# Recalibrating Equity & Social Justice in Scottish Education:

# Bouncing forward after COVID-19 lockdowns

# Broad Principles

Research identifies 6 broad principles which can be used to help schools and local authorities consider their use of SAC funding and supports to recalibrate equity and help learners to bounce forward after COVID-19 school closures:

## 1. Impact of COVID-19
Research suggests that children and young people learn less well when not in regular classes (Fitzpatrick et al, 2020; Heppen et al, 2017). According to the Grattan Institute (2020), the achievement gap widens at triple the rate in remote schooling.

## 2. Prioritise re-engagement
Most learners will recover but children and young people who are already facing disadvantage will need additional support to re-engage (Grattan Institute, 2020).

## 3. Identify those learners most impacted by poverty and COVID-19
To effectively target support and impact upon those children and young people most affected by poverty and COVID-19, all educational establishments, local authorities and national agencies need to use data and research as an evidence base. Research highlights that learners most affected include: groups already finding it difficult to achieve their educational potential such as those affected by poverty, younger children (P1-3), those experiencing transitions, children and young people with existing mental health and social difficulties and those with ASN.

## 4. Intensify support in the short-term for learners identified
Intensified support is needed in the short-term for learners most affected by COVID-19 and school closures. Focus should be on targeted supports for core literacy and numeracy, language development, social learning, physical skills or concentration.

## 5. High quality universal and targeted provision is vital
Provision needs to be more than just additional time and teaching. It needs to be of the highest quality and evidence based. Factors which support this include: appropriate training in interventions being delivered and networked learning systems.

## 6. Long-term strategic vision to close the poverty related attainment gap still required
The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people affected by poverty and their learning needs to be kept in perspective. The poverty related attainment has been a factor of our society before the current pandemic. These underpinning, deep rooted causes need to continue to be prioritised and tackled (Grattan Institute, 2020).

# Impact of COVID-19

Research suggests that children and young people learn less well when not in regular classes (Fitzpatrick et al, 2020; Heppen et al, 2017). According to the Grattan Institute (2020), the achievement gap widens at triple the rate in remote schooling. Research informs us that even short breaks in schooling can impact children's learning. Studies looking at learners affected by weather related closures, teachers strikes and summer breaks highlight negative impacts on exam performance (Marcotte and Hemelt, 2008; Goodman, 2014) or learning in younger children (Burkman et al, 2004; Quinn et al, 2016). COVID-19 has led to global school closures. For many children and young people the socioeconomic inequalities in engagement with home learning have exacerbated, (Andrew et al., 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020; The DELVE Initiative, 2020) leading to an increase in disparities in educational achievement (Audit, Scotland, 2020; Engzell, Frey & Verhagen, 2020; Scottish Government, 2021; EEF, 2020a). Indeed the pandemic itself has pushed more children into poverty and food insecurity has risen (Children and Young People's Commission, 2020).

*Why children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be affected more than other learners by school closures?*

| *Factors influencing health and wellbeing* | *Factors influencing learning at home* |
|---|---|
| | |
| • Those impacted by poverty are more likely to have underlying health conditions which make them more vulnerable to COVID-19. Age adjusted death rates were more than double in SIMD 1 compared to SIMD 10 (Blundell et al, 2020). <br> • Economic pressures and poverty have been differentially experienced and certain groups of children will be more affected by their parents' job insecurity (Children and Young People's Commission, 2020, Robertson & McHardy, 2021). Greater financial strain in the home makes learning harder (Ananat et al, 2011). <br> • Difficulties accessing services which provide much needed support to help families cope and children to learn. This is particularly true for children and young people with ASN (Scottish Government, 2021; Young Minds, 2020; Family Fund, 2020) <br> • Violence against women and children tends to increase in pandemics (Fraser, 2020) and figures in Scotland follow this pattern (Scottish Government, 2020b). | • Fewer family resources and less access to online learning resources, including technology, to offset lost instruction/ teaching time (Eyles et al, 2020; Black, 2020; Robertson & McHardy, 2021; Scottish Government, 2021). <br> • If a child is physically hungry, their focus is unlikely to be on learning (Montacute, 2020). <br> • Only 3 in 4 (74.4%) children and young people said they have a quiet space to work, read and relax at home (Clark and Picton, 2020) <br> • Less access to books, with 1 in 8 children in UK not owning a single book (Quigley, 2020) <br> • Time spent each day learning at home during COVID-19 school closures is significantly related to family income (IFS, 2020; Sutton Trust, 2020). With those children and young people from more affluent families reporting spending more time studying, engaging online and submitting completed work (IFS, 2020). |

# Prioritise re-engagement

Most children and young people will recover but those already facing disadvantage will need additional support to re-engage in education (Grattan Institute, 2020).  Learners need to re-engage:

- physically by attending educational activities either online or face-to-face
- emotionally by being motivated to learn and actively participating in their education.

**Re-engaging physically**:

School attendance is crucial for children's educational attainment (e.g., Ansari & Pianta, 2019), particularly for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Ready, 2010).  University of Strathclyde (Sosu & Klein, 2020) advises that Covid-19 may not only have increased socioeconomic achievement gaps during lockdown but may have continued to do so via school attendance disparities when schools reopened in August 2020. Their analysis of socioeconomic differences in overall absenteeism indicates learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic areas were more likely to be absent following school return than their more affluent peers.  One reason for this could be children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more at risk of infection COVID-19 and so more likely to self-isolate from school and miss a greater proportion of school because of COVID-19-related reasons.

**Re-engaging emotionally**:

Several factors may influence this including:

- The 'Matthew effect' shows that missing concepts or skills can impede the uptake of new skills.  Struggling learners can become less motivated, and so the problems compound as they avoid learning (Robertson & McHardy, 2021).
- Teachers clearly identify that loss of peer interaction affects learners' motivation (Scottish Government, 2021;  EEF, 2020a).
- COVID-19 has led to the loss of routine, structure, friendship, opportunities and freedom, and this can trigger the emergence of anxiety, trauma and bereavement in any child or young person (Carpenter & Carpenter, 2020).

**What helps?  What can we learn from engagement over school closures?**

- ***Learning is relational*** (OECD, 2020).  Secondary school pupils were more likely to report they had done a lot of school work at home if they were regularly keeping in touch with their teachers. Pupils who said they were having infrequent or no contact with their schools reported doing much less work (CPAG, 2020a, b)
- ***Personalisation***:  learners have a unique perspective on their needs and experiences. Involving them ensures that learning continues to address their needs and aspirations, even as these evolve (OECD, 2020)
- ***Asking what will help***.  During lockdowns, parents and carers valued schools that took the time to understand their particular circumstances and offer personalised support (CPAG, 2020a, b).
- ***Work with partners***.  Policy Scotland (2020) and Scottish Government (2021) highlighted the importance of the collaborative, partnership which was utilised to effectively support families and children's learning over lockdowns.  The support provided by CLD and Youth work will help young people to thrive on their return to school (National Youth Agency, 2020) and Scottish Government (2020c) believe are key for a full recovery and renewal to active civil society.
- ***Motivators***.  With remote learning, peer interaction helped with motivation of learners  but it was also important for teachers to adopt different approaches to learning to suit the content and tasks (EEF, 2020a).  Fullan and Quinn (2020) talk about leading a new learning agenda which takes into consideration how children and young people have been learning during remote learning.

# Identifying learners most impacted by poverty & COVID-19

To effectively target support and impact for children and young people most affected by poverty, COVID-19 and remote learning, all educational establishments, local authorities and national agencies need to use data as an evidence base. Addressing the impact of this interrupted learning now will minimise further disruption (OECD, 2020).

**Which groups have been impacted most?**
1. *Groups who were already low achieving educational groups* such as learners impacted by poverty, including rural poverty (Grattan Institute, 2020), single parent households (Robertson & McHardy, 2021).
2. *Younger children*, with the progress of children in P1 and P2 being most notably affected (Scottish Government, 2021). Teachers highlighted the challenge of replicating routines and teaching approaches online, such as the structured repetition required for early level reading and writing (Grattan Institute, 2020; Scottish Government, 2021).
3. *Children experiencing transitions*, such as children moving from nursery to primary school or from primary school to secondary school (Scottish Government, 2021) and particularly those from areas affected by disadvantage going through these transitions (Grattan Institute, 2020).
4. *Children and young people with existing mental health, social and emotional difficultie*s (Grattan Institute, 2020). Increased isolation and anxiety can exacerbate existing difficulties, making it harder to learn upon returning to school.
5. *Learners with additional support needs* rely on specialist support to progress and many found it difficult to access these supports due to lockdown restrictions (Robertson & McHardy, 2021)

**What gaps in learning have been identified?**
- *Core literacy and numeracy*: higher numbers of children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds showed regression in core literacy and numeracy skills when schools re-opened after the closures of school buildings (Scottish Government, 2021; OFSTED, 2020)
- *Children's concentration*: many learners affected by socio-economic disadvantage were struggling to absorb new information and regain prior levels of independence and engagement (Scottish Government, 2021)
- *Language*: Some evidence of remote learning impacting adversely on language development, particularly for younger children. (Scottish Govt, 2021; OFSTED, 2020)
- *Physical skills*: Some felt the development of younger children's physical skills had been interrupted, in particular fine motor skills (OFSTED, 2020).
- *Social learning*: Some primary-aged pupils were struggling with social skills. With some struggling to interact with peers due to prolonged isolation and need to relearn how to maintain friendships. This was further compounded by class or year-group bubble restrictions, meaning pupils cannot socialise as they typically would (OFSTED, 2020).

**Assessment:**
- Local authority and school data should be utilised to explore the impact of school closures on the above groups as a start. Knowledge of community context will support further data investigations needed. Example from Stirling supporting schools use of data to explore context: Data Impact Toolkit
- Formative assessment will support tracking and monitoring of progress (OECD, 2021).
- Assessment within BGE guidance from Education Scotland is available to suit the current context (April 2021)

# Intensifying support in the short-term

Intensified support is needed in the short-term - 6 months from your starting point of delivering support - for learners most affected by COVID-19 and school closures. Rather than spreading support too thinly, interventions need to be prioritised for children and young people most impacted upon. NFER (2020) and EEF(2020) emphasise the additional difficulties faced by learners experiencing poverty and advise a combination of targeted and sustained supports are needed once learners return to school.

**Targeted supports using small group and 1:1 instruction** are the most effective forms of academic intervention post-lockdown to support at-risk children and young people (Outhwaite & Guilliford, 2020; Grattan Institute, 2020). Scottish Government (2021) advise on increasing the amount and quality of learning time, increased personalisation and enhancing role of personal tuition to support children experiencing the greatest challenges. Further details on how to deliver high quality evidence based small group interventions can be found on page 6. These can be universal supports used in targeted ways or tailored interventions for small groups.

Areas where gaps have been identified and therefore require intensified support include:

- *Core literacy and numeracy*: Examples of evidence-based interventions available in the UK which can be led by Support for learning assistants[1] (SLAs) can be found at the EEF website (EEF, 2020c)
- *Children's concentration*: Disadvantaged pupils benefit from explicit support to help them work independently eg, by providing checklists or daily plans (EEF, 2020d). EEF provides clear guidance on how to help learners to develop the skills to monitor, direct and review their own learning (Quigley et al, 2019) as well as a framework for Support for learning assistants to scaffold learning and encourage independent thinking (2020e)
- *Language*: Oral language interventions which use metacognition and collaborative learning are successful (EEF, 2020). Robertson and McHardy (2021) and EEF (2020b) also describe the positive impact of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention designed to improve language skills for 4-5 year olds.
- *Social learning*: EEF provides details on 6 strategies to improve social and emotional learning in schools. This includes teaching SEL skills explicitly such as relationship skills. This resource and the Early Intervention Foundation (2020) provide practical tips which can be used for small groups or individually to support children's emotional and relationships skills develop.
- *Physical skills*: Curby and Carlson (2014) describe the association between fine motor skills and future achievement in reading and maths. Better Movers and Thinkers has activities to develop both fine and gross motor skills and NHS Tayside details activities supporting fine motor skills
- *Transitions*: Compassionate transitions are described by the SDEP (2020) and Education Scotland provide resources for learners with ASN during transition in the context of COVID-19

**What to avoid:**

- Do not hire additional staff such as SLAs without providing or having a plan to provide high quality training in interventions they will be delivering
- Do not stream – research highlights detrimental impact on children affected by poverty
- Avoid initiatives that take longer than 6 months for this short-term intensified support (Grattan Institute, 2020)

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[1] SLAs can also be called Teaching Assistants (TAs), PSAs (Pupil Support Assistants), etc

# High quality universal and targeted provision is vital

Provision to support children and young people who have been impacted most by COVID-19 needs to be more than just additional teaching and support.  It needs to be of the highest quality.  Factors which support this include using evidence based interventions, appropriate training for staff for interventions and networked learning systems.

**Delivering high quality, evidence based small group interventions:**
The area of research showing [the strongest evidence for SLAs having a positive impact on pupil attainment](#) focuses on their role in delivering structured interventions in 1:1 or small group settings (EEF, 2020e).  It is important to think about which intervention programme is being used and their delivery.  EEF (2020e) and Grattan Institute (2020) describe common elements of successful small group interventions, including those for core literacy and numeracy:
- Sessions are often short (15-45 minutes), occur regularly (3–5 times per week) and are maintained over a sustained period (10–20 weeks).
- Clear, careful timetabling is in place to enable consistent delivery by staff
- Staff receive extensive training from experienced trainers or teachers (5–30 hours per intervention)
- The intervention has structured supporting resources and lesson plans, with clear objectives and possibly a delivery script
- Ensure there is fidelity to the programme and do not depart from delivery protocols otherwise the intervention is less likely to have the impact desired
- Ensure staff closely follow the plan and structure of intervention, and use delivery scripts
- Assessments are used to identify appropriate learners, guide areas for focus and track learner progress. Effective interventions ensure the right support is being provided to the right child.  They evaluate progress throughout an intervention to ensure improvement.
- Connections are made between any out of-class learning in the intervention and classroom teaching, including designated time to discuss progress
- Consider where interventions are being delivered, as the environment could inhibit successful learning. Finding space isn't always easy, but try to avoid busy spaces, especially for learners with sensory needs or who are easily distracted

**The emphasis of these small groups**, particularly in core literacy and numeracy, should be prioritising foundation skills and knowledge needed for future learning.   Israel (2020) details some helpful questions which can be used to determine group focus:
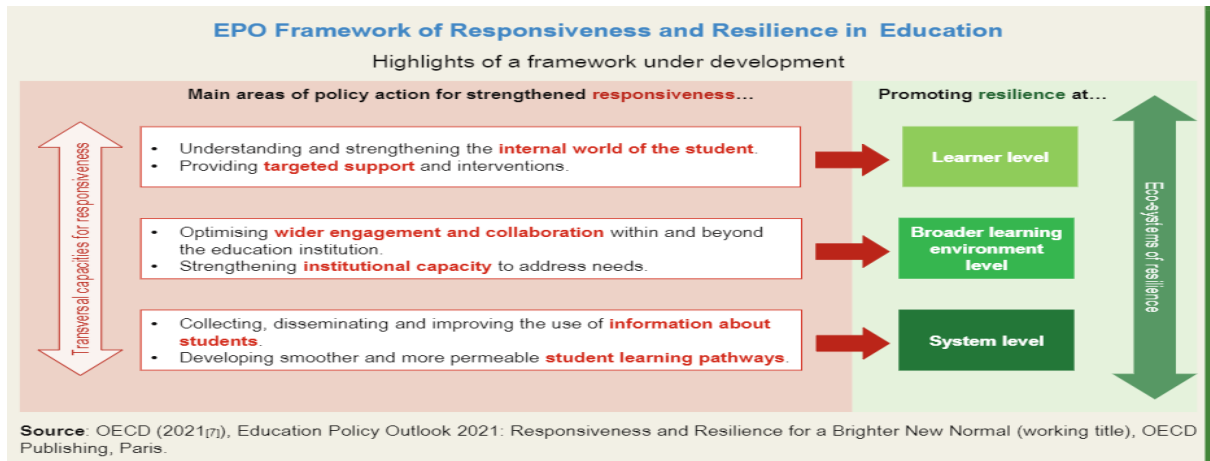- What skills and knowledge were interrupted for learners in each stage or subject?
- Do any need to be prioritised as foundations of future learning?
- How will staff approach consistently assessing unfinished learning needs related to prioritised and interrupted skills and knowledge?
- How will staff cultivate strong relationships with and among learners to address social and emotional learning alongside core literacy and numeracy?

**Providing staff support** to ensure effective implementation needs planned, especially:
- Appropriate, high quality training for interventions to be delivered.  Additionally research has shown that improving SLAs' talk to children can support the development of independent learning skills, which are associated with improved learning outcomes.  For example SLAs should be trained to avoid prioritising task completion and concentrate on helping children to develop ownership of tasks (EEF, 2020e)
- Consider networked learning.   This is a process of developing and maintaining connections with people and information and communicating in a way that supports one another's learning.  It is a relational stance to learning and could include time to liaise with teachers on children being supported, mentoring or a facilitated SLA network.

# Long-term strategic vision still required

The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people affected by poverty and their learning needs to be kept in perspective. The poverty related attainment gap has been a factor of our society before the current pandemic. These underpinning, deep rooted causes need to continue to be prioritised and tackled by all.



**EPO Framework of Responsiveness and Resilience in Education**
Highlights of a framework under development

**Main areas of policy action for strengthened responsiveness...**

Transversal capacities for responsiveness

- Understanding and strengthening the **internal world of the student**.
- Providing **targeted support** and interventions.

- Optimising **wider engagement and collaboration** within and beyond the education institution.
- Strengthening **institutional capacity** to address needs.

- Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of **information about students**.
- Developing smoother and more permeable **student learning pathways**.

**Promoting resilience at...**

**Learner level**

**Broader learning environment level**

**System level**

Eco-systems of resilience

**Source**: OECD (2021[7]), Education Policy Outlook 2021: Responsiveness and Resilience for a Brighter New Normal (working title), OECD Publishing, Paris.

The OECD framework (2021) above provides a positive start to help consider equity, as do their 10 principles for effective and equitable educational recovery (OECD-Education International, 2021). These principles are detailed below within the bullet points.

**Learner level:**
- Continue to provide targeted support to meet children's learning and social and emotional needs (OECD, 2021) including after-school programmes (Robertson & McHardy, 2021).
- Have an asset-based focus on youth, families, and communities. Moving forward, learners' own voices, experiences, perspectives, and advice must be central to the future of schooling and learning in all its forms (ICEA, 2020). The incorporation of the UNCRC into Scottish legislation underpins Scotland's desire to achieve this.

**Broader learning environment**
- Co-design a robust digital learning infrastructure with teachers and stakeholders (OECD, 2021). Digital learning is most effective when it is complements classroom teaching rather than being the sole approach to teaching (Evidence for learning, 2020).
- Empower teachers to exercise their professionalism and benefit from professional learning opportunities. Position them to become drivers of their own learning (OECD, 2021).
- Reimagine learning: Fullan et al (2020) describe the 4 elements needed to design powerful deep learning experiences: reimagining learning partnerships and environment, leveraging digital and critical awareness of most effective pedagogical practices.
- Offer supports engaging parents in their children's learning (OECD, 2021; Robertson & McHardy, 2021). Education Scotland identify the key features of high quality family learning here.

**System level:**
- Encourage a collaborative culture of innovation (OECD, 2021).
- Learn from national and international evidence (OECD, 2021). This includes about the different systems described above as well as thinking forward and planning to futureproof education to cope with any further interruptions in children's learning.

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