

A ROUNDTABLE CONVERSATION



STAFF & STUDENT WELLBEING DURING COVID-19

**BY BEN BROWN
@EDROUNDTABLES**



Contributors

Chris Dyson @chrisdysonHT

Jonathan Lynch @MrJonathanLynch

Jennifer Rogers @jennife63777728

Tim Moran @tim_moran81

Fraser Williams @MrFWallace1

Staff Wellbeing

Transitions to home working had been tough for a number of staff with workload of some being reported as increasing. Concerns were raised about unreasonable expectations of some leaders given that there were a lot of new skills needing to be developed very quickly and there was a real danger of expecting too much too soon.

Sensible working practices would take into account the fact that teachers have a real balancing act between health, family and work, as does every other family in the UK right now.

It was commented that home no longer feels like a sanctuary, it has become a place of work and access to teachers seems to be unrelenting. They have no space to go to, to get away from the stresses of work.

It should be born in mind that schools are not just a group of people, they are a community and this community has been fractured by the current situation. A number of actions can be taken to ensure that staff still feel like members of this community and don't become isolated.



Daily email summaries

Ideal for summarising what is happening in school



WhatsApp groups

Perfect for social banter and sharing personal stuff that you are missing.



Zoom meetings

For those face to face staff meetings, because you will be missing seeing each other

Staff Groups

Remember, different groups of staff may have different needs.

Some vulnerable staff will be shielding for 12 weeks with no opportunities to physically be in school, others will be fearful of being in school and worried

about a lack of PPE to protect them from asymptomatic children.

Others, such as TAs are not in school at all, as they are not part of the staffing rota. They also need to be included within the community.



Shielded Staff

Shielded staff can be given remote tasks that keep them involved with the community. Such as ringing children each week to make contact and check in with them.



Teaching Staff

Teaching staff coming into school may be concerned about their own families being exposed. Rota sensibly, reducing exposure as much as possible.



Support Staff

Support staff could become very isolated, don't forget about them. One suggestion was to involve them in creating videos to broadcast to children and families.

Other Issues

Teaching workload was also discussed, but home learning is a very large topic, so further discussion will be necessary. Identifying best practice given the challenges that still face schools and teachers is a must.

Student Wellbeing

The students themselves face a lot of challenges.

Studying from home is not the same as studying in school, where face to face support, routine and a supportive environment provide the necessary support for learning.

Families will have different experiences of lockdown and outcomes will be very

different for individual students.

Home learning is not home schooling. Schools have a duty not to put pressure onto students but provide them with support that they require and opportunities that they may take advantage of.

Several groups of students were identified with the following actions suggested.



Vulnerable Children

Most schools have provisions in place to support children who were recognised as vulnerable prior to the lockdown.

The use of online documentation to support processes needs careful consideration.



Unknown Status

The changes in circumstances caused by the lockdown may have resulted in new children becoming vulnerable.

Maintaining links with all children is therefore vital. It is the unseen children that should be of most concern.



All Children

All children will be missing their friends, their teachers and being in the school.

Virtual assemblies that celebrate what children are doing at home have been successful, as have “fun” videos of staff singing and dancing.

What happens next?

There is a lot of uncertainty about the future, primarily because we don't know when we will return to school.

However, this does not mean that preparations should not be made for what we can predict is likely.

SEMH

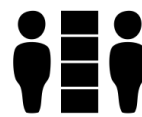
A variety of things are likely to impact the mental health and wellbeing of some children.



Covid-19 is a deadly disease, children may be bereaved.



There has been an increase in domestic violence which children may have witnessed.



Isolation from friends and family may impact some children adversely.

Contacting and speaking to educational psychologists for general advice would be a useful exercise for planning and preparing the curriculum with an SEMH focus for the return to school.

It will not be business as normal when we return to schools, so the expectations should not be the same. The work on SEMH should have an impact on what should be expected under accountability measures in terms of exams and OFSTED.

Transitions

EYFS/Y1 and Year 6/7 transitions were of particular concern.



EYFS/Y1

Children in the EYFS are unlikely to have reached their ELGs, in addition, they will not have had the benefit of learning the routines of the school and understanding the expectations of the move to Year 1.

If we return to school in September, schools will have to adjust their organisation to allow new Year 1 children time to adapt to the new expectations, this may mean adjusting the way that the curriculum is taught and the content.



Year 6/7

The transition from Year 6 is a huge rite of passage for school children, the amount of work that goes in to supporting make these changes is huge.

The exchange of information, the identification of vulnerable children and management of their transition takes time.

This combined with the lack of opportunity to say farewell has the potential to “shock” children arriving in Year 7. They will simply be unprepared.

Managing transitions for these children will need careful planning as the impact on these children has the potential to be huge.

Accountability and Testing

Disruption to learning has occurred. Home learning is not the same as school and it is an uneven playing field.

Some pupils will have been supported by their families and will have had access to the technology necessary to participate in online opportunities provided by schools. Others won't.

The impact on accountability measures is unknown, but is very likely to be disruptive.



Accountability

The disruption faced by schools, the changes that will be necessary to the curriculum and school year make judging schools by normal standards problematic and unfair. These are not normal times.

Schools will need at least a year to adjust and get back to an even keel. Ofsted should be suspended at least until September 2021, with the opportunity being taken to evaluate whether it is still fit for purpose.

These are big changes to education and out of the hands of schools. For there to be effective change, campaigning for these – with solutions – needs to start now.



Testing

Huge amounts of learning time have been lost due to the lockdown. This cannot be made up easily.

The implications for testing are obvious and adjustments for children due to be tested in 2021 need to be planned for now.

Suspending testing for 2021, particularly baseline and SATs testing is suggested.

Developing coursework-based outcomes for higher level exams would also be prudent.

Summary

The current situation is constantly evolving, schools and school leaders will need to be prepared to take action. The timeliness and success of government guidance has been problematic for many schools. Free School Meals being a current concern, the vouchers system has been ineffective in many cases for a number of reasons.

Schools that have been proactive in taking action have been better placed to manage the impact of the lockdown on their communities.

This needs to continue if schools and the communities that they serve are to cope with the current situation for an extended period of time.

Taking action on staff and student wellbeing now will have significant benefits in the future. Staff will not be burned-out; students will be supported on their return to schools.

If you have had experiences of the issues discussed and have found potential solutions, then get in touch @edroundtables on Twitter.

If you have an educational topic you would like to discuss with your peers in a confidential space. Then contact @edroundtables or visit www.edrt.co.uk

Ben Brown

