feel more vulnerable."

Dr Hope Thompson explains that in these situations it is important to give people space and to let others know they need this too. For anyone who has experienced loss, it is important to create outlets – whether that is space to talk to friends, close colleagues or a professional – to reflect and process, to "journal" – whatever that person needs and finds helpful for them.

It can be useful for leaders to model that it is okay to feel upset and that staff will be supported if they are struggling.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Education Support has created a range of mental health resources for all school staff during the Covid-19 crisis <https://bit.ly/2Z1yLL9>
- ▶ To access the *Coping with Bereavement* film, go to <https://bit.ly/2NXfIAR>
- ▶ Education Support's confidential, 24/7 helpline: **08000 562 561**



The challenge facing NQTs

How should schools support their NQTs in September given that many have missed out on vital classroom practice at the end of their initial teacher training (ITT) period?

While there are a number of challenges facing us in the coming months – and clearly children remain the top priority – this is certainly not the time to be shifting attention and capacity away from supporting our early career teachers.

ITT providers have kept trainees “on programme” and NQTs for September have generally not stopped classroom practice altogether during lockdown. Many have contributed to remote learning and volunteered to support classes in their schools, even though there was no compulsion to do so.

Nevertheless, there has obviously been some unexpected disruption which has needed to be managed carefully by the sector.

In June, the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) ran an “ITT September and Beyond” webinar when this was an issue explored by the panellists. NASBTT executive director Emma Hollis highlighted the need to have compassion at the forefront of our minds now, more than ever, in the new school year and for all those working in schools.

Compassion applies directly to NQTs, of course, who are going into an unknown world. NQTs are entering a new profession that they are genuinely very excited about. Nerves are normal, but this year there is a deeper sense of the unknown. Will they get it right? What are they going to be facing?

The mentors they are working with, and looking to, will not have the answers in the same way as they did before. That is not to say we need to have all the answers, but we do need to be entering into discourse with our NQTs and to understand that there is a nervousness, an uncertainty, as they go into their new careers.

During the webinar, Professor Sam Twiselton, director of Sheffield Institute of Education and chair of the Advisory Group for the Department for Education (DfE) ITT Core Content Framework,

highlighted the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, which gave birth to the Early Career Framework (ECF), and in turn the ITT Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019).

This framework and the ECF should be uppermost in our minds when thinking about supporting NQTs. It includes a core entitlement to evidence-based training that new teachers receive across the ITT year and the first two years after they have qualified.

This is designed to support more trainees to successfully enter and remain in the profession. We need that now more than ever, not just because of the implications of Covid-19, but simply because one of the reasons teachers are leaving is because they need carefully focused and personalised support for longer. They must know there is a system in place to support them.

ITT Core Content (the preliminary year of the three-year early career package) starts this September and, although statutory roll-out of the ECF is not until September 2021, the principles of both should be firmly embraced now.

Having said that, a pilot of the ECF is going ahead this September in the North East, Bradford, Doncaster and Greater Manchester. It is expected to benefit around 2,000 teachers. And in light of the disruption to ITT, the DfE has said it will fund a one-year offer of support for “up to 3,000 early career teachers working in schools outside of the early roll-out areas from this autumn”. Eligible schools will be contacted in due course (see *SecEd*, 2020).

With this underpinning everything we do to support NQTs, as well as demonstrating compassion, understanding and patience, in my mind there are five practical things that schools can do to support our new teachers:

Effective handover

It must be clear what ITT providers and NQT appropriate bodies are doing to mitigate for the gap in experience. They should work

together to ensure that high-quality CPD and support is in place for all early career teachers while remaining mindful of school capacity. Transition documents from providers to employers should include detailed key strengths and areas for development.

Addressing anxiety

Schools, ITT providers and NQT appropriate bodies must understand the potential lack of confidence facing new teachers and work together with compassion for NQTs and their mentors. This increased emphasis upon relationships and collaboration could be the difference between retaining and losing a teacher.

Open communication

Remove as many unknowns as possible for NQTs and provide a level of reassurance through clear communication and structure. Get mentors in place and put them in touch with NQTs as early as possible. Make sure new teachers know who to go to in school for support and what policies, protocols and expectations are in place. A lack of communication at this stage will increase levels of anxiety.

Flexible approaches

Is there an opportunity to support NQT induction through the temporary removal of additional duties and responsibilities? Be creative and consider co-teaching experience, live coaching, staggered release time and look for an opportunity to build. Consider how the whole school community can help to grow and nurture a new teacher, not just the mentor. Hold virtual meetings at year or departmental level depending upon phase and involve new teachers in planning for autumn.

Empower mentors

“Developing others” is a core component in all leadership training and for many the first experience of this is to mentor a trainee or NQT. The impact of good mentoring can have a profound

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impact upon an experienced teacher’s career and on the school community as a whole.

The very process of evaluating one’s own practice in order to explain this to a novice can be transformative and the chance to share expertise and knowledge with the next generation of teachers can improve morale and retention.

But these positive outcomes can only be achieved if the mentor is given the time, space and respect from their school leaders to do the job effectively – remove any one of these and the opposite impact can be seen, with mentors feeling overwhelmed and undervalued.

As the ECF gains momentum, schools may consider a whole school “teacher educator” role in the same way as we have an SEN lead, for example. NASBTT has developed a suite of Teacher Educator qualifications and a Teacher Educator and Mentoring Zone for use by schools.

Embracing the support that ITT providers and NQT appropriate bodies can offer will help schools to grow their teaching capacity, even through a period of repair and reintegration.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ DfE: Supporting early career teachers (ECF), January 2019: <http://bit.ly/2UpPaUL>
- ▶ NASBTT: Teacher Educator and Mentoring Zone: www.nasbtt.org.uk/temz
- ▶ SecEd: Funded support for NQTs hit by coronavirus lockdown, June 2020: <https://bit.ly/2D0jwJS>



Talking about mental health

Opening up about mental health can be daunting and can make a person feel vulnerable. How can we handle these conversations to ensure positive and constructive outcomes?

Conversations about mental health can be uncomfortable and awkward. However, if it is not acknowledged or discussed in your school, it can leave staff feeling isolated, unheard and, even worse, ashamed. Opening up about mental health challenges can be daunting and can make a person feel extremely vulnerable. This is why the conversation must be well-considered and carried out in a particular way...

What not to say (or do)...

- Do not have a conversation when others are present, such as in the staffroom or corridor.
- Do not try to have the conversation first thing in the morning as they come through the door and they are trying to wake up.
- Do not approach them to have an initial conversation about mental health five minutes before they are due to teach a lesson.
- Do not use your phone to check emails while having the conversation. Likewise, do not check your watch repeatedly during the meeting.
- Do not fidget uncomfortably and rush the conversation.
- Do not try to squeeze the conversation into a 10-minute window between other meetings.
- Do not interrupt or try to put words into their mouth.
- Do not take classes or responsibilities away from a staff member without consultation.
- Do not say things like “everyone feels sad sometimes”, “everyone gets stressed” or “we’re all in the same boat”. Do not try to dismiss concerns about Covid-19 or infection.
- Do not talk about the mental health of colleagues in a flippant or dismissive way.
- Do not treat mental health less seriously than physical health (the two are often linked).

- Do not tell them to “think positively”. Do not tell suggest solving problems by taking up yoga or mindfulness.

Starting a conversation

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England has produced some excellence guidance for line managers to explain which phrases could be useful to open-up a dialogue (MHFA England, 2016).

I have summarised the document and delivered it to staff in my school as part of a CPD session on staff mental health. Many more conversations about mental health are now happening in my school and support has been put in place for a range of colleagues, which has enabled them to stay in the classroom and do the job they love in a way that helps them to cope.

The guidance emphasises “non-judgemental listening”, which means hearing and understanding exactly what is being said and allowing the person to speak freely and comfortably without feeling judged.

This requires three attributes: acceptance, genuineness and empathy. The guidance recommends a combination of verbal and non-verbal skills:

- Listen without interrupting.
- Pay attention.
- Ask appropriate questions to make sure you are both clear about what is being said.
- Listen to the words and the tone of voice and observe the body language.
- Check you understand what the person is saying by restating it.
- Summarise facts and feelings.
- Use minimal prompts (mmm, ah, or I see) to keep the conversation moving.
- Do not worry about pauses or silences, as the person may simply be thinking or temporarily lost for words.
- Avoid the temptation to fill the silences as you may break their train of thought or the rapport between you.

- Keep appropriate eye contact (do not stare or avoid their eyes).
- Maintain an open body position.
- Sit down even if the other person is standing (to make you seem less threatening).
- Try not to sit directly opposite the other person (which can seem confrontational).

Other considerations

Many of these initial conversations will happen with an emotional colleague. The British “stiff upper lip” culture means that people can find emotional colleagues hard to cope with. This is not an excuse. If a member of staff is opening up about their feelings and difficulties (and it may even be the first time they have done this with anyone), they will need to feel that you are able to hear this information, listen actively and allow them to “sit” with them.

Some people in schools still unfortunately think that offering them a tissue and telling them that “things will get better” is supportive. People are crying because they cannot cope, not because they want token sympathy and a patronising comment.

If a colleague has come to you in an emotional state due to poor mental health, the first thing you will need to do is try to stay calm yourself. You may be feeling tired, stressed or anxious, but it is important that you show you genuinely care and want to listen. Reassure them that it is okay to be upset and that you are listening. In fact, the process of listening may provide an important space for both you and the colleague to gain insight into the problem and consider how to move forwards.

Ask them if they would like you to contact anyone or if they would like someone to be with them. Another colleague who is trusted and knows about their personal lives may be able to give more information which could lead to better support being put in place. It is important to give them an

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appropriate space where they can express emotion freely and compose themselves in privacy.

Alternatively, you might suggest that you both leave the building for a short time for a coffee or short walk to give them time to collect themselves. They may choose to go on their own, but it is advisable that they are accompanied if they are still very distressed.

It is important to respect their wishes and allow them to regain some control over a potentially overwhelming situation. Once they have recovered sufficiently, they may want to carry on working.

Between you, you will need to decide if this is an option – putting on a “brave” face in front of 30 children may not be wise and could end up causing more damage.

Alternatively, they might want to take a break or even go home. They might feel embarrassed at breaking down, so it is a good idea to explain that you value them and want to support their recovery.

Allowing someone the time and space to be honest about their struggles is one of the kindest actions that another person can take. There is no reason why this cannot be done in every school.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ For general MHFA England workplace resources, visit <https://bit.ly/31Nq7BR>
- ▶ For the MHFA England MHFA Line Managers’ Resource (2016), go to: <http://bit.ly/39ynJzk>



Post-lockdown CPD: How should we support staff?

Professional learning will play a vital role in supporting staff – both in their teaching and with their wellbeing. How should schools be approaching CPD for the next academic year?

In recent times, it has seemed like the only certainty for school leaders has been the uncertainty that lies ahead. Headteachers and senior teams have done an incredible job in the past few months, rising to extraordinary challenges to ensure that students can continue to learn and that staff are supported to continue to deliver a high-quality education as safely as possible. One of the things that has struck me and my colleagues at the Teacher Development Trust (TDT), a national charity for effective professional development in schools, is the immense range of

unique experiences and ever-changing priorities that have been recounted to us by the leaders across our network. Everyone we speak to has a different story of how Covid-19 has affected the day-to-day reality of their school context, and it is clearer than ever that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution to help both pupils and teachers get back “on track”. Professional development is no exception to this. On one side of the spectrum, many teachers found that being at home gifted them with greater time and freedom to engage with professional learning

through the wealth of virtual CPD opportunities, webinars and online courses that popped up during lockdown – or perhaps just catching up on their reading lists of books related to teaching and learning. Conversely, for a huge number of teachers and leaders, CPD has had to take a back seat while every hour of the working day has been spent dedicated to the safety of students, be that supporting vulnerable children, mitigating against safeguarding risks, providing food vouchers to families, or ensuring that those in homes without internet or technology are

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equipped with the resources they need to continue to learn. Additionally, many colleagues were juggling these priorities with a full timetable of online teaching as well as providing care or home-schooling to their own

children, leaving little headspace for much else. One leader we spoke to admitted that at one point they had had no “emotional space” for anything new.

CPD – should it be a priority?

Bearing in mind the variety of experiences that colleagues will have lived over the past few months, school leaders should think carefully about what support and development opportunities will look like during the next academic year and how CPD will adapt to the newly emerging needs of both students and teachers. The last thing that professional development should be is burdensome or create additional workload. However, now more than ever, with the attainment gap widening due to lockdown, we need to ensure that teaching and learning is as effective as possible. High-quality leadership of in-school professional development is key to creating a culture in which teachers are thriving.

Always start with needs

The content and focus of your CPD for next year may well be subject to change based on needs analysis undertaken both now and after the summer. CPD must be tailored to the context of your school. For instance, some leaders have said they will put greater emphasis on CPD related to pastoral needs, not least bereavement support. The key is to make sure that you are asking staff what they need and, as a leader, showing that you are listening. Dr Kulvarn Atwal, author of *The Thinking School: Developing a dynamic learning community*, models this excellently. As a headteacher of three London primary schools, he consulted his staff about what they need. Their responses? They want to make decisions regarding their own learning, they believe collaborative learning is key, and they want it to be more relevant and specific to their experiences in the classroom.

From learning to development

A huge benefit of being more reliant on remote working is the extent to which teachers have recently embraced opportunities for online professional learning. As a leader, what is exceptionally important to remember is that if one of your teachers has spent hours and hours on webinars or online courses during lockdown, then unless you ensure that once back in school that colleague has the organisational support and means to trial and apply their new learning, it is highly unlikely to have any impact on student outcomes.

At the TDT, we use the metaphor of learning organisations sometimes being like a shoal of fish. Individual staff might be feeling excited over new things that they are learning in their own time, but end up exerting lots of energy “swimming around” in different directions. Without a clear shared vision or tight structures in place to join up the dots, the shoal itself does not move on, and that expended energy will not result in collective progress. Assuming your teachers have had at least some time to engage with individual CPD during lockdown, ensure that as a leader you are actively planning for how to:

- Harness that enthusiasm and sustain it. For instance, you

could invite teachers to share and feedback their new learning to their teams or to wider staff. Or empower key “champions” to lead an informal internal TeachMeet-style reading group.

- Ensure that your in-school CPD programme builds in opportunities for learning to be applied. Activities which create the most effective CPD include collaborative teacher enquiry, peer-coaching or research projects based on trialling strategies and analysing pupil impact.

Moving CPD to an online space

Teachers are now far more open to the idea of virtual meetings and online learning, so it is likely that schools will continue to take advantage of virtual or blended CPD programmes. Benefits include greater flexibility, widening access, and more opportunities for reflection and thinking, with gaps between sessions and time to practise and implement. It can also open up CPD to a wider, global audience that gives more perspective, meaning teachers can connect with specialists from other schools. Working with others in other settings can allow you to open up more about challenges in your own setting in a way you might not with your peers.

Ideally, we do not want teachers to see the objective as trying to replicate what happens in person. So, to avoid this, start by asking: “What is great learning and how can we do that online?” This process should start with revisiting what it is that teachers value and appreciate – and this is a key opportunity to gain buy-in to the process from staff, rather than framing it as a bolt-on to their existing workload, or “yet another new initiative”.

Formal vs informal

Online CPD is not just synchronous courses or hosting staff meetings over Zoom; it could include forums, asynchronous courses, blogs and articles, online video calls, podcasts and videos. Whether formal or informal, it is worth keeping (light-touch) logs of what staff are doing, which will also support tighter evaluation processes. There is an important

balance to be struck between giving teachers the autonomy of what to access and when, while ensuring that leaders are actively scheduling and protecting time and not assuming that it happens on top of everything else. This is especially important during closures or school holidays when work/life boundaries can get blurred.

Next steps

Diagnosis is key: You cannot improve your professional learning until you know where it is now. What are the current strengths of your school’s professional learning provision, and how do you know? You might consider doing a diagnostic review of your current CPD, a training needs analysis or skills audit and getting some external validation of what you should focus on next.

The CPD standards: Whether you are laying fresh plans for next year or adapting existing ones, it is crucial to keep revisiting the Department for Education’s Standard for Professional Development to ensure that your school’s CPD for next year is designed to be as effective as possible (DfE, 2016).

Support new teachers: Consider the additional training needs of early career teachers as a result of their compromised NQT year and adapt your school or trust’s CPD programme accordingly, e.g. providing additional time for NQTs to take part in structured collaboration, peer-observation or team-teaching, or adjusting the focus of particular CPD sessions to minimise content gaps.

Connect with other leaders: Leaders across the TDT Network have told us how powerful it has been to share experiences with other heads and senior colleagues across the country and to know that there are others overcoming similar professional challenges.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ DfE: Standard for Teachers’ Professional Development, July 2016: <http://bit.ly/2Pj4Vys>
- ▶ Teacher Development Trust: www.tdtrust.org



The four Cs of staff wellbeing

During the lockdown and beyond, Bishop Young Academy has put staff wellbeing at the top of its priority list. At the heart of its approach are four Cs...

Bishop Young Academy in Leeds has been trail-blazing wellbeing strategies during the Covid-19 closures and reintegration for both their students and their staff. Alongside safeguarding, wellbeing and positive mental health are of the highest priority and a fundamental aspect of an effective school. Based on this work, here are some strategies to put staff wellbeing at the top of your agenda.

Communication

Well-informed staff are, without a doubt, happier. While staff are working in many different capacities at the moment – based remotely at home, on rota, running “home tutoring” for their own children – communication remains key if we are to ensure that they feel connected and up-to-date with the ever-changing situation in which we find ourselves.

We have found that regular weekly staff briefings held virtually have helped to keep all staff up-to-speed on information or upcoming changes. The briefings are short and informative and can be accessed virtually from home or on-site from a classroom or office.

The introduction of a virtual staffroom, which staff can dial into from the comfort of their own kitchen, has also given us an opportunity to catch-up informally – social distance does not mean social isolation.

Meanwhile, regular line management check-ins have a focus on wellbeing, which we consider to be vital if we are to understand what each individual is experiencing – all of us have different personal situations, worries and concerns to navigate in addition to the complexities of juggling remote learning and reintegrating back into school.

Check-ins are two-fold as not only do they ensure the staff member feels included, but they also allow leaders to be mindful of those staff who have been in

lockdown on their own, or have suffered traumatic experiences during this period.

In every leadership meeting, wellbeing is on the agenda to make sure we are actively reflecting on how people are feeling and how key changes may have an impact on staff as we move forward. In each scenario throughout the Covid closures and into the reintegration phase, it is key to ensure staff feel and stay connected to each other and the school community.

Change

Change can be unsettling for many individuals. Understanding what each staff member’s lockdown experience has been like will enable successful reintegration to be planned as meticulously as it has been planned for the students.

Using a Covid questionnaire, in conjunction with HR support, is a good way to obtain important information regarding a staff member’s vulnerability category or fitness for work, so they can be best supported in continuing to work remotely or starting a phased return to work.

“Return to Work” conversations coupled with the completion of a wellbeing matrix means that a Personalised Recovery Plan can be generated for the staff, just as we are doing for students who are returning to school.

One such matrix is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales (WEMBS), which were developed to enable the measurement of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.

It is crucial to consider the needs of the individual member of staff to ascertain if they are shielding, if they have family at home, or if they have other barriers, such as struggling with reduced public transport services, when looking at returning to work. Adjusting timetables and

rotas to support staff within their circumstances will make a positive contribution to their wellbeing and will reduce stressors at this challenging time.

Connection

As mentioned above, in order to try and quantify wellbeing, a matrix can be used to help signpost to appropriate support, such as the WEMBS.

Under the WEMBS, once a score is generated staff can be directed to the relevant support or even volunteer to support a peer with their wellbeing. It is vital to make certain there is a streamlined and accessible package of support available for staff regarding wellbeing strategies and mental health support. This ranges from peer or line management support to signposting to external support or referrals for on-site counselling if needed.

Every day at the school, a wellbeing support lead is identified on rota who can be accessed if required by both staff and students. This staff member is qualified in mental health support or is a Mental Health First Aider.

The addition of wellbeing sessions in our recovery curriculum enables staff and students to explore different strategies and tips for wellbeing together – normalising these issues and tackling the stigma that can often be attached to mental health.

Furthermore, building time outdoors into the reintegration timetable is a great way to boost endorphins as part of the recovery curriculum.

The continuation of regular initiatives such as our Wellbeing Weeks and Wellbeing Wednesdays have been a key part of our approach. During the Covid-19 closures we have held three “Virtual Wellbeing Weeks”, uniting staff in activities ranging from quizzes and creative tasks, to virtual trekking across the globe and even TikTok videos.

Emails with weekly tips or suggestions for how to look after

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your wellbeing are also sent to all staff as well as posted to our school community via social media.

Collaboration

Keeping staff morale up is a priority. Continuing to celebrate milestones and successes achieved by staff, as well as praising those who have gone above and beyond, really helps. And remember, a simple thank you can go some distance in this regard.

At Bishop Young, there have been staff who have been able to volunteer their time supporting students beyond the classroom by completing essential doorstep welfare checks and food parcel drops. These staff volunteers have visited students at home, observing social distancing, to deliver work and care packages.

Staff have even used their time in lockdown to clear out their own cupboards and donate toys, clothes and food to some of our most vulnerable families. Some of our staff have even been able to donate old laptops into a refurbishment scheme for those families struggling to access online learning.

This collaboration and the fostering of community spirit during these uncertain times has had a knock-on effect on the morale and wellbeing of our staff, students and our community. Helping others is a great way to boost positive wellbeing.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales: <https://bit.ly/3gsb18X>



How are your staff feeling?

Wellbeing surveys and clear communication are at the heart of one multi-academy trust’s approach to ensuring they understand the stressors and challenges that staff are facing

Our staff, like our children, their families and the communities we serve, have been through their fair share of upset since the lockdown, and as the sun began to shine again it was great to see those first signs of lives returning to at least a kind of normal.

Although we are embracing these post-lockdown times with bubble classes, newly installed washing facilities and a stepping up of cleaning regimes throughout our schools, some things will stay the same and will in fact have a more profound role in how we do things in the next few months and years. One of those themes is the wellbeing of our staff.

Even before the lockdown, staff wellbeing was a very important part of how we ran Warrington Primary Academy Trust (WPAT). Teaching is a hugely rewarding profession, but it also has its pressures, and these can seriously affect wellbeing. *Headteacher Update* has highlighted these issues during the lockdown (2020) and any number of surveys have revealed the heightened stress and anxiety of teachers amid school closures and online learning.

We take a multi-stranded approach to protecting and promoting wellbeing. First, we are constantly scanning for signs of stress and poor wellbeing through our regular staff surveys and as we prepare for wider re-opening in September these will be particularly important to help steer our planning and to highlight any anxieties or issues among colleagues.

There are all manner of online staff survey resources out there. Our survey is based on the An Even Better Place to Work programme and has been part of life in our schools since we launched the trust in 2016. The anonymous survey allows colleagues to say how they are feeling across a range of measures, including things like motivation, making a difference, conflict and feedback.

Our aim is to have all areas with a score of five or above. That leads to a green on the grid, indicating a high degree of staff wellbeing. Ambers and reds, as you would expect, indicate low or poor levels of wellbeing.

The results can be analysed on an individual school basis as well as for different cross-trust teams, such as the senior leadership team,

teaching assistants and teachers. The wellbeing survey is carried out every three months. It works because it gives everyone an opportunity to say exactly how they are feeling and be confident that their views will be anonymous.

The survey would be an empty exercise if the results were not used to trigger action. For example, we noticed in one survey that the “feeling valued” measure had not moved on from the previous survey and that our leadership team had scored that area the lowest.

That prompted us to hold an activity in which each senior leader was invited to write short, supportive comments that expressed their thanks to each of their colleagues so that at the end of the activity each had an envelope containing a collection of messages.

It gave everyone an opportunity to tell colleagues how much they valued them and it helped – at the next survey that result had improved noticeably.

The survey was set up with support from coach Chris Whitely, who pointed out that while we were good at making sure that our parents were happy, we rarely asked staff how they felt about their jobs.

We were conscious about giving our staff another paper exercise, so we decided to do the survey online and make sure that it took just three to four minutes to complete. And because the survey is online it makes it easy to interpret the data in various ways so that we can work out which teams might need more support, either in individual schools or across the trust.

It also means that we can work out which teams are happiest. We can then pair up those teams so that they can learn from and support each other.

We are planning another staff survey soon to determine how the past few months have affected the wellbeing of our colleagues, but it is just one part of our wellbeing focus.

We try and encourage an open conversation with all staff, which involves regular updates and contact so that if they have

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concerns or questions they are able to put them to us regularly. This approach was stepped up during lockdown, with regular cross-MAT meetings on Microsoft Teams. During these meetings, I gave colleagues an update on developments and then answered the questions they had submitted.

Feedback shows that these sessions have gone down well across the trust. Everyone has been dealing with very different working patterns and juggling these with the pressures of their home lives and they appreciated the opportunity to come together in these forums and discuss any concerns they might have.

We are very aware that our colleagues have been through a lot recently and that those who have been personally affected by Covid-19 may need additional care and support. In such cases, we can refer them to our mental health and wellbeing professional. We have bought-in this service and if staff are struggling then they can call her to get advice and information as well as help to find other services if necessary.

Ahead of September, we will be placing an increased emphasis on the surveys and communication and offering extra support to all staff who need it.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ An Even Better Place to Work: www.anevenbetterplaceto-work.com
- ▶ Headteacher Update: *Protecting teacher wellbeing during lockdown*, April 2020: <https://bit.ly/2Z4vn0K>





Leadership, wellbeing, culture & communication

We take a whistle-stop tour across the North East to seek some advice and ideas and to find out how schools are supporting the wellbeing, resilience and mental health of staff

I recently took a holiday. I didn't go far – the Costa del Living Room. I was not convinced initially. The idea of using annual leave for something that did not feel like a holiday seemed uninviting.

But having done it, I felt revived and refreshed. My wife and children seemed to enjoy it too (and it was much cheaper than usual!).

Turning off and looking after yourself is invaluable. Yet, during the current crisis and amid the reams and reams of government responses and guidance, it has been easy to lose sight of some of the small steps that can be taken to ensure teacher wellbeing.

A culture of wellbeing

Resilience and wellbeing expert James Hilton, author of *Riding the Waves* (2020) and *Leading from the*

Edge (2016), said: "This year has been an anxious time for everyone. It is more important than ever to create a culture of wellbeing in schools and this starts at the very top."

For James, our satisfaction in our role as a school leader or classroom teacher is central to leading a happy, healthy and effective school. Recognising the positive aspects of school leadership and celebrating the daily wins can be especially difficult in periods of extreme pressure, high accountability and constant change – but it is vital.

He described to me three approaches that will help school leaders to create the right conditions – or climate – to support the wellbeing of adults and children.

Lead by example: Remember, schools become like their leaders

over time, James says. For example, leaders who model trust create a trusting staff over time. This applies especially to wellbeing. Model the wellbeing behaviours that you want your staff to develop. If you send out emails at all hours it communicates to staff that you expect them to be working too. Plan your wellbeing regime – e.g. digital detox times and planned breaks and non-work activities. Let staff know that that is what you are doing.

Talk to someone outside of your immediate situation: As we get more experienced, we fall into the habit of thinking based on our perceptions, looking for confirmation bias – i.e. evidence to back up what we already think or believe. Speak to someone you trust and get them to challenge your

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thinking. This is especially important when responding to sensitive issues involving colleagues or when considering a decision which will have an immediate impact on the sense of security, wellbeing and confidence that adults and children feel in school.

Write a brief journal of your thoughts and feelings: Worrying fuels our anxiety, which in turn fuels our stress levels, and yet worry is quite a foggy, amorphous thing.

Writing a brief journal entry, in times of difficulty, helps to clarify your thinking, enabling you to analyse which parts of any problem you can address. The more in control you feel, the lower your levels of anxiety.

Guiding principles

Before beginning to consider a whole-school plan for staff wellbeing, it is important to consider the guiding principles that underpin the type of culture that you want to create as a leader.

The dioceses of Durham and Newcastle began by mapping out the guiding principles that they believed needed to inform how school leaders begin to implement a robust staff wellbeing culture in their schools.

Paul Rickeard, executive headteacher and director of education at the dioceses, explained: "We aim to promote positive mental health for every member of our staff and all our pupils. We aim to recognise and respond to need as it arises.

"By developing and implementing practical, relevant and effective mental health and wellbeing policies and procedures we can promote a safe and stable environment for both staff and pupils affected both directly and indirectly by mental health and wellbeing issues." (Those interested in finding out more about these guiding principles can contact Paul via @paulrickeard)

Jo Warner, assistant director for school effectiveness in the dioceses, added: "One of the key things for our schools at the present time is to have a strong focus on relationships – rebuilding, re-engaging, re-establishing, repairing, starting new ones. This is going to be crucial in the first few weeks of wider opening of schools.

"This is about everyone flourishing, so staff relationships, relationships with families, children and staff, and children with children.

"They may find themselves with a different group of peers, or with an unfamiliar teacher or teaching assistant and they will need to develop a sense of trust, openness, honesty and, of course, fun with their new school family."

They suggest the following as a means of beginning to map out your plans as a school leader:

- What does a good wellbeing culture look like for you and your team? Begin by mapping this out with school leaders and adults who work in the school.
- Consider the guiding principles that will inform this culture and present a summary of these that is easy to digest for all adults serving the school community.
- Consider how you will measure the effectiveness of your strategic plans.
- To what extent does your school's vision and values underpin relationships at all levels in the school community, enabling pupils to disagree well and to practise forgiveness and reconciliation?
- Is all of this reflected in the school's behaviour, exclusion and attendance policies?
- How well do leaders ensure there is support for good mental health (in children and adults) and a sense of belonging that embraces and celebrates difference?

Nourish the workplace

"A happy teacher teaches better, takes less time off sick and wants to build a career at your school," writes Kimberley Evans, founder of Nourish the Workplace and leader and advocate of teacher wellbeing in schools.

The organisation was founded in response to a number of changing factors in the teaching landscape, including workload issues, retention and recruitment problems and the need to revisit what effective teacher wellbeing looks like.

Kimberley, among other key advocates of wellbeing, works on the steering group for the wellbeing website #Teacher5aday and offers the following practical steps that all teachers can consider, regardless of their role, to consolidate the wellbeing agenda in schools.

It's good to talk: Bottling up emotions and stresses is not good for your mental health. Have a few people you can talk to about things to help you. For instance, have some peers to discuss things with (like other headteachers), something more formal like supervision or a coach, and then some friends with whom you can have a more general chat. The more layers of help you activate, the better your wellbeing will be.

Don't be a lone ranger: Delegating is a skill, a vital skill. You cannot try to be everything to everyone and you cannot do everything. Even if you are a perfectionist and cannot stand how others do it, put your trust in your team and it will help your wellbeing.

Know your limits: Having technology at our fingertips can be a blessing and a curse. Decide what limits you need to set for yourself to protect your wellbeing, as well as that of others. Turn off your work phone, delete the email app from your phone, or turn off notifications after a certain hour.

Orchestrate the energy

When he is not leading a large multi-academy trust in the North of England or supporting the impact of a charity that he helped to set up in Newcastle upon Tyne, Nick Blackburn is busy coaching others and sharing insights on what staff wellbeing means to him and his team.

Wellbeing is high on the agenda at Lingfield Education Trust, where Nick is executive headteacher, and school leaders are keen to champion this as a cornerstone of their school action plans.

He explained: "We are concerned with creating enabling environments for leaders and working through what the points of collaboration need to be. We are in the business of learning and teaching, but we also need to create healthy and sustainable workplaces."

The trust supports this through non-managerial supervision and open access to counselling services for all staff. In addition, Nick is a champion of advocating vulnerabilities and resilience through discussion and one-to-one time with senior leaders.

He added: "If it matters to us or to you, then we talk about it. We were inspired by the philosophy of Peter Drucker, who says that 'your first and foremost job as a leader is to take charge of your own energy and then help to orchestrate the energy of those around you.'"

James Wilson, deputy headteacher at Duchess High School in Northumberland, further accentuates the importance of considering how senior leaders model the tone and orchestrate the energy of the wider staff team.

For example, he told me: "We place a stringent focus on our email traffic as this often dictates the tone and levels of busyness felt by our colleagues. This has especially been the case since the period of lockdown."

James and colleagues on the senior leadership team are the only ones that permit whole-staff emails, acting as circuit breakers to email traffic and the levels of urgency that can sometimes be unwarranted in school in-boxes.

He explained: "We send a daily bulletin wrap-up with the need-to-know information only and insist on no emails being sent after 4pm or before 8am. We also place a clear emphasis on phone calls or face-to-face requests if you are asking colleagues to implement specific tasks."

Do not underestimate the impact of middle leaders as part of the orchestra too – as demonstrated by Nicci Best, head of faculty at Mortimer Community College in South Shields and leader of school wellbeing.

Nicci explained some of the steps that her and the team have taken to support and champion teacher wellbeing: "We have organised staff sports days, cuppa and catch-up afternoons, quiz of the term, social events and treats in in-trays to support wellbeing and boost staff morale.

"We have also built into our CPD programme regular opportunities for staff to engage in fun learning activities together that illuminate the value of activities designed to support wellbeing. Examples include cooking lessons, learning yoga, mindfulness training and workload reduction techniques."

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ For more on James Hilton, see <https://jameshilton.org.uk>
- ▶ Nourish the Workplace helps schools to support staff wellbeing through anonymous staff surveys, coaching and CPD: www.nourishtheworkplace.com
- ▶ Teacher5aday is curated by teachers and offers a "one-stop-shop for all things wellbeing": <https://teacher5aday.co.uk/>

What does the guidance say?

The government has published its long-awaited guidance ahead of full re-opening in September. What does it have to say about staff safety and wellbeing?

On July 2, the Department for Education (DfE) published its guidance for schools ahead of full re-opening in September.

Much of the national attention focused on the measures for pupils (see *SecEd*, 2020) – but what does it say about staff wellbeing and safety?

While the recommended approach for pupils is not based on social distancing, but on creating larger social bubbles (of whole classes or even whole year groups) and then preventing mixing between groups, teachers are still required to socially distance, as they may have to work across different groups of pupils, especially at secondary level.

However, the guidance is light on details when it comes to protecting vulnerable categories of staff, including those from Black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

Essential measures

The guidance (DfE, 2020) says that schools must “review their health and safety risk assessments” ahead of September. Key measures include:

- A requirement that people who are ill stay at home.
- Robust hand and respiratory hygiene, enhanced cleaning arrangements.
- Active engagement with NHS Test and Trace.
- Formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise distancing between those in school where possible.
- Staff maintaining distance from pupils and other staff as much as possible.
- Wellbeing and workload support for school staff.

Social distancing

Social bubbles should be kept apart and movement around the school minimised. Break times, lunch times and arrival and leaving times should all be staggered.

Assemblies should be avoided as should any other large gatherings.

The guidance says that “while passing briefly in the corridor or playground is low risk, schools should avoid creating busy corridors, entrances and exits”.

It continues: “Schools should also plan how shared staff spaces are set up and used to help staff to distance from each other. Use of staffrooms should be minimised, although staff must still have a break of a reasonable length during the day.”

Teachers and school staff can work across different classes and year groups “to facilitate the delivery of the school timetable”, but they should maintain social distance of two metres where possible, the guidance states.

Older children should also “be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff and their peers where possible” within their bubbles.

Health and safety duties

Schools should “continue to assess health and safety risks and consider how to meet equalities duties in the usual way”, the guidance states.

It continues: “Governing boards and school leaders should have regard to staff (including the headteacher) work/life balance and wellbeing. Schools should ensure they have explained to all staff the measures they are proposing putting in place and involve all staff in that process.”

The guidance reminds schools of their duty of care to employees, including when it comes to their mental health, and signposts to a range of resources.

It adds: “Schools already have mechanisms to support staff wellbeing and these will be particularly important, as some staff may be particularly anxious about returning to school.”

The guidance warns that schools may need to alter the way in which they deploy their staff, and use existing staff “more flexibly”, to

welcome back all pupils at the start of the autumn term. However, it states: “Managers should discuss and agree any changes to staff roles with individuals. It is important that planning builds in the need to avoid increases in unnecessary and unmanageable workload burdens.”

Vulnerable staff

The government’s shielding measures for clinically vulnerable people will be relaxed from August 1 and the guidance says that it “expects that most staff will attend school” from September.

It adds: “Where schools apply the full measures in this guidance the risks to all staff will be mitigated significantly, including those who are extremely clinically vulnerable and clinically vulnerable. We expect this will allow most staff to return to the workplace, although we advise those in the most at-risk categories to take particular care while community transmission rates continue to fall.”

The guidance also states: “School leaders should be flexible in how those members of staff are deployed to enable them to work remotely where possible or in roles in school where it is possible to maintain social distancing.”

The guidance recognises that people with certain characteristics are more at risk from Covid-19, including the BAME community. However, there is little information other than advice that schools should “discuss their concerns and explain the measures in place to reduce risks”.

The guidance states: “If people with significant risk factors are concerned, we recommend schools discuss their concerns and explain the measures the school is putting in place to reduce risks.

“School leaders should try as far as practically possible to accommodate additional measures where appropriate.”

The Association of School and College Leaders is concerned about

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the lack of guidance for BAME staff. General secretary Geoff Barton said: “The absence of detailed guidance about the risk of coronavirus to pupils and staff from certain ethnic minorities is an on-going concern. Schools need information and guidance. It is not good enough for the government to offer no support beyond suggesting schools discuss any concerns.”

Cases of infection

If schools have a case of Covid-19, they will be advised by their Public Health England local health protection team. Action might include small groups of young people and staff being asked to self-isolate for up to 14 days.

The guidance says that schools “must” understand the NHS Test and Trace process and if there are two or more confirmed cases in a two-week period, a larger number of pupils, perhaps even a whole year group, may have to self-isolate “as a precautionary measure”.

If an outbreak is suspected, a mobile testing unit may be despatched. All staff, pupils and their families will have access to testing if they develop Covid-19 symptoms, and schools will be provided with home-testing kits for children and staff who would otherwise be unable to get a test.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ DfE: Guidance for full opening – schools, July 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/38tdOfd>
- ▶ SecEd: *Headteachers face up to ‘mind-boggling logistics’ of full reopening in September*, July, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2NPAPQb>