

19th June 2020

Dear all,

I hope you are all well! I know for many of you this week has been extremely busy as you've balanced providing home learning for pupils, going into school to teach, planning for next year and supporting your loved ones. For this reason, I plan to scale back on how regularly I send these updates. This week I don't have any new, generic professional learning to share, and it would never be my intention to find something for the sake of it.

Having said this, I have seen some subject specific sessions that looked useful, and I will continue to post anything like this in the Professional Learning group on Teams and to share with middle leaders, and I encourage you to do the same. Do share feedback from subject sessions with your line managers: talking about training makes it more likely to have impact and your reflections will help a non-specialist line manager understand your work. If you spot or take part in any online professional learning that you think was great, please let me know and I can include it in a less regular roundup.

What might September look like?

Planning for September is difficult as we still don't know what schools will be able or required to provide – and much of it depends on how the virus and population behave over the coming weeks. However, you will want to plan so that you can have a well-deserved break over the summer holiday.

Although we don't know for certain, we should consider that some form of protective measures may remain in place and that things might not be back to normal by the Autumn term. I believe this gives us four possibilities to consider in our planning:

1. All pupils may be in school on a part-time basis, meaning we need to provide a mixture of online and in-person teaching
2. Although pupils may be in school, there may be periods of total school closure, either in response to local levels of contagion, a further national spike, or as a preventative measure around flu season where the NHS could become overwhelmed by flu cases in addition to coronavirus cases
3. Most pupils could be in school but a small number continue to stay at home to protect their own or a family member's health
4. All pupils return to school but there are significant differences in how we can interact, for example adults may have to remain at a distance from pupils, and/or pupils will continue to be educated in bubbles

Whilst none of these scenarios may come to pass, it seems prudent to prepare on the basis that they could.

Do we need a “catch up” or “recovery” curriculum?

As a result of the hard work and resilience of our staff and pupils, we have much to celebrate in terms of what has been achieved during lockdown. The culture of our schools meant we were in a good position when schools closed to most children: our pupils expect to work hard, know they will be held to account, and value learning. This, combined with the tenacity of our teachers, our pastoral teams, our TAs and learning mentors and the pupils' families, means that we have seen high levels of engagement and regular completion of quality work from the vast majority of our pupils, which significantly exceeds that reported across the profession.

There is lots of talk in the media of children “falling behind” and there being a need for a catch up or recovery curriculum, and whilst there is no doubt that schools closing will have had a negative impact on the education and wellbeing of many children, most of our students have continued to work hard and will go on to achieve incredible things. For this reason, I don't like the terms “catch up” or “recovery” in this context, because it suggests we can do something specific in a short time period that will get everyone back on track. Although there may be more children disadvantaged by the current situation, or while that disadvantage may have had a sharper impact, we already have experience of working with children that arrive with us far behind, and we already know how to support them to succeed by taking a long-term approach of:

- Reinforcing that they are part of a community where all pupils are valued
- Sustaining a culture that expects and demands all children succeed
- Maintaining an environment that focuses the pupils on learning and minimises distractions
- Focusing our lessons on learning by maximising time and using the highest leverage teacher actions
- Curating a world-class curriculum that enables our pupils to become citizens of the educated community

In our schools we already do these things brilliantly. Now, it is more important than ever that we continue to do so.

Planning for the unknown

Although we don't know exactly what September will be like, we can start to think about our curriculum delivery with a "what if?" perspective. There are so many uncertainties around, but we can gain some security from considering in advance how we may respond to different scenarios, and here are some actions I think may be helpful:

Gather some data

Whilst it is very difficult to do this remotely, whatever actions you can take to gather some formative assessment will help you in planning your September delivery. Large examinations and assessments will create huge amounts of work, not only to mark but then to analyse in terms of pupil learning, so small scale, granular and bitesize formative assessments layered through the coming weeks is likely to be more helpful in building a picture of pupil learning. Going back to the principles of Data Driven Instruction will help here - at its core lies the principle that effective teaching is best served by a clear understanding of what pupils have learnt as opposed to what we have simply taught them. It will be very difficult to do this at individual level at the moment, but you may be able to gather a general picture of cohort strengths and weaknesses that need addressing in the Autumn term.

Curriculum adaptation

Over the last few months, you will have done a great deal of work to review and develop the curriculum, so you are in an excellent position to apply curricular thought and adapt to the current situation. Armed with your knowledge of not only what has been taught but with an idea of what has been learned, you can consider your curriculum map. Think about what has been missed and whether it needs integrating into your planning for September. This may mean other things are pushed back or removed altogether from your plan. These decisions aren't easy but the principles of curriculum planning are the same as always:

- Prioritising the most important content for current and future learning
- Careful sequencing

Discussion with your colleagues, your line managers, SLT or me may help if you are finding such decisions difficult. Please get in touch if this is something you would like some support with.

The next step is to consider your plan and think about how it is best delivered. Of course, in an ideal world we will have all pupils in school benefitting from our expertise – but what if we don't? Look at your curriculum map and identify the parts of your curriculum that would be most challenging to deliver remotely: this is what you prioritise when pupils are in school. Then identify the content that could be most easily adapted for remote delivery. This should make it easier to "switch" content should unexpected closures happen, or a part time in school/at home curriculum is adopted. I do realise this would have knock on effects on sequencing and is far more complicated than it sounds, so again, do talk to colleagues and get in touch if you want to talk this through. The ideas below may help you in making this difficult decision:

BEST DELIVERED IN SCHOOL:

- Content that relies on extensive teacher instruction, explanation and elaboration
- Brand new knowledge, particularly highly abstract concepts and threshold concepts
- Modelling (although video content may be an option to help with this)
- Learning that relies on small steps and immediate feedback

- Work that relies on lots of scaffolding

EASIER TO DELIVER AT HOME:

- Review of content, retrieval and revision
- New knowledge that builds on some prior learning or earlier concepts
- Practice of procedures
- Consolidation, building, linking
- Tests and assessments (accepting there are limits over consistency of conditions when completed at home)

Preparing resources

This is often the time of year when lots of work goes into creating lesson resources for next year. Again, once you know what you will deliver in September, scrutinise your resources (particularly those you would plan to use if schools closed again) and consider if they need any adapting for home use. For example, does any content need an additional explanation if pupils are working at home without you to introduce the lesson? How could you provide this? A written explanation, video or link to online content? Do tasks need breaking down into steps, as you would in a lesson? Can these steps be made explicit in the resources? Do you need to add a glossary or vocabulary box in the absence of your explanations? Might explanations benefit from the addition of some dual coding (which you may have drawn or projected in the lesson)? If this is the case you may want to make changes to the resources now, or you may just want to make a note of what would need doing to enhance the resources should schools close again.

What about pupils who can't come back?

If a small number of pupils are unable to come back to school for some time we will, as a trust, look to do all we can to enhance their home learning. This is something I am currently working on with school Principals and we will keep you updated.

I hope this is useful and, as always, feel free to get in touch if you want to talk anything through.

Have a lovely weekend!

Best wishes,

Sallie

REMINDER

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