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# [CORONAVIRUS]

HOW DO WE  
REALISTICALLY  
SUPPORT THE MOST  
VULNERABLE IF  
SCHOOLS CLOSE?  
SOME PRACTICAL  
ADVICE.



A summary of a roundtable  
conversation

## **Forward**

The following material is a summary of a roundtable conversation and material submitted from contributors who were unable to attend.

It is intended to offer a bit of clarity around some of the issues that schools are facing with regards to Coronavirus and school closures. Actions are suggested, but remember that all schools are different, they are different sizes and are in different locations and communities.

This is not a list of what should be done, it is a plan of what could be done.

It is better to do less and do it well than try to do lots and fail.

It is key that the school prioritises what is important for their school, pupils and community and do that.

There is a danger that schools could over-promise.

Don't promise anything – make plans to do what you can.

This is an ever-changing landscape and what is possible now, may not be possible in the future if circumstances change.

Consider staffing and staff protection too, whatever you do must be sustainable.

Remember, you are not alone and it is not your job to solve everyone's problems.

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## Who are your vulnerable children?

Although you will have lists of who your children are, when schools are closed their vulnerability changes.

Children will be vulnerable for a variety of reasons. They may be eligible for free school meals, they may be SEN, they may be active child protection cases, they may have single parents, they may be looked after or they may need pastoral support.

To make it easier to identify the level of vulnerability and need use a risk assessment matrix. Probability v Severity.

|             |               | Severity        |             |             |             |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|             |               | Catastrophic: 4 | Critical: 3 | Moderate: 2 | Marginal: 1 |
| Probability | Frequent: 5   | High - 20       | High - 15   | High - 10   | Medium - 5  |
|             | Probable: 4   | High - 16       | High - 12   | Serious - 8 | Medium - 4  |
|             | Occasional: 3 | High - 12       | Serious - 6 | Medium - 4  | Low - 3     |
|             | Remote: 2     | Serious - 8     | Medium - 4  | Medium - 2  | Low - 2     |
|             | Improbable: 1 | Medium - 4      | Low - 3     | Low - 2     | Low - 1     |

Consider very carefully the context that the children are in. This is not school. These children are at home, the ability of parents to cope

with the children is a risk factor as is the number of other siblings in the house.

Siblings increase the risk factor exponentially for each additional child that the parent has to care for.



## Which other agencies are involved?

Remember that you are not the sole provider of support for many of your more vulnerable children.

You will of course want to do everything you can to help but do delegate safe and wells checks to other agencies where possible. They have to accept some responsibility and are more likely to be better suited than you.

For example, looked after children are the responsibility of the local authority who are corporate parents.

Liaise with other agencies involved as a priority.



## **Children without agency involvement**

Your matrix will have children on it that require some other form of support and do not have outside agency involvement.

These children should become your focus for safe and well checks.

Prioritise using the matrix but make sure that you don't over-promise.

Parents who become over-reliant on you will not cope well if you are unable to deliver or sustain delivery of actions that you want to provide.

Suggest actions that they can take themselves and consider the frequency of your checks.

Higher risk children may need daily checks, while lower risk children may only need checks every three days or even once a week. You know your children.

Actions that parents could take include keeping their mobile phone charged ready

for emergency calls to be made.

Making sure that any necessary medical supplies are available

That routines are established that support the needs of the child. This will not be like any normal holiday.

Do not share your personal numbers. If there is an emergency there is only 1 number they should be calling. 999.



## **Free School Meals**

One of the largest groups of vulnerable children are without doubt those children who rely on free school meals.

As yet there has been very little guidance from government or local authorities.

There was some discussion on whether schools would be allowed to open and act as hubs for meal provision in one form or another. However, we proceeded on the basis that permission

would be given, although schools that do not own their buildings may need to liaise with their landlords.

There are a number of things to consider with regards FSM.

How you fund your free school meals and who currently provides them will impact the steps you take.

Consider which meals you are able to provide. Some schools have been providing breakfast clubs in addition to lunch.

Consider carefully the number of children who may access your provision. If there are low numbers you may be able to safely provide hot food on site.

Consider how you will pack and distribute food. Home delivery is probably unsuitable as it trains parents to rely on you.

If for any reasons you were unable to sustain delivery you could be adding an additional layer of vulnerability to the family and child.

Indeed, encouraging families to come to you will allow more efficient contact with parents and children whom you consider vulnerable.



## **Sources of food**

Potential sources of food for free school meals are:

1) Your caterer. They may be able to provide either hot meals on site, packed lunches or food parcels.

2) Charities. There may be a number of food providers who can help you, whether it is Magic Breakfast or a food bank.

3) Supermarkets. A number of supermarkets (Morrisons, Tesco & Sainsbury's) have responded to local approaches to set up voucher schemes and individual accounts for families in receipt of FSM.

Of these only Sainsbury's have guaranteed that tobacco and alcohol cannot be purchased with vouchers.

4) Corporate sponsorship. Food companies, such as

Greggs have provided bread for breakfast clubs, and may be able to support FSM by providing bread for sandwiches and packed lunches.



## **Your governing body**

As a headteacher, you are not alone. You are part of a community, which are represented in school by the governing body.

You will no doubt have had meetings with them already.

Make sure that you are utilising them. They have experience and connections to the community that can be very helpful at this time.

Consider which other community groups could liaise with the governors to provide support to you and the school as a whole.

Not everything that you decide to do will require a teacher, sometimes a volunteer will do the job just as well, if not better.

Times of crisis can bring out the best in people. Despite the social isolation that is advised, communities will

want to do their best to support each other. Don't be afraid of accepting that help, or even asking for it.



## **Online safety**

Children at home are very likely to be spending a great deal more time online.

This increases the risk of exploitation.

Remind parents of what they can be doing to keep their children safe. The following links should be very useful.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

[https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en\\_us/](https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/)

[https://safety.google/intl/en\\_uk/families/families-tips/](https://safety.google/intl/en_uk/families/families-tips/)



## **County Lines**

Children at risk of criminal exploitation, including county lines, will be particularly at risk while schools are closed. Not least

because drug dealers will need to continue to supply people with addictions. The government are indicating that the police will only deal with life-threatening situations.

Do not put yourself in one of these situations. You are a teacher. Do report any concerns that you have to the appropriate agencies.

Child protection policies should continue to be followed.



## **Conclusion**

These are unprecedented times. Do what you can to protect vulnerable children, but remember to keep yourself safe at all times.

It is also an everchanging situation, be flexible and make sure you don't promise anything.

Deliver what you can without adding any additional layers of vulnerability.

Make sure that what you plan on doing is sustainable. Do less, but do it well.

Just because another school is doing something, doesn't mean that you should.

Work with the other schools in your area, particularly where it makes sense to pool resources.

Open lines of communication with all agencies and organisations that could help.

Good luck, you are all community heroes whatever you do.

*Ben Brown*

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