



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

Sharing good practice and looking to the future

Throughout the disruption of the past three months, schools and colleges have responded speedily, sensitively and creatively to the demands placed on them by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. As well as having to rethink how education is delivered, settings have had to consider the psychological impacts of lockdown and how it has affected their pupils' wellbeing.

In this booklet we include some examples of good practice that schools have shared with us about how they've responded to the challenges of lockdown. We also look at how this period of lockdown can help us think about whole-school approaches to mental health and include some suggestions about how to start this process.

Practice examples

During lockdown we have been collecting examples of good practice from our [Schools in Mind Network](#). These case studies illustrate

how some schools have responded to support pupils during this time. These interventions and strategies can also be adapted to help manage change and disruption in other circumstances.

Our case studies emerged from a survey we shared through our Schools in Mind network at the end of March 2020 to identify schools' main concerns. We received 307 responses and used them to develop resources for schools that would be the most relevant and useful.

Our respondents were most worried about being able to support their most vulnerable pupils, particularly where pupils had less structure and routine in their home lives and no longer had daily access to teaching staff.

The following case studies are examples of practice that schools sent to us to highlight how they responded to these needs.



1. [Lessness Heath Primary school: communication is key](#)

Lessness Heath Primary school, in the London Borough of Bexley, focused on building sustainable relationships with vulnerable children and their families.

'Our first step was to reach out to our families and collect circumstantial data around the risks and lived experiences of our pupils and parents. This information was readily available to us as we have a rigorous wellbeing auditing process to ascertain needs. Every day, high quality home learning was sent home. Our families are really grateful for the personal effort that each teacher has put in to meet individual needs. Parents have received weekly check in calls and doorstep visits to establish the wellbeing of our families. Our partnership of work and continued sense of togetherness has been built on trust, this is deep rooted within our positive school culture.'

Kelly Hannaghan, Wellbeing Consultant, Lessness Heath Primary School, Bexleyheath

2. [Blessed Hugh Faringdon Secondary: identify hidden issues](#)

Staff at Blessed Hugh Faringdon Catholic School, a secondary school in Reading, identified 'hidden' issues that could emerge as a result of pupils not attending school.

'A principle concern is in identifying the 'hidden' issues such as those students for whom we had no previous concerns but whose mental health and well-being are suffering, and those who find themselves adversely affected by the mental health problems or the impact of the actions of a member of their household. Being proactive, remaining abreast of developments, communicating information promptly and clearly along with an ongoing dialogue are fundamental to our effectiveness in the current fast changing, unpredictable environment in which we find ourselves.'

Sue Matthews, Assistant Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead, Blessed Hugh Faringdon Catholic School, Reading

3. **Gordon Primary School, Greenwich:** creating a sense of belonging.

The school has used classroom bubbles as a way of creating a sense of belonging. The school has also incorporated social distancing into its end of year activities:

'All the bubbles in school have chosen an animal for their bubble class identity making a sense of belonging. Some of them have made their own socially distanced friendly greeting gestures.'

'The year sixes are working on a socially distanced end of year production! This should still be able to provide the children with some sort of ending memory and togetherness.'

Lotti Newlove, Learning Mentor, Gordon Primary School, Greenwich



Gordon Primary School,
Greenwich

4. **Cherbourg Primary School:** working together across the whole-school community

As schools begin to welcome back larger groups of pupils, a key concern for staff and families is how social distancing measures are implemented in school. Cherbourg Primary School in Southampton invited pupils to be part of the decision-making around new safety measures. Involving pupils in problem solving helps to build resilience and creates a sense of unity which can have a positive impact on wellbeing during this challenging time.

'The children were asked to write down their ideas to reduce touching and keep clean across a number of aspects of normal school life. Their solutions have been invaluable as our plans for the next twelve months evolve. Ideas included:

- The use of individual bum bags to carry personal pens, pencils etc*
- A worry monster in each class*
- A class hygiene monitor*
- Doors propped open where possible*
- Staggered start and end to the day*
- New groupings with names (e.g. watermelons and coconuts) which indicate who to line up with, where, what toilet to use and what side of classroom bubble they're on.'*

Julie Greer, Headteacher, Cherbourg Primary School, Eastleigh

5. **Alliance for Learning:** promoting mental health and wellbeing

'Mental health and wellbeing of our children and young people and their carers has been a key focus and we are signposting key resources including those from the Anna Freud Centre, via a Covid-19 section on our website, social media and other regular communications. We are also hosting introductory sessions to mental health and a free Mental Health First Aid refresher course for staff within our school network... Across our schools we have been encouraging schools to share approaches so that no school is struggling alone.'

Lisa Fathers, Director of Teaching School and Partnerships, Alliance for Learning, North West England

Looking to the future:

Many lessons about how to support pupils' mental health will have emerged from lockdown. But how can they be applied to future policies and practice in our settings?

Whole-school approaches

We know that whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing can have significant impact on children and young people. Such approaches take time, leadership and commitment, and are best managed gradually.

[Research](#) shows social and emotional programmes can reduce conduct problems by around 11% and can have important consequences for both the individual and the broader school environment. The impact is even greater for 'at risk' children and young people (for example, those with mental health problems) while the limited research available also suggests that children from socio-economically deprived and ethnic minority backgrounds typically experience greater improvements than their peers.

For schools and colleges wishing to adopt a whole-school approach, it may be helpful to review what has been learnt from lockdown. A good starting point would be to look at working with stakeholders.

Children and young people can learn about resilience when they see that challenges can be overcome by working with others. During lockdown, schools and colleges will have forged new relationships with parents and carers to support children and young people. This togetherness is crucial to the recovery process and can help children and young people feel that they don't have to face challenges alone.

You could capture learning by asking some simple questions, such as:

- How did we support our pupils?
- How did we support families?
- How did we support staff?
- How did we work with other agencies?

You could use a format with three questions and a comment box:

- What did we do well?
- What could we have done better?
- What would we do differently next time?
- Any other comments?

All of the main stakeholder groups – pupils, parents and carers, staff and relevant organisations should be involved in the feedback process.

Don't forget your achievements

The incredible successes of schools during lockdown has been achieved through the energy and commitment of staff. There can be no better time to pay respect to their work by developing or reviewing approaches to staff mental health and wellbeing to sustain the workforce now and into the future.

As schools return to some semblance of normality, it is important to reflect on what has been achieved during this period. With no notice, entire ways of working have been re-thought and new ways of reaching out to pupils have been developed. What schools have achieved is nothing short of amazing, and acknowledging this to staff and pupils, as well as to the wider school community, at a time which has undoubtedly been difficult and stressful for all concerned is the best way to start the recovery programme. There is so much to look back on and to be proud of and it is important to communicate this to all those who contributed.

Additional resources

[Managing the transition back to school](#), Anna Freud Centre.

Emerging Evidence: [Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health Vol. 1](#), the Evidence Based Practice Unit, a partnership of the Anna Freud Centre and UCL.

Emerging Evidence: [Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health Vol. 2](#), the Evidence Based Practice Unit, a partnership of the Anna Freud Centre and UCL.

[Coronavirus toolkit 7: managing transitions](#), Mentally Healthy Schools, Anna Freud Centre.

[Ten steps towards school staff wellbeing](#), Anna Freud Centre.

More about Schools in Mind

Schools in Mind is a free network for staff working in schools and colleges, and allied professionals which shares practical, academic and clinical expertise regarding the wellbeing and mental health issues that affect schools.

[Join us here](#)

Finding support

Samaritans: 116 123 / [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

Childline: 0800 1111 / [childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk)

Youth Wellbeing Directory:
youthwellbeing.co.uk

Details on how to find urgent help are available here: www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/urgent-help/

About us

The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families has developed and delivered pioneering mental health care for over 65 years. Our aim is to transform current mental health provision in the UK by improving the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of treatment. We believe that every child and their family should be at the heart of the care they receive, working in partnership with professionals.

Our Patron: Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge

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