**POLICY
RESEARCH
FORUM**

How are schools coping with the impact of Covid-19 on the teaching of pupils with SEN : lessons for schools

June 2021

SUMMARY
How are schools coping with the impact of Covid-19 on the teaching of pupils with SEN: lessons for schools

This policy seminar on **How are schools coping with the impact of Covid-19 on the teaching of pupils with SEN: lessons for schools** took place **30 April** 2021, 2-4pm on zoom. It addressed the following questions in relation to children and young people with SEN / Disabilities: How have teachers, SENCos and head teachers been supported to cope with the teaching of pupils with SEN/disability? What lessons have been learned for the future provision for children and young people with SEN / disabilities? And what are the conditions required to enable these lessons to be implemented in schools? Presentations were by Dr Amelia Roberts, (Centre for Inclusive Education, Institute of Education) on 'Back on Track' for pupils with SEND as we emerge from Covid-19: an exploration of the helpful with additional views on the unhelpful', Dr Beate Hellawell, Lewisham Local Authority, on 'Building Back Better? The role of local authorities in supporting recovery-focused provisions led by schools' and Tricia Mahoney, Assistant Head and Inclusion Lead, Oakwood Primary School, on 'Coping with the impact of Covid-19 from a SENCo perspective'.

Dr Amelia Roberts' presentation was about the work done on the 'Back on Track' knowledge exchange project, funded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund (2020) at UCL: 'Developing a rapid-response Knowledge Exchange protocol to structure responsive 'research to schools' collaborations: pilot model - mitigating the effects of Covid-19 on the wellbeing and education of children with Special Educational Needs'. The 'Back on Track' Knowledge Exchange model focuses on four core areas to support schools to support young people with special educational needs: school morale and ethos; individual wellbeing and mental health; a focus on reducing exclusions in all their forms. She presented a mixed picture of how schools coped, concluding that it may be more helpful to address the nuances of individual experience rather than focus on a blanket statement linking educational upheaval to future earning losses.

Dr Beate Hellawell focussed on the role of local authorities in supporting recovery-focused provisions led by schools. She highlighted what the pandemic has revealed about these local systems and what needs to happen next to make sure that those insights bring lasting changes for a system that is widely acknowledged to be under immense pressure and in need of reform. She examines four phases that most local systems have had to navigate since the pandemic, identifies key issues that have been confronted and how they have been done in her local service. For example, learning loss, learning disruption and local knowledge, scaffolding-up not, catching-up, digital, remote and blended learning and support structures. She makes the case for the important role of well-functioning local systems and a recognition of the unique role of the LA as a convener of partnerships, a champion of vulnerable children and a commissioner of services. This entails that LAs should have the power and capacity to support such system-wide approaches and to challenge instances of poor practice or non-engagement.

Tricia Mahoney, as SEN Coordinator, inclusion lead and Assistant head, outlined Oakwood Primary school's responses to the pandemic, which involved the key strategy of improving teacher and student relationships. They managed to secure their successes through remote learning which has increased staff, parent/carer and pupil communication. This has further developed their relationships with pupils as they were able to find out more about the children's interests, strengths and needs. The use of adaptable routines is presented as a key part of their strategy in this school. How the school did this is set out in detail by illustrating how the school's particular experiences and practices connected to the three seminar questions. Oakwood Primary School is presented as an inclusive school that strives to foster an inclusive environment and to support pupils with SEN to the best of their ability.

In the final section, there is a summary of the main themes that came out of the group discussions that followed the presentations. These themes are organised in terms of the three seminar questions. About the final question on the conditions required for the lessons learned to influence future policy and practice, these were about: the narrow time opportunity for change, the risk of losing what been achieved since March 2020, the school Governors' role, an overall rethink of schools' purposes, some change principles, about the current national SEN review, resources & funding, the moderation of curriculum and assessment pressures, schools needing support, teachers have opportunities for reflective practice and special schools being considered in all decisions.

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Section 1: Introduction

This policy seminar on **How are schools coping with the impact of Covid-19 on the teaching of pupils with SEN: lessons for schools took place 30 April** 2021, 2-4pm on Teams. It addressed the following issues and questions in relation to children and young people with SEN / Disabilities:

1. How have teachers, SENCos and head teachers been supported to cope with the teaching of pupils with SEN/disability?
2. What lessons have been learned for the future provision for children and young people with SEN / disabilities?
3. What are the conditions required to enable these lessons to be implemented in schools?

Presentations were given by Dr Amelia Roberts, Centre for Inclusive Education, Institute of Education on: 'Back on Track' for pupils with SEND as we emerge from Covid-19: an exploration of the helpful with additional views on the unhelpful; Dr Beate Hellawell, Lewisham Local Authority: Building Back Better? The role of local authorities in supporting recovery-focused provisions led by schools and Tricia Mahoney, Assistant Head and Inclusion Lead, Oakwood Primary School: Coping with the impact of Covid-19 from a SENCo perspective. The conclusions of the small group discussions are summarised at the end of this policy paper.

SEN Policy Research Forum
The SEN Policy Research Forum, which organised this seminar, incorporates the aims and work of the previous SEN Policy Options group in a new format and with some expanded aims. The Forum's website is at:
https://senpolicyresearchforum.co.uk

The aim of the Forum is to contribute intelligent analysis, knowledge and experience to promote the development of policy and practice for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Forum will be concerned with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities from preschool to post 16. It will cover the whole of the UK and aim to:
1. provide timely policy review and critique,
2. promote intelligent policy debate,
3. help set longer term agendas – acting like a think-tank,
4. deliberate over and examine policy options in the field.
5. inform research and development work in the field.
6. contribute to development of more informed media coverage of SEND policy issues.

The uncertainties over what counts as 'special educational needs' and 'disabilities' in relation to a wider concept of 'additional needs' are recognised. These will be among the many issues examined through the Forum.

The Forum, which continues the work of the SEN Policy Options group has been

continuing this work since 1993 for over 28 years. It started as an ESRC seminar series with some initial funding from the Cadbury Trust. The Forum appreciates the generous funding from NASEN and the Pears Foundation to enable it to function, though it operates independently of these organisations.

Lead group and coordination of the Forum:
Dr Peter Gray - Policy Consultant (co-coordinator)
Professor Brahm Norwich - University of Exeter (co-coordinator)
Yoland Burgess - Young People's Education and Skills, London Councils
Professor Julie Dockrell – UCL Institute of Education
Dr Beate Hellawell - Lewisham local authority
Dr Brian Lamb - Policy consultant
Professor Geoff Lindsay - University of Warwick
Penny Richardson - Policy Consultant
Chris Robertson - SENCO Forum; University of Birmingham
Sharon Smith – Parent of young person with SEN
Dr Rob Webster - UCL Institute of Education
Professor Klaus Wedell - UCL, Institute of Education
Julie Wharton - Winchester University

Membership:
If you would like to join the Forum, go to the website and follow link to register as a member. You will be invited to future seminars and be able to participate in discussion through the blog on the SENPRF website for joining instructions.
https://senpolicyresearchforum.co.uk

For further information please contact the co-coordinators of the Forum, Brahm Norwich, Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LU (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk) or Peter Gray (pgray@sscyp) .

Past Policy Options Papers (see website for downloadable copies)
1. Bucking the market: Peter Housden, Chief Education Officer, Nottinghamshire LEA
2. Towards effective schools for all: Mel Ainscow, Cambridge University Institute of Education
3. Teacher education for special educational needs: Professor Peter Mittler, Manchester University
4. Resourcing for SEN: Jennifer Evans and Ingrid Lunt, Institute of Education, London University
5. Special schools and their alternatives: Max Hunt, Director of Education, Stockport LEA
6. Meeting SEN: options for partnership between health, education and social services: Tony Dessent, Senior Assistant Director, Nottinghamshire LEA
7. SEN in the 1990s: users' perspectives: Micheline Mason, Robina Mallet, Colin Low and Philippa Russell
8. Independence and dependence? Responsibilities for SEN in the Unitary and County Authorities: Roy Atkinson, Michael Peters, Derek Jones, Simon Gardner

and Phillipa Russell

9. Inclusion or exclusion: Educational Policy and Practice for Children and Young People with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties: John Bangs, Peter Gray and Greg Richardson

10. Baseline Assessment and SEN: Geoff Lindsay, Max Hunt, Sheila Wolfendale, Peter Tymms

11. Future policy for SEN: Response to the Green Paper: Brahm Norwich, Ann Lewis, John Moore, Harry Daniels

12. Rethinking support for more inclusive education: Peter Gray, Clive Danks, Rik Boxer, Barbara Burke, Geoff Frank, Ruth Newbury and Joan Baxter

13. Developments in additional resource allocation to promote greater inclusion: John Moore, Cor Meijer, Klaus Wedell, Paul Croll and Diane Moses.

14. Early years and SEN: Professor Sheila Wolfendale and Philippa Russell

15. Specialist Teaching for SEN and inclusion: Annie Grant, Ann Lewis and Brahm Norwich

16. The equity dilemma: allocating resources for special educational needs: Richard Humphries, Sonia Sharpe, David Ruebain, Philippa Russell and Mike Ellis

17. Standards and effectiveness in special educational needs: questioning conceptual orthodoxy: Richard Byers, Seamus Hegarty and Carol Fitz Gibbon

18. Disability, disadvantage, inclusion and social inclusion: Professor Alan Dyson and Sandra Morrison

19. Rethinking the 14-19 curriculum: SEN perspectives and implications: Dr Lesley Dee, Christopher Robertson, Professor Geoff Lindsay, Ann Gross, and Keith Bovair

20. Examining key issues underlying the Audit Commission Reports on SEN: Chris Beek, Penny Richardson and Peter Gray

21. Future schooling that includes children with SEN / disability: Klaus Wedell, Ingrid Lunt and Brahm Norwich

22. Taking Stock: integrated Children's Services, Improvement and Inclusion: Margaret Doran, Tony Dessent and Professor Chris Husbands

23. Special schools in the new era: how do we go beyond generalities? Chris Wells, Philippa Russell, Peter Gray and Brahm Norwich

24. Individual budgets and direct payments: issues, challenges and future implications for the strategic management of SEN
Christine Lenehan, Glenys Jones Elaine Hack and Sheila Riddell

25. Personalisation and SEN
Judy Sebba, Armando DiFinizio, Alison Peacock and Martin Johnson.

26. Choice-equity dilemma in special educational provision
John Clarke, Ann Lewis, Peter Gray

27. SEN Green Paper 2011: progress and prospects
Brian Lamb, Kate Frood and Debbie Orton

28. A school for the future - 2025: Practical Futures Thinking
Alison Black

29. The Coalition Government's policy on SEND: aspirations and challenges? P. Gray, B. Norwich, P Stobbs and S Hodgson.

30. How will accountability work in the new SEND legislative system?
Parents from Camden local authority, Penny Richardson, Jean Gross and Brian

Lamb

31. Research in special needs and inclusive education: the interface with policy and practice, Brahm Norwich, Peter Blatchford, Rob Webster, Simon Ellis, Janet Tod, Geoff Lindsay and Julie Dockrell.

32. Professional training in the changing context of special educational needs disability policy and practice. Neil Smith, Dr Hazel Lawson, Dr Glenys Jones.

33. Governance in a changing education system: ensuring equity and entitlement for disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs. Peter Gray, Niki Elliot and Brahm Norwich.

34. School commissioning for send: new models, limits and possibilities, Tom Jefford, Debbie Orton and Kate Fallon.

35. An early review of the new SEN / disability policy and legislation: where are we now? Brian Lamb, Kate browning, Andre Imich and Chris Harrison.

36. Preparing for adulthood - developing provision for children and young people with SEND. Yolande Burgess Justin Cooke. Ellen Atkinson and Gill Waceba.

37. A worthwhile investment? Assessing and valuing educational outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Graham Douglas, Graham Easterlow, Jean Ware & Anne Heavey

38. Changes in SEN / disability provision, pressures on ordinary schools and parental choice: a review of inclusive education and its prospects. Alison Black, Lizzie Harris, Jayne Fitzgerald, Claire-Marie Whiting and Jenny Andrews.

39. Policy for SEND and Inclusion: examining UK national and some European differences. Chris Robertson, Alfons Timmerhuis Niels Egelund and Camilla Brørup Dyssegaard, Cecilia Simón and Gerardo Echeita and Richard Rieser.2018

40. Exclusions, barriers to admission and quality of mainstream provision for children and young people with SEND: what can be done? Jules Daulby, Louise Gazeley, Nicola Furey and James Roach. 2019

41. Accountability, performance management and inspection: how to enable positive responses to diversity? Jonathan Roberts, Nick Whittaker, Jane Starbuck and Robin Banerjee. 2020

43. A review of policy in the field of special needs and inclusive education since the 1990s Lorna Selfe, Robin C. Richmond with Peter Gray and Brahm Norwich. 2020

44. Trends in SEN identification: contexts, causes and consequences, Jo Hutchinson, Sami Timimi and Neil McKay, 2020.

45. Learning from the Covid crisis for educating children and young people with SEN / disabilities. Amy Skipp, Sharon Smith and Dominic Wall. March 2021.

Copies of most of these papers can now be downloaded from the website of the SEN Policy Research Forum https://senpolicyresearchforum.co.uk/past-policy-papers/

Section 2:
'Back on Track' for pupils with SEND as we emerge from Covid-19: an exploration of the helpful with additional views on the unhelpful

Dr Amelia Roberts, Centre for Inclusive Education, Institute of Education

This paper is built on the work done on the 'Back on Track' knowledge exchange project, funded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund (2020) at UCL: 'Developing a rapid-response KE protocol to structure responsive 'research to schools' collaborations: pilot model - mitigating the effects of Covid-19 on the wellbeing and education of children with Special Educational Needs'. The project was inspired by UCL Centre for Inclusive Education's weekly resource collation from March to July 2020 to support the sudden home-schooling of thousands of young people with special educational needs as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. These resources were collated by the CIE academic team: Gill Brackenbury, Elisabeth Herbert, Emma Sumner, Sally Franklin and Kate Bradley as well as myself and many of these can be found in the 'Back on Track' guidance document (link below).

Our aim was to write a rapid-response variation of our established Knowledge Exchange programme with schools to respond to the unique short, medium and long term consequences of Covid-19 on the education of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Co-created with teachers, parents and the Local Authority of Enfield, the project produced the Back on Track guidance document, which was presented at a public-engagement event and widely shared free of charge to schools, Local Authorities and other stakeholder groups.

UCL Centre for Inclusive Education has been pioneering research in education-based Knowledge Exchange programmes, including the influential 'Maximising Impact of Teaching Assistants' which won the BERA Public Engagement and Impact Award in 2019 (Blatchford et al 2012). The KE framework developed by CIE now underpins four other KE programmes, including 'Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children' (Carroll and Cameron 2017) and 'Supporting Wellbeing, Emotional Resilience and Learning' (O'Brien and Roberts 2019).

This paper will discuss the core four 'Back on Track' principles derived from the collaboration and piloted with Camden headteachers and SENCOs. This paper also alludes to other current research, particularly that emerging from the Institute of Education (IOE).

One piece of research with a powerful set of messages hails from the IOE's National Literacy Centre (2020). The team make eight recommendations to support pupils' full introduction back to school, urging against too narrow a focus on testing and content delivery and recommending instead school autonomy and an emphasis on supporting wellbeing and mental health. The focus is very much about the importance of bringing children back into their educational community. Instead of making assumptions about a child with special educational needs and their requirements, the recommendation is that children are brought back into their mainstream, mixed ability classrooms and taught inclusively alongside peers.

The focus here is on excellent, differentiated classroom teaching done on a mixed ability basis, enabling children to regain a sense of identity as part of their communities. But it is still important be aware of risk factors, considering who needs what support and being alert to pupils whose vulnerability may be increased as a result of the pandemic.

Reports by the Sutton Trust (such as Montacute 2020) indicate that young people who are in a lower socioeconomic environment will experience disproportionate effects from the pandemic, including being the recipients of different types and quality of online provision related to the resourcing of their schools. For example, schools in higher socioeconomic areas offered nearly double the face to face online teaching, and they also offered much more feedback on pupils' individual work, whereas schools in lower socio economic areas tended to make programmes and lessons available online, but provided less personalised interaction.

We know now that COVID-19 has not been 'a great leveller' and has instead reinforced social disadvantage, and when we look at special educational needs, mapped inter-sectionally against social disadvantage, we need to assess with accuracy the types of support needed by individuals.

The UCL Centre for Inclusive Education's 'Back on Track' Knowledge Exchange model focuses on four core areas to evaluate in respect of supporting schools to support young people with special educational needs in the following months and years. These four areas are school morale and ethos; individual wellbeing and mental health; a focus on reducing exclusions in all their forms (permanent, fixed term, school refusal and what we might call 'micro exclusions' which are when children find it difficult to access, friendships or access particular activities within a lesson) and enabling pupil attainment.

Our findings are suggesting that we need to be paying attention to the level of support that school staff are able to access, and some questions to consider might be:
* Who is supporting the most vulnerable?
* What kind of support are they being offered.
* How are the most vulnerable being identified?
* Is anybody newly or unexpectedly vulnerable?
* Is anybody's vulnerability now magnified?

One critical area is the importance of thinking through difficulties around transition. For example, consider the child with autism whose behaviour is aggressive because they find the sensation of the school hand gel very problematic. It is important to take an analytical exploration of problems like this to really understand what is being experienced by the young person. For example, is it the smell or the texture or the coldness of the gel? Is it the sensation? Is it the sound of the application process which is causing the problem? It is crucial to be curious about the problem so that we can have a dialogue with child, home and school and seek that smallest possible adjustment that might make the critical difference to a child being able to reintegrate back into their school community successfully, or not.

So now more than ever, collaboration, pupil, voice, family engagement really matter because in terms of supporting the child with SEN, if we can address issues that arise with

compassion and collaboration, then schools and family will to be able to move forward in a positive way and perhaps even in a way that is better than pre-pandemic. But if we allow a situation to go on unresolved, then a child that was making a success of school may suddenly find they are not making success of school. There are therefore windows of opportunity: are we able to resolve problems and progress? Or are schools, families and children going to be derailed by problems that occur as a result of the pandemic?

The example above illustrates how, if there is an issue, it be resolved collaboratively by a tiny adjustment such as by choosing a type of hand gel that's more pleasant or by using wet wipes instead of gel and then thinking about how communication is managed around the whole school so that this is well known and all staff members are aware of that. Yet if the problem remained unresolved, unnecessary exclusions or absences could be a consequence, with long term effects on children's lives.

Another element that is important for schools is to be prepared for changes in behaviour. Schools won't always know who has been particularly traumatized and who hasn't. We do know that many children are incredibly resilient and many will negotiate these difficulties with aplomb. Others, however, will have had a really very difficult time at home, and a very difficult time in negotiating the differences between home and school. For example, reports of domestic violence have increased during lockdowns. Mental health inquiries to hotlines have increased, so schools don't yet know who has been traumatised and the extent of that trauma. What is certain, however, is that many young people with chaotic or high-stress lives at home have had no respite from their home lives for many months. Therefore schools and teachers need to be ready for changes in behaviour and emotional dysregulation, particularly those that come from unusual directions.

Children may be experiencing grief, both bereavement of lost loved ones as a result of the pandemic, and lost opportunities. They will have missed their friends. They will have missed experiences that they were looking forward to, so grief will manifest for many individuals. Some bereavements may be complicated, such as the loss of a grandparent coupled with inability to visit or attend funerals due to lockdown regulations. Young people may be withdrawn, confused and disorientated and schools need to be aware and prepared for these changes.

To support schools and families, CIE have created a toolkit of resources in '*Back on Track: Guidance for schools and families supporting children with special educational needs in response to Covid-19'* (link below). This includes resources to support transitions, such as designing new routines, practicing those routines (eg using 'now and next' cards), thinking about collaboration and encouraging discussion around wellbeing and mental health.

The 'Back on Track' document includes a number of resources to support children with anxiety, such as an App designed for people with Autism called 'Molehill Mountain'. Another resource, created by the Centre for Research in Autism Education, in conjunction with Ambitious about Autism is called 'Know Your Normal'. This toolkit enables you to have a conversation with young people about what's normal for them so that it's easier to recognise signs of increasing mental health needs such as anxiety and depression. One of the examples given is of a young woman who, when she has a packet of crisps, likes to pour

out the crisps and line them up in size order so she can eat them from large to small and that behaviour is normal for her. So knowing the habits and routines, such as sleeping and eating patterns, enables schools, young people and families to identify changes in the normal routine early, so that appropriate support can be offered promptly.

It is also crucial to prioritise pupil voice and family voice, including accessing pupil voice from non-verbal young people who may find it harder to verbalise their opinions. It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of collaboration.

The next area of focus is 'closing the attainment gap'. It has always been important for pupils with Special Educational Needs to ensure that appropriate and targeted interventions are available at the right time for the right pupils, delivered in the right way, by the right person, in the right conditions for the right length of time. This has never been more important. Schools need to question whether the intervention that they are using is the right choice, used with the right child in the right way and recorded appropriately. It is vital to be precise about the skills we want to address and consider how this is monitored and recorded, so we know when to stop as well as start the intervention. Right now it is all about doing the things that have always mattered, but doing them as well as we ever have.

To address specifically one or two of the focus questions of this seminar in terms of the support for SENCOs and headteachers around special educational needs and/or disabilities, it seems as if support around SEND has been minimal from a central government perspective, and this has been particularly characterized by the lack of mention or particular support of special schools from the DfE. It has been a very difficult time for schools. There has been some really good support from many other organisations, but I think we will look back on this time and think that we probably could have been much more supportive of pupils and families with special educational needs.

There is a fascinating piece of research that was undertaken by a colleague, Dr Georgia Pavlopoulou et al (2020). She looked at the impact of the pandemic on families of children with autism and found that they very much felt the loss of engagement with professional services during this time, so suddenly a lot of support was withdrawn and again for many young people, including some with autism, they found it very difficult to understand that formal schooling was suddenly expected to happen at home when they had seen that structured learning was previously usually a school dependent phenomenon. Being out of the context of school meant that learning was very difficult for some young people, while others found it easier to learn at home due to a reduction in anxiety and a more personalised timetable.

What lessons have been learned for future provision?
The volume of research is immense at the moment and there is so much information coming through which will need to be synthesised, digested and disseminated. In our 'Back on Track' guidance document, we have compiled a brief overview of some of the core findings relating to the impacts of the pandemic on education and wellbeing of young people, so I would direct you to that as a starting point, but it is just that. It is simply a starting point.

But one of the key findings is that we should be focusing on wellbeing. We should be focusing on collaboration and community rather than trying to push an agenda of catching up on the curriculum. In terms of lessons learned, we need to engage families and children with SEN much more, now and in the future. We need to put them at the heart of planning rather than as an afterthought.

I wanted to conclude with thinking about a piece of research that came from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which offers a potentially unhelpful 'headline finding', obscuring more helpful elements from the report.

On Feb 1st 2021 the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) released a report claiming that Covid-19 school closures *could cost pupils £40,000 in lifetime earnings'*. The report used a pre-Covid 19 study (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2018) which examined the impact of missed periods of schooling on future earnings. Using the conclusion that each year of schooling in *'higher income countries'* bestows an average increase of 8% in earnings, the IFS determines that because 'most will have lost over half a year of schooling', their earnings will drop by at least 4%, approximating £40,000 over a lifetime.

There are reasons to treat this statement with caution. The original study considered missed schooling for individual children in the context of their peers who were still in school, thus focusing on individuals or small groups rather than whole cohorts affected by a pandemic. In the original review of 1120 estimates of returns on education, across 139 countries, the authors consider the effects of non-schooling in countries not affected by a pandemic. In the current context, disruptions to schooling have affected everyone at the same time, although not necessarily in the same way.

The term 'school closures' is a misnomer as most schools have remained open for children of key workers or vulnerable children. It would be inaccurate to assume that the children inside the school gates are receiving a proper education, while those outside are not. Ofsted (2021) published a 'myth busting' report in Jan 21 which included dispelling the myth that *'remote education is fundamentally different to other forms of teaching/learning'.* Instead, the report focuses on the ways in which excellent teaching and a high quality curriculum can be delivered remotely, by focusing on key components such as feedback, assessment, peer interactions and maintaining regular contact with pupils.

This is not to say that all children have received excellent remote teaching. The IFS report correctly highlights the differential impact of the pandemic in replicating and enhancing disadvantage. The digital divide has been well documented and despite the Department for Education's attempt to provide laptops, roll out to families and pupils in need has been inconsistent. The Sutton Trust's report on the impact of Covid-19 measures on social mobility was unequivocal in its findings that economic advantage mitigates the worst of the effects of Covid-19 on education (Montacute, 2020).

In short, the picture is a mixed one and it may be more helpful to address the nuances of individual experience rather than focus on a blanket statement linking educational upheaval to earning losses. Indeed, it is more likely that future earning loss will have more to do with

reduced opportunities due to economic recession and business failures post lockdown. Education cannot be neatly measured in terms of days and hours inside school. Some children will have enjoyed rich learning opportunities at home, while many others are exposed to a full school-based curriculum in non-pandemic times that fails to meet either their educational or emotional needs.

So ideas about repeating a year, longer school days and summer schools may be useful for some pupils and some schools in some circumstances, but the one size fits all approach is not a helpful one, nor is the notion that the curriculum is a fixed quantity that has to be 'caught up' without deeper questions about the nature of learning and the foundations of great teaching.

A powerful illustration comes from this example from Professor Dockrell and her research team which encourages us to look more closely at what is happening in the classroom and how we might make the learning environment rich with activities that promote oral language and dialogue.

Rather than trying to catch up on curriculum content, we could be ensuring that a classroom is structured to enable dialogue and oracy and language and peer learning. It is much more important to focus on active lessons, a really exciting curriculum and an engaging learning experience than to be harnessed to an inflexible curriculum and try and feed children volumes of taught content. We know that doesn't work and it particularly doesn't work for children with special educational needs. So fundamentally we need to help schools not to feel backed into a corner to teach in ways they know are not successful.

The key, therefore, lies in allowing a more nuanced, flexible approach to understanding and responding to the needs of all pupils and particularly pupils with special educational needs, with schools having more control over budgets and decision making. We should be praising schools, families and young people and spend time acknowledging what an astonishing job they have done during the pandemic.

Ultimately we need to celebrate our young people as we move forward as a community in this brave new world.

Resources:

'Back on Track: Guidance for schools and families supporting children with special educational needs in response to Covid-19'
Free to download from our website: UCL Centre for Inclusive Education or
https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10118958/

Molehill Mountain App
https://www.autistica.org.uk/molehill-mountain

Know Your Normal

https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/what-we-do/youth-participation/youth-led-toolkits/know-your-normal

Interruption of provision due to Covid-19: *IOE recommendations*
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/covid-19-research-ucl-institute-education

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Section 3:

Building Back Better? The role of local authorities in supporting recovery-focused provisions led by schools

Dr Beate Hellawell, SEN Advisor, Lewisham Local Authority

Introduction

This paper contributes to the ongoing dialogue in literature, policy seminars and professional conversations in schools and local authority (LA) forums that documents how local special educational needs and disability (SEND) systems have navigated the extraordinary challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. I hope to highlight what these events have revealed about those local systems and what needs to happen next to make sure that those insights bring lasting changes for a system that is widely acknowledged to be under immense pressure and in need of reform.

I will exemplify broader issues by reflecting on my current role as SEND advisor for a local authority in London and as someone who is research-active with links to the UCL Institute of Education. The SEND advisory service is a free service that supports mainstream and special schools (including academies) as well as alternative provisions (APs) and further education settings with the strategic development of their SEND provision. The SEND advisory team is located in a multi-disciplinary multi-agency service that includes advisory teachers for specific learning difficulties and sensory needs, educational psychologists, case officers for the statutory LA SEND functions, social workers for children with disabilities, and health professionals offering core and commissioned services including speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. Children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are co-located in the building and we work closely with colleagues from the Council's admissions, attendance, and inclusion teams. SEND advisors provide support and challenge to develop and embed inclusive practice across settings with a particular focus on CYP on SEN support. Our key service outcomes are to (1) improve attainment, (2) increase engagement, and (3) reduce exclusions for all CYP with SEND.

My reflections are located in the field of critical education policy (CEP) approaches. CEP studies are concerned with inter-linking professional practice with education policymaking (Gunter, Hall and Mills 2015), aim to connect the local to the bigger educational reform picture, and are committed to ensuring that important thinking is not pushed off the agenda or declared irrelevant. This calls for an acceptance of uncertainty and doubt (Urban 2008) as integral to ethical professional practice, and for a willingness to expand our notions of evidence-based practice to one of integrating best research evidence with expertise and one that values and promotes 'practice-based evidence' (Fox 2015). The literature I draw on has not been systematically reviewed, but rather was highlighted via the various networks I subscribe to as a research-engaged practitioner and has caught my attention, and through a more systematic search on the UCL open access portal (https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/), searching for Covid-19 in the title or abstract, limited to IoE publications.

Where we have been and where we are at

In this section I draw substantially on Bryant, Parish and Bunyan's (2021) research commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) who have identified the following phases that most local systems have navigated since the pandemic:

Phase 1: Initial response to lockdown –March and April 2020
Key activities that characterised local systems' responses during this period included:
1. putting in place systems for keeping "eyes on" vulnerable children, and
2. developing essential structures of system leadership, communications and partnership working.

In my authority this involved well-meaning but initially poorly coordinated information gathering exercises from various teams and services. It overwhelmed schools and at times mistook collating (quickly outdated) information with the understandable need to feel in control. We succeeded in effectively moving online the termly site visits with special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs). This phase also resulted in the transformation of the established head teacher's briefing meeting to an expanded weekly online 'Covid Briefing' that became an important vehicle to address locally emerging issues as the pandemic progressed. It is an example of Bryant et al.'s (2021) findings that the pandemic has required a system-wide response and has worked best where response to the pandemic was one of evolution, rather than requiring the creation of an entirely new way of working.

Phase 2: Adapting to lockdown – May to July 2020
Key activities included:
1. refining system-wide communications,
2. addressing practical challenges, such as access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and IT devices,
3. assessing risk to support the return to in-person teaching and support for families, and
4. improving core systems relating to access to support.

The SEND advisory service provided a risk assessment template to schools and settings and undertook a quality assurance exercise to monitor appropriate application of the risk assessments. We challenged where schools were quick to find reasons to keep CYP away from school rather than looking for ways of making attendance possible. We also put systems in place to work with schools and families where there was disagreement about whether and how children with EHC plans and those deemed vulnerable could return to school. We have noted the concerns raised in the national SENCO workforce survey (Curran, Boddison and Moloney 2020) that the lack of timely, consistent guidance and support from LAs was a key difficulty for SENCOs in addition to the time the risk assessments took to complete. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the availability of our free service, which provided direct and responsive access to the LA for SENCOs, mitigated against this and that our LA was therefore maybe better placed than some others to provide consistent and clear support for our specific local context. We will need to confirm this through local fact finding.

Phase 3: "New normal" –September to December 2020
Key activities included:
1. putting plans and risk assessments developed during the previous period to the test of operating,

2. responding to "bubbles bursting" when someone in a teaching bubble or team tested positive, and
3. identifying and responding to children's and families' needs resulting from the first lockdown.

Our 'new normal' saw the formation of online SEND collaboratives (approximately 6 local schools) to facilitate peer-to-peer support for SENCOs and replace 'checking in' opportunities that were no longer possible as part of former networking meetings. For a time, our mission to improve inclusive practice for CYP with SEND took a back seat as we responded to and supported crisis and emerging needs. What is already clear is that the virtual SEND collaboratives are an important step in the development of networks for school-to-school support (Curran et al. 2020), especially in a context where SEND is not yet fully embedded in the local school improvement work.

Phase 4: Return to lockdown – January to March 2021
Key activities included:
1. delivering a robust offer of remote learning and remote support for families, and
2. balancing continuity of education and support for families with reducing opportunities for transmission.

Our SEND advisory service focused on supporting SENCOs in their task to simultaneously facilitate differentiated remote learning for CYP on SEN support and also support the many children still attending school. We became first-hand witnesses of extreme fatigue, the risk of burnout, and the strain on human and financial local resources at family, school and LA level.

Supporting recovery-focused SEND provision
I will now turn to the role of local authorities in supporting recovery-focused SEND provision led by schools. Our SEND advisory service was set up as part of the local drive to focus on early intervention in response to an increase in local need and a disproportionate number of exclusions of CYP with SEND, as well as an uneven profile as far as their attainment and engagement is concerned. Moss et al. (2020, p.4) argue that where they exist, strong local support structures have played an important part in facilitating good local decision-making and conclude that: "Stronger, locally responsive networks would allow policy decisions and national guidance to develop from a much fuller awareness of what the every-day realities of school life are. Such networks would also help schools collaborate on finding local solutions to novel dilemmas posed by the crisis". Our service is designed to support our local schools and to facilitate good local decision-making. The following sets out what I believe we need to do next.

A. Learning loss, learning disruption and local knowledge

Harmey and Moss (2020) argue that 'learning disruption' may be a more useful descriptor for pupils' experience during the COVID pandemic since 'learning loss' research focuses on the impact on academic achievement of time out of school under ordinary circumstances, whereas literature on unplanned school disruption is a more useful reference point to inform understanding of the likely impacts of school closures during COVID on children's education. Research relating to learning disruption shows that system leaders' local knowledge is essential in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable in the community, and that they are able to do so well in many cases because of their local knowledge.

What is needed now:
- Create and protect important thinking and reflection spaces that enables deep learning from and working for lasting change - not only for school leaders, but also for middle leaders, including SENCOs where they are not part of the SLT. This is hard to square with the documented fatigue in local systems, and also the need to continue statutory services in schools and by local authority teams. Some of our existing forums that have proved so helpful for managing the pandemic crisis can evolve into those spaces if we let them.
- Develop a joint recovery strategy as well as review contingency planning and identify what should be LA-led and what should be school-led, making sure that parents and the organisations representing parents are engaged in this process. Addressing variable access to IT, upskilling school staff for providing effective virtual SEN support, identifying innovative practice and promoting this across the local system, and embedding the schools' role as key providers of early help and other social care support are some of the areas where the local authority can maintain or take up an important role.
- Consolidate data gathering and analysis activities and develop a SEND data strategy for the local system that captures local knowledge and can inform emerging needs more successfully. As part of this, we need to compare some of the national findings with what is the case locally to learn lessons, but also to celebrate local successes.

B. Scaffolding up, not catching up

Schools are thinking differently about their universal offer and the benefits that learning online can bring, especially for learners with SEND (Curran et al. 2020). Webster (2021) argues that schools should avoid the 'catch up' intervention trap and rather focus on 'scaffolding up' in the main classroom. Inclusive whole class teaching uses many of the existing teaching skills to enable learners with SEND to access the curriculum as long as there is a student-first approach in a high-quality teaching environment (EEF 2020).
What is needed now:
- Develop an improved joint local understanding and framework of what constitute SEN support needs that should and can be met by schools, including through consistent high-quality teaching and meaningful interventions, and where the LA needs to step in. This means we need to address the vexing 'ordinarily available' question that we have not resolved yet.

C. Digital, remote and blended learning and support structures

Bubb and Jones (2020) found that remote learning was well received by many pupils and parents, with more potential for creative learning, better progress, more useful feedback, and greater student independence. However, an Education Policy Institute (EPI 2021) report notes that pupils with SEND have faced considerable challenges with remote learning, with many lacking access to specialised support. Ofsted (2020) observes that best practice for blended learning and remote learning is still being developed but that a blended approach was helping schools to re-engage disaffected learners, by allowing them to stream lessons from the school's on-site inclusion centre. Whilst these benefits for individuals are important to sustain, this finding also reveals the danger of 'backdoor' exclusions where CYP

with SEND may find themselves internally isolated, rather than included in the classroom, and this needs monitoring.

What is needed now:

- Capture the positives for those children where remote or online learning improved their experience. This also means capturing local learning around positive experiences of differentiating online and how to take this back into the classroom. It may include drafting EHC plans that allow for blended learning arrangements if the family supports this: we need to be brave and re-imagine how to write section Fs in EHC plans that reflect this learning.
- Review and develop approaches and practices for virtual working across the local system, including for multi-disciplinary teams around the child (TAC) and EHC planning meetings and task and finish projects.

D. Early and improved identification of SEND

Early identification and assessment of SEND has been adversely affected by Covid-19 and "for some children this will cause lasting harm" (Ofsted 2020, p.34).

We instigate professional discussions as part of our termly visits to promote the role of the graduated response in the early identification of SEND. We promoted the specialist services schools can buy into to support identification and assessment, but also encourage schools to evaluate the use and usefulness of specialists and move away from a model that uses service level agreements (SLAs) mostly for diagnostic assessments to a 'modelling and training' approach.

Some parents can suddenly see their children's learning challenges and gaps and are now on board with SEND and agree to assessments and referrals, including EHC needs assessments. In many instances relationships with parents have been strengthened and TACs that raise initial concerns are more productive.

What is needed now:

- We need to respond to the insight (Hutchinson 2021) that variance in the identification of SEND happens mostly at school level. As advisors engaged with geographically near, but very diverse schools, we can provide useful benchmarking. This will not only aid early identification of need, but also ensures that over-identification of SEND in the context of learning disruption is avoided.
- We need to consider how service level agreements for traded services with schools should be re-imagined based on what we have learned during lockdown to protect quality diagnostic assessments where needed, but where we re-focus on early interventions and prioritise differentiated high-quality teaching through our commissioning.

E. Children missing education

Parish, Bryant and Swords (2020, p.2) argue that the get-out term 'suitable education otherwise' should be replaced by a wider definition of children missing education to "any child of statutory school age who is missing out on a formal, full-time education". While parents, local authorities and schools all have both responsibilities and powers to ensure that children receive the education to which they are entitled, some significant omissions in

the current legislation mean that it is possible for children to slip through the net. We know that many of those are CYP with SEND and that the pandemic has exacerbated the issue.

In our service this concern has resulted in two ongoing pilot projects, with one triaging the needs of primary children in APs that may have unidentified SEND and the other triaging young people who currently attend the hospital outreach service provision (HOP) but are unlikely to be able to return to mainstream school. We also take a keen interest in any children that are on reduced timetables and press schools for evidence that there is a clear plan in place how they will manage the return to full-time education.

What is needed now:
- The work of identifying children who are missing education and then bringing together families, schools and other education providers and health and care services to broker a solution is a costly, painstaking, and labour-intensive task (Parish et al. 2020). This is where local government teams, including our service, have a unique opportunity to remain relevant as nobody else in the system currently takes responsibility for it. Experience shows that there is no substitute for individual, careful case-management.

F. Mental Health and Wellbeing

Literature consistently identifies the detrimental impact of Covid-19 and calls for a focus on mental health and wellbeing as part of the recovery (Curran et al. 2020). Sideropoulos et al. (2021) found that Covid-19 impacts the wellbeing of those with SEND differently to that of their siblings and that school closures have a particular effect on this group as schools provide an important routine and structure that helps to reduce anxiety and improves wellbeing (Van Herwegen et al. 2020). Additionally, schools provide parents with access to specialist advice that not only benefits CYP with SEND but also relieves parents' anxiety (Asbury et al. 2020). This is an important insight since parents and carers' mental health predicts anxiety of individuals with SEND (Ashworth et al. 2019).

Our service has identified existing forums that aim to support mental health and wellbeing and we contribute our SEND expertise. This includes representation on fair access panels, quality-assuring APs where CYP with unidentified SEMH needs sometimes end up, and working closely with the HOP service. We have also supported our local schools with better understanding how to make effective referrals by brokering meetings with health services, including CAMHS. Mental health and wellbeing for CYP with SEND and those that are working with them and their families are a high priority for all services across the local system. However, this is currently not always well coordinated and there are duplications as well as gaps in the provision.
What is needed now:
- Develop joined-up SEMH support across the system to address duplication and gaps and gain a better understanding of the relationship between vulnerability and SEND (Children's Commissioner 2020) that the pandemic has highlighted.

G. Careful transition planning
The negative impact on young people's wellbeing, especially for children with additional support needs, following phase transitions is well documented. Jindal-Snape (2021) argues

for the need to support transitions that span different domains and contexts as one transition, such as a child moving from primary to secondary school, often trigger related transitions among their significant others. This ecosystem of multiple and multi-dimensional transitions needs an expansive view to enable support to be provided to all who need it in the ecosystem. Jindal-Snape concludes that significant others need to be provided with support for their own transitions, otherwise we cannot expect them to be able to support vulnerable children and young people, including those with SEND. An ongoing UCL transition study (Moving Up) suggest re-thinking Y7 provision and harnessing emerging modes of teaching to support effective transitions.

What is needed now:
- Further consider how careful and 'expansive' whole-family system transition planning and innovation for Y7 provision for pupils with SEND can contribute to reduced exclusions or off-rolling in the early stages of the secondary phase.
- Work closely with schools to help them identify any children who may manage well in small primaries where high-quality teaching and close contact with families mean that needs for the whole ecosystem have been met that might not be met in large secondary schools.

H. Off-rolling and exclusions
Daniels et al. (2020) have highlighted the increased risk of exclusions after Covid-19, including for the already over-represented SEND cohort. Anderson and Cohen (2015) have previously proposed advocacy leadership as a framework for understanding the SENCO leadership role and Clarke and Done 2021) argue that this advocacy role has been missing in the often-reactive responses of senior leaders to the pandemic. This was exacerbated because many SENCOs are still not part of SLTs and so not involved in disaster planning and being able to mitigate against 'strategic' exclusions (Done and Knowler 2021).

What is needed now:
- Embedding the strategic advocacy role of SENCOs to ensure off-rolling and exclusions are not simply dealt with from a 'zero tolerance' behaviour-led perspective that does not take account of trauma-informed practice and the requirement to make reasonable adjustments.

Conclusion
In this paper I have reflected on how a local authority SEND advisory service has supported their local schools, what lessens we have learned and how this should shape future support. Bryant et al.'s (2021) key recommendations provide timely pointers for 'what next' for our service. They argue for a long-term strategy for building back better in education and children's services, shared between central government and local systems. They make the case for the important role of well-functioning local systems and a recognition of the unique role of the LA as a convener of partnerships, a champion of vulnerable children and a commissioner of services. They argue that LAs should have the power and capacity to support such system-wide approaches and to challenge instances of poor practice or non-engagement. I have set out what this may mean for our service.

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Section 4:
Coping with the impact of Covid-19 from a SENCo perspective.

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The Covid pandemic has resulted in a cycle of constant transition and change for our pupils, staff, parents and carers. At Oakwood, one of our main leadership priorities has included supporting the well-being of all stakeholders. Staff at Oakwood feel that we are a "family", able to support each other as part of a close-knit team. This extends to our pupils and families. Maintaining a positive outlook, through what has been a difficult time, has been important in sustaining morale.

Improving teacher and student relationships have been key to our ongoing success in learning at Oakwood. Staff have felt that the remote learning increased staff, parent/carer and pupil communication and thus further developed their relationships with pupils as they were able to find out more about the children's interests, strengths and needs.

Rawlings Lester et al. (2017) describe the importance of routines:
> *"Establishing, explaining, reviewing, and modifying (as needed) rules, routines, and procedures that are clearly understood to handle the daily recurring activities as well as developing procedures for unpredictable events that may occur, will help you to devote the maximum amount of time available for instruction and enhance classroom management."*
> (Rawlings Lester et al., 2017:410)

This has certainly been one of the most useful strategies in supporting our children during the pandemic. Particularly for SEN children, including those with Autism, routine is vital. A break in routine can trigger anxiety and an emotional response.

To support changes in routine our Covid risk assessment is reviewed weekly and therefore rules and routines may be modified slightly. The use of Social Stories for all children in preparing for their return after both lockdowns and regular updates to class, playground and lunchtime charters has supported changes to routines. Alongside providing clear routines, promoting attendance has been important and our attendance figures during the pandemic reflect this.

Support for our SEN pupils during the pandemic has included:

- Allocated TA (Teaching Assistants) to support EHCPs either at home or in school tailored to their needs and circumstances, adaption of target setting
- SENCo supported with EHCP provision and monitoring
- Risk assessments shared and adapted (Covid, behaviour and EHCP risk assessments)
- Redeployment of staff in school to meet needs and also to maintain bubbles wherever possible;
- Adapted behaviour support plans
- At least weekly phone calls for EHCP children;

- SLT (Senior Leadership Team) and ELSAs (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) on the playground at the start and end of the day
- Continued referrals to Early Help, Southampton Advisory Outreach Service (SAOS), CAMHs and the Autism Service
- COVID-related training for all staff e.g. anxiety, supervision where required
- Food packs for our vulnerable families
- Printed home learning packs where needed
- Provision of laptops
- Update to our SEN policy - including 'Covid-19' and 'Remote Learning for SEN' sections
- The use of reduced timetables for individual pupils to enable success
- Year group bubbles including break and lunch times
- 'Soft' starts in the mornings where pupils can be dropped off between 08:40 and 09:00
- Staggered end times for the school day to lessen the traffic of people on the playground
- ELSA support for children and families

Risk assessments were completed for EHCP children with their parents in May 2020 and checked by the local authority. This led to two children returning at the start of June 2020, one on a part time basis to enable success. Other parents chose for their children to remain at home until the September full re-opening.

For the first time, social stories were provided to support **all** children returning in September 2020 and March 2021 with success. The social stories were personalised to each class group. Personalised bespoke social stories is a strategy we regularly use for EHCP children and those with social communication difficulties when needed.

Our primary focus in September 2020 was making sure children returned to school feeling safe, happy and secure. We provided parents with a statement about our curriculum intent for the first few weeks back which had a strong focus on social, emotional and mental well-being. Staff adapted to the needs of their classes and individual pupils, providing them with the support where needed.

To help the children with a sense of community, for the first two weeks in September 2020, there was a whole school book-based project on the book 'Here we are' by Oliver Jeffers. This provided a wealth of curriculum opportunities, but predominantly PSHE. The unity of a whole school approach enabled the promotion of a sense of belonging and joint working. The book allowed for children to discuss their time during lockdown focusing not on what had been 'lost', but what had been gained. There was an emphasis on allowing children to celebrate their successes during lockdown and to talk to their peers about their lockdown stories.

Attending Julie Wharton's seminar: "SENCos and the New Normal" in October 2020 was a useful opportunity to discuss the first lockdown and return to school with other SENCos.

Discussion was based around how SEN children and families were supported and what we were doing to manage the anxiety of all stakeholders.

January - March 2021 national lockdown

Number of children on SEN register: 66 (6 with EHCPs)
SEN children attending school during the January to March lockdown period: 15
SEN children engaging well with learning: 56
SEN children with low engagement: 10

In January, our leadership team appointed two Onsite Project Leads and two Remote Learning Project Leads from within our teaching staff. These roles continue to be incredibly valuable to staff, children and parents.

The Onsite Leads work in liaison with the leadership team to support the well-being of staff and pupils attending during lockdown. This includes the implementation of the ongoing risk assessment. Their support continues with full reopening of the school.

The Remote Leads work in liaison with the leadership team to support all aspects of remote learning, including: technical support, consistent use of Google Classroom, weekly remote learning staff meetings, monitoring engagement, increasing our offer of live interventions and creating a code of conduct.

Live interventions were offered to most of our SEN pupils. An "SEN remote provision document" was created to monitor every SEN child including their SEN need, engagement level and interventions offered. Two staff were present for safeguarding reasons during the live interventions. Teaching assistants were supported via class teachers to assist and lead interventions. Most SEN children were engaging well with the recorded and live remote learning offered. Some SEN children did not attend live remote learning sessions and did not engage in remote learning. Teachers and the leadership team made contact with parents and carers to offer support.

Interventions offered included:

- One-to-one 3 to 5 times per week for EHCP children not attending school to work on individual targets, including reading, maths and literacy skills.
- One-to-one interventions for speech and language and social and emotional support.
- Small group interventions for phonics, reading and maths skills.

All SEN parents and carers were emailed on 22 January 2021 to ascertain their views on their child's remote learning offer. Their responses enabled us to personalise our support further. Parents were able to email me directly about their specific concerns and I was able to offer useful support via signposting to certain programmes, for example the "BBC Dance Mat typing programme for a year 5 pupil" and particular games and activities which would be beneficial. Liaison with year group teachers following my contact with the parents and carers was crucial to ensuring interventions offered were appropriate. A small number of SEN parents hoped their child could have a school place during lockdown as they were

finding remote learning with their child difficult. They did not meet the criteria to get a school place.

A survey was sent to **all** parents in February 2021 to help evaluate our remote learning offer. The parent survey was overwhelmingly positive, and on top of this we have had many unsolicited emails from parents thanking us for our efforts during lockdown. Children have been able to talk about the learning they have completed at home with their teachers.

Live assemblies for all children took place weekly or twice weekly to celebrate successes and help to prepare the children for the online learning for the following week. They also particularly helped with transition back to school on 8 March as staff were able to talk children through the new routines in preparation for their return. In support of this, a video was provided prior to reopening explaining the new routines and a whole school virtual assembly on the first day embedded routines further.

Support for schools has been offered by external professionals during the pandemic:

- The Educational Psychology Service
- Our local Inclusion Partnership
- Local Authority
- School Nursing Team

Staff and parents have felt that CAMHS could have offered more support during the pandemic. Parents were waiting for overdue appointments relating to medication reviews. Schools were unable to make contact with CAMHS professionals for advice regarding complex high-needs children. Could the CAMHS service have offered mental health advice and training to schools at a time of increased anxiety and trauma?

The Speech and Language Assistant Team (SALSA) service, which our school has a service level agreement with, has been very supportive during the pandemic. They have provided termly newsletters with useful ideas and signposting to helpful websites and further resources which have all been shared with parents/carers and staff.

In July 2020 the SALSA team provided a leaflet: "The Benefits of Sharing a book". It aimed to demonstrate to parents the numerous speech and language benefits of sharing a book with their child and that it is not just about learning to read. Also, guidance for year 6 transition to secondary school was offered.

In January 2021, home learning packs for children on their caseload were emailed to parents with the offer of further advice if needed. However, no parent made contact about the packs given.

What lessons have been learned for the future provision for children and young people with SEN/disabilities?

The mental health and well-being of our pupils and staff continues to be a high priority. To support this we aim for:
- Daily mindfulness opportunities

- Increased PSHE learning opportunities, including circle times
- A focus on physical health, including our daily Golden Mile
- ELSA support for individual pupils

Staff will continue to improve and foster positive relationships with pupils as this is seen as key to promoting learning and behaviour. Staff strive to employ the PACE approach of Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy to support in developing relationships. (PACE Approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes, an American psychologist who works with traumatised children.)

Good communication with parents is important to support in changes to routines.

At Oakwood Primary School we promote a growth mindset towards learning where making mistakes are learning opportunities and that learning should be a desirable struggle. We teach our pupils the power of YET so they can say, "I can not do this YET!" and that problem solving is a part of learning.

Staff focus on process and effort praise for pupils and try to avoid intelligence and over-inflated praise which can demotivate pupils with low self-esteem. Oakwood Primary School aims to use reward as a way of promoting good behaviour and learning. This includes our house point system, Golden Tickets for citizenship, Gold Book for learning and individual reward systems for our SEN pupils.

Staff continue to embed rules and routines and support children in changes to them. Staff strive to improve pupil's learning behaviours. This has been particularly crucial since the most recent lockdown where many of our children returned to school with less stamina for learning activities. Additional movement breaks have been needed to increase attention span.

Break and lunchtimes have been much calmer now that the children eat and play with their year group only and have consistent allocated lunchtime staff for each bubble.

Prior to the pandemic, we offered a break and lunch time "Rainbow Room" provision for our children with social communication difficulties. However, we have since found that the separate year group bubbles on the playground, with SLT, ELSA support and sports coaches, has been more beneficial. Our SEN children are benefitting from quieter, calmer outside environments where the ELSA is able to support with social situations as they arise. A couple of our EHCP children, who were unable to participate with groups of peers at lunch times, are now able to successfully. We will consider continuing the separate year group bubbles for break and lunch times when social distancing is lifted as it has had such a positive impact on our SEN pupils.

The 'soft' start to our school mornings continue to support our SEN pupils. Many SEN children arrive close to 08:40 and are quickly ready to learn in the calm environment they enter. Walk around the school at 08:50 and you will see children settled in their seats completing morning learning tasks and SEN children completing one-to-one learning interventions or their morning independent 1, 2, 3 jobs (TEACCH approach).

The leadership team and school ELSAs show presence on the school playground at the start and end of the school day. This enables contact with SEN parents and children on a daily basis.

Our SEN pupils also benefit from having their own desk space and not moving seats for each subject. This is a strategy that we may continue with.

Our offer of live remote learning interventions greatly improved over the most recent lockdown and our teachers are now confident in delivering these. (We did not use live remote interventions in the first 2020 lockdowns.) We now have the ability to provide a good offer of remote learning to isolating SEN pupils in good health. This has already been the case recently (March 2021) where an SEN year 2 pupil at home, joined a peer in school virtually for daily interventions with their teacher over the course of the ten days.

We believe it is important to personalise support. We use the relationships we have fostered, especially with those pupils with autism and mental health difficulties, to enable us to personalise the SEN support effectively.

Preparation for changes is vital for SEN children, especially those with autism and social and emotional needs.

How can we increase the engagement of our SEN pupils with any further lockdowns? This is an important question but we should also note that some of our families are vulnerable and this can affect engagement for a variety of reasons. Oakwood staff will do our best to offer help to families where we can.

What are the conditions required to enable these lessons to be implemented on the reopening of schools?

A beneficial strategy we employed in the March 8 reopening of schools was to provide smaller teaching group sizes across the school. It contributed to staff feeling safer with regards to social distancing, and enabled more individual attention to be given to pupils as well as further building relationships.

Recruiting staff where needed has continued. We have recently appointed a new full time teaching assistant for year 5. We have also appointed a full time ELSA to support with the increase in mental health needs across the school. We know that a key transition point is fast approaching. Our new ELSA will provide vital support to our SEN and vulnerable year six children.

For the first time, we appointed a teaching assistant (TA) from a supply agency to provide one-to-one support for a child with autism in year 6 (to cover staff absence). Virtual meetings with the child, key staff and the new TA took place which helped to ensure a smooth transition and a really successful four weeks of cover. We will continue to use virtual meetings with children, alongside social stories to introduce new staff.

Teachers continue to assess and plan lessons to enable children to fill gaps quickly with subject leads and the leadership team monitoring progress. Teacher and Phase meetings

currently have a strong focus on children's learning and progress and Pupil Progress meetings continue.

We have had some challenging individual cases in school over lockdown and on return to school. One in particular was at risk of permanent exclusion. However, we took swift action, bringing his Annual Review forward (with only a week's notice), seeking advice from a local special school for social and emotional needs and the Local Authority, reinstating emergency SAOS (Southampton Advisory Outreach Service) provision and seeking additional Physical Intervention training. Initial impact was very positive, and longer term needs are now being reviewed in the pupil's best interests, with support from the family.

To help ensure success for our SEN pupils we will continue with:
- Personalised social stories
- Fostering relationships with pupils and parents
- Having mental health as a key priority for our pupils and staff
- Clear communication to parents and staff
- 'Soft' starts and staggered ends to the school day
- Year group bubbles
- SEN interventions based on need
- ELSA and SLT support
- The introduction of Comic Strip Conversations for children with Autism and social and emotional difficulties

External professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists are able to attend our school again now for face-to-face meetings. Our children have made us proud by showing us that they can interact with adults they do not know, who are also wearing PPE. To enable this to be successful, we offer our staff presence, which is usually gladly accepted.

Pupil voice is important to us. Our plan is to do SEN pupil conferencing to gain further insight into how they are feeling now; the support they are receiving and how this can be improved.

We will continue to provide our staff with quality continued professional development which relates to SEN and emotional well-being. The most recent training I provided to the teaching assistants focussed on autism strategies, including social stories and comic strip conversations. I am proud to be part of the new Autism Champion initiative and look forward to further training relating to this.

Our relatively new leadership team has felt that now is the perfect time to introduce our new school motto and values in co-production with our staff, pupils and parents and carers. This is supporting our relationship as an Oakwood Family.

Our motto is Respect, Believe, Achieve.
Our values are: Resilience, Empathy, Strength, Pride, Excellence, Curiosity and Teamwork.

Oakwood Primary School is an inclusive school. We strive to foster an inclusive environment and to support pupils with SEN to the best of our ability. We always aim to improve our offer of provision and support to all of our SEN pupils. We will rise to the challenges that lie ahead in terms of closing the learning gaps and moving forward to a bright future for all.

References:
Rawlings Lester, R., Bolton Alannson, P., & Notar, C. E. (2017). Routines Are the Foundation of Classroom Management. Education, 137(4), 398–412.

Section 5:
Summary of themes from group discussions

The transcripts of the group accounts of their discussions were analysed for themes under the three questions considered at the seminar.

1. **How have teachers, SENCos and head teachers been supported to cope with the teaching of pupils with SEN/disability?**

Mental health /wellbeing
Strong support was identified in all presentations around mental health and wellbeing of all members of the school community.

Senior leadership
While one group identified how head teachers had been under a lot of pressure to support staff and families, another group referred to the school's leadership team as very important for whether or not there was a whole school approach to SEND.

Variations
Support for coping was described as varying depending on where you were. For some people it was very much in house, for others it depended on the network that the school belonged to.

Collaborative and communication groupings
SENCos working across school was mentioned by several groups to support each other and exchange advice and guidance. Examples mentioned included, Nottingham where anytime new information came out it went out to all schools. Another group referred to schools being signposted to a variety of wellbeing and other relevant resources.

Outside agencies
One group referred to teacher briefings run by the local authority and educational psychology service which did much training and CPD. Another group referred to commendable services from outside agencies, such as educational psychology services, speech and language therapy services for innovative practices, e.g. in supporting in relation to bereavement.

Role of parents
One group referred to the role of parents in supporting schools as being mixed. While some parents needed a lot of support, others provided a lot of support.

Support to cope; when not work well

Headteacher vacancies
One group referred to concerns raised about the number of head teacher vacancies that seem to be anecdotally available at the moment.

Pressures on SENCOs

One group referred to some SENCOs finding their own roles unmanageable while still having to undertake the National SENCO training award, due to the additional workload.

Not enough consistency of approach
One group referred to a lack of consistency in approach across the local authorities to support schools, SENCos and headteachers. Echoing what other groups said, some services simply stopped or were pulled back by local authorities.

Therapies unavailable
Two groups referred to issues with therapies. One group talked about therapies appearing to just stop, but that there was some disparity between areas in terms of what support your child had at home. The other group referred explicitly to issues with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health services.

Insufficient teacher support
One group referred to some teachers having found this period extremely difficult; not having had access to that support that they may have needed.

Government information communication
There was reference to Government changing how information was communicated to schools; for example having 24 hours' notice, coming out at night and expected to do something the next day or coming out over a holiday.

Information sharing problems
For one group there was too much information going into schools on top of everything else that schools were doing. Ensuring that schools get the right information at the right time, was seen as important.

2. **What lessons have been learned for the future provision for children and young people with SEN / disabilities?**

Make a legacy by learning from what worked during pandemic
Important to take stock and see what worked; learn those lessons. Some of the routines that were put in place during COVID-19 should have a legacy.

Why did it take a pandemic to make us think about doing things better?

Parents and families
One group referred to how schools considered family factors to assess which children would be OK at home learning and which might need to come into school.

Unexpected reactions
One group focussed on the fear induced by the pandemic and the unexpected reactions of some people to it. Some parents and children expected to experience anxiety did not, while there were surprises about those adults and children who did.

Mental health and wellbeing

Several groups referred to the way in which schools dealt with mental health issues has been significant and should have a future in schools. This could involve generalizing the way in which the school previously dealt with mental health issues for a small targeted group of children being generalized to school.

Use strategies like circles: all children in school following the same story. The use of social stories and very positive activities like telling us about lock down your experience.

Remote learning approaches used in schools
Several groups noted that remote learning which supported some of the children to learn better at home could provide opportunities nationally for schools. Blended learning should be supported to continue, when it can have a good impact for some students. This offers opportunity to do something different to the 30 hours sat in a classroom. Other groups talked about: children not necessarily having to be present to be taught and working more closely with parents and families.

Changes to accountability approaches
Most groups believed that there were lessons to learn about changing the accountability system. The removal of the accountability measures gave some flexibility to teaching and learning. Some schools really appreciated the greater level of agency during this time which enabled them to focus on the holistic needs of children with SEN and all pupils actually.

Concerns about measuring what can be measured rather than what is important to learn. Belief in the importance of having success measured for all our pupils in terms of their learning start points.

Change in general approach
Focus on a more positive approach; need to change narrative. Much in the press is about how children need to catch up because they are behind. This will cause problems.

School need permission to innovate.

There is too much polarisation between wellbeing and learning. One group believed that the right type of teaching that emphasises oracy, using active learning and collaboration can play a really significant role in supporting wellbeing

No one strategy fits all: differentiation
Several groups referred to the need for a diversity of teaching approaches; no one strategy that will fit all. Some home learning was not differentiated enough to individual need.

Strategies usually used for pupils with SEN like social stories. Like comic strip benefitted others too. This illustrates lessons about how SEND interventions can benefit the whole population.

Quality first teaching will improve if more thought given to the how of teaching.

Flexible learner-centred approach

One group that the adoption of flexible timetables, showed how flexibility could be put back into the system to enable real person centred approach in education.

More positive managing of schools
Several groups commented on how positive bubbles of children were much calmer and more pleasant for unstructured time: that there were smaller class groups, more personalized support, softer starts, fewer children and parents. Fewer children around at break and lunch were positive; staggered starts and routines that create safe and supportive environments could be taken forward.

Continuing to use virtual meeting technology, which is time saving, reducing travel times etc. Keeping the group bubbles; children who are anxious going up in years 7 ; small numbers of children on the playground at lunchtime.

Support for schools
One group noted the importance of ensuring that there is support for schools particularly from local authorities

Work with parents
One group noted that this is the time to push forward on collaborative working with parents in a more productive way.

Prepare for future lockdowns
Prepare for future lockdowns or future changes; having people prepared in advance so children know what to expect

Questions for future practice

How support parents to support their children
Gp4 Reference 2: 4.61% coverage
some pupils really struggle to access what was on offer. There was talk about whether parents needed some support in terms of how they could support their children to use and access the home learning effectively.

Extra work around relationship building. So one person mentioned that the online nature had had a real positive impact on relationship building between home and schools and the fact that that could be used to take things forward

How ensure that lessons learned
Concern about how do we retain what has been learned as we move forward?
Avoid doing more, not adding on extra work; what are we going to get rid of to actually move forward with this new way of working.

3. **What are the conditions required to enable these lessons to be implemented in schools?**
Narrow time opportunity for change

The window for actually learning lessons is quite slim. By September many schools supported by the government will be want to think of it as business as usual.

Risk of losing what been ache3iveed since March 2020
Several groups commented on the risk of losing all the amazing things that have been achieved. This is because what has been done in the last 18 months may not be fitting with the current government's values. Current dialogue seems to be going back to where we were; opportunities might be missed in this case.

School Governors' role
Support for the governors that they lead on lessons to be learned for future provision

Overall rethink of schools' purposes
That there is a complete rethink of the nature of schools; purposes have been lost, so the need to do this.

Change principles
We need to have consistency nationwide rather than the post code lottery.

About the current national SEN review
The SEND review looks for greater clarity around finances, SCN, support and consistency in the statutory assessment process.

Resources & funding
Several groups referred to additional staff and additional funding as being crucial to allow schools to put in place that the provision and the resources that are needed to support students:

For example: investment in early years and early support services therapy; need therapy and not just assessments; more funding for technology.

Moderation of curriculum and assessment pressures
Several groups referred to the moderation of curriculum and assessment pressures especially for secondary school; risk of there being a very quick return to business as normal because of the curriculum pressure. It is very difficult for schools to move away and do something drastically different if they are judged by results, with these children not getting these results.

The Ofsted framework to change to allow schools to be more flexible and to do something different to meet individual needs.

Schools need support
Schools may need the support to actually take forward some of these ideas, e.g. looking at blended learning

Teachers have opportunities for reflective practice

Supervision for teaching staff and access to skilled teachers to talk about the issues that are going on; to enable thinking through of outside directives.

Special schools
Special schools being considered in all decisions. Need to ensure no loss of expertise from the special school teaching school alliance. Avoid special schools being an add-on.