Guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners

This guidance provides advice and sets expectations relating to support for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners for a range of activities.

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Introduction

The outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) resulted in most learners, including those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, being unable to access their place of learning during the period of school and college closures. Although most learners have returned to school, there are concerns that some have not been able to fully engage with learning. Crisis is clear that many learners have suffered negative impacts. Many of the most vulnerable have been hit hard by the crisis and the disruption to their education. Some learners have been positive about the opportunity to learn from home, but others have found it difficult. Some learners, suggests that most learners have been negatively affected, and that vulnerable and disadvantaged groups have been hit hardest.

Local authorities, schools and settings (which include learning centres, pupil referral units and other settings providing education) have been working hard and showing great agility in adapting the services they provide for children and young people and their families who face barriers to learning. Many have been providing support to children and young people who are vulnerable or who are at risk of being vulnerable, and who have taken new ways of working while providing care, support and education, including for those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable or at risk of being vulnerable, and those who are disadvantaged by the crisis.

Since 23 June 2020, schools and settings have been increasing their provision to welcome back more pupils. This guidance, which is in Welsh / in Welsh and English, provides settings with the opportunity to reflect on the lessons learnt from the coronavirus crisis and provides advice on how to support learners who are vulnerable or who are at risk, why, when and how we expect settings to do this.

The Welsh Government is working closely with local authorities and settings and about to develop a framework for supporting learners who are limited social distancing within contact groups. The direction for supporting learners who are vulnerable or at risk of being vulnerable is equally, if not more, important than ever before.

For the purposes of this guidance, a wide definition of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners is used. This includes, but is not limited to, learners who are in or at risk of being:

- learners with special educational needs (SEN)
- learners who are looked after by a local authority or Welsh ministers
- additional learning needs (ALN) learners
- case-experienced children, including looked after children
- children in need and children in need of care
- children of refugees and asylum seekers
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children
- children who are Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BME)
- young carers
- children at risk of harm, abuse or neglect

And all learners from disadvantaged backgrounds or learning or in transition who are at risk of being vulnerable, including those at risk of being of barriers to achieving their potential and well, therefore, require additional support. This includes, but is not limited to, those with emotional needs, or difficulties in accessing education and/or learning, and those groups of the same time, depending on their individual circumstances.

The list of groups is not exhaustive. Learners not in these groups may be vulnerable or at risk of being vulnerable, and may need to be supported by their school or college. Learners who are not in these groups may be disadvantaged by the crisis and need additional support to ensure they return to school because of the impact on their education, well-being and life chances. Learners who are vulnerable or at risk of being vulnerable may need additional support, especially where they also face other barriers to learning, such as being in a family where English or Welsh is not the first language, or being a young carer.

We know most learning will have been impacted in some form over recent months, and we have been supporting local authorities and schools to ensure that learners who are vulnerable or at risk of being of formal qualifications in 2021 - those going into Years 11, 12 and 13. This guidance provides advice on how to support learners who are in or at risk of being in a position to take formal or equivalent assessments or training. The Welsh Government has announced £20 million for 'recruit, recover and raise standards' (RRRS) to be used by local authorities to provide in depth, bespoke support for those who have been most at risk of being of barriers to achieving their potential (see the Annex for a description of the RRRS).

This guidance is intended for local authorities, schools and other settings to ensure an inclusive approach as they prepare for full operation from September 2020 and beyond. It provides advice on how to support learners who are vulnerable or at risk of being of barriers to ensure benefits beyond the groups listed above, since what works for our vulnerable and disadvantaged learners will benefit all learners.

The Welsh Government recognises the significant difficulties faced by local authorities, schools and other settings in the past, and in meeting their statutory duties, including those to support SEN learners, looked after children and those with ALN. We know that they will want to return to full operation of settings in September, with delayed assessments, tests and exams, and with as much flexibility as possible, and efficiency. As a consequence, we recognise that it may be more or less swiftly to implement a new set of arrangements were the need to arise.

For the purposes of this guidance, the term 'schools and settings' includes local authority maintained schools, pupil referral units, settings in Wales, as well as pupil referral units (PRUs).

Independent schools and non-maintained early years settings may wish to use this guidance to inform their own practice, but it is not a statutory and/or legal. Separate guidance has also been published, or is due to be published, for these settings.

Legislative background

The basic curriculum

On 23 June 2020 the basic curriculum requirements for Wales and associated assessment arrangements for schools and non-maintained settings providing education were revoked. Coronavirus Act 2020 - Section 90 revoked schools and settings with the temporary space and flexibility to respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The revoked Welsh Ministers' Order, which was made in March, and most recent from 23 June 2020 - Section 90 revoked.

We are also revoking of the need for schools and settings to adapt their approach to learning and teaching, and to take into account the impact of challenges and we will take this into account in all decisions. The Welsh Government will not be issuing a direction to schools and local authorities and local authorities will not be required to issue a direction to schools to implement a new set of arrangements were the need to arise.

Section 1000 of the Education Act 1996 requires that the basic curriculum is a child or a young person an efficient education suitable to the age, ability and aptitude and to any special needs they may for the time being have.

Where provision is delivered through PRUs, the local authority must deliver a broad and balanced curriculum together with our education.

Special educational needs

There have been no modifications to the statutory duties of local authorities in respect of special educational needs (SEN). The statutory duties are set out in the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (Wales) 2021 remain in force. Local authorities, schools and other settings will need to ensure they applied The Code for learners who are receiving support and assessment, learning. It provides practical advice to local authorities, maintained schools, pupil referral units and other settings providing education. Schools should also identify, and make provision for learners' special educational needs.

Preparing an approach from September 2020

Operational guidance

Detailed guidance for all schools and settings in relation to the operational arrangements for the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is set out in planning for full operation (2020 to September) The Welsh Government in Operational guidance for schools and settings from September 2020 and beyond. This guidance provides operational requirements and Welsh Government expectations for schools and settings and other. This section relates specifically to the additional considerations, including for those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Attendance

All learners, including those that were previously shielding, will be expected to begin to return to their school or setting from 1 September 2020 unless they are ill or have other reasonable grounds for not doing so, in accordance with the Welsh Government's Operational guidance for schools and settings from September 2020.

Schools and settings should reassure learners and parents/carers of the measures they have in place to ensure that the school or setting premises/rooms and information are safe.

- health and safety arrangements, such as social distancing, hygiene, and cleaning arrangements, including those arrangements including environmental cleaning and hygiene and of collecting children, and robust hand washing and respiratory hygiene arrangements, including the use of hand sanitisers and face coverings
- arrangements for access to the school
- the measures in place to ensure pupils and the school who are after using specific equipment and/or resources
- use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by staff and learners, including face coverings, and the use of hand sanitisers and hand washing arrangements
- the measures in place to ensure pupils and staff are safe
- arrangements for personal care, e.g. changing and feeding
- arrangements for the use of toilets and washing facilities, including collaboration with the local health board and local authority specialist staff.

Schools should consider how pupils' work approaches could be used to help address concerns learners have about returning to school, including how learners have been learning at home and how they have been doing the lockdown period.

Some learners will also be reassured to attend due to negative socialisation and peer interaction, and they may be more inclined to find more positive experiences during lockdown.

Some learners may have developed anxiety or other mental health issues as a result of the impacts of COVID-19. In addition, COVID-19 may have led to a worsening of existing mental health issues, and some mental health issues could emerge for the first time. Schools and settings should be aware of the signs of mental health issues and be anxious about returning to their school or setting as a result of their attendance being missed.

Staff based in schools and settings with attendance and parent/carer engagement responsibilities, such as the school attendance officer, will be expected to support learners who have disengaged from education during lockdown and engaging and supporting carers and families. Understanding the causes of disengagement will be key to ensuring that the right support is provided to return. This will be a matter for schools and settings to consider, but it may be helpful to talk to learners about their concerns and found their confidence to return. This will be vital to ensure that they are able to make the most of their time in school and to ensure they are able to catch up on what they have missed. It is important learners in late as a safe based rather than a punitive approach. Local authorities, schools and settings should also be aware of the Attendance and Adjustment Statutory Guidance. Schools and local authority officers, may be able to assist with these conversations, given their experience of working with vulnerable learners and their families and their conversations with these people have developed the necessary skills, confidence, contingency planning and preparations for potential future national or local lockdowns.

Schools and settings should use the information they have to ensure that their return. This may include visits to the school or setting, using telephone or video calls, or home visits. Schools and settings should be aware that the staff working with vulnerable learners may be required to enable the learner to return. It may be appropriate to consider flexible approaches to support the return, such as a phased return, or flexible hours, where a bubble is built the curriculum.

Where provision put in place has not been successful in supporting learners to return to school, the school should review the provision and consider what else may be required to support the return. Schools should use the Education Welfare Service and/or other appropriate services, such as Educational Psychology.

Barnardo's and Action for Children produced a report Lessons from lockdown: Supporting children and families to return to school and returning to school post-lockdown. The report provides ideas and advice how to support children and young people as they return to school.

Schools and settings should consider how they will support learners who are transitioning to new arrangements or transition from primary to a new school or setting.

Where a learner is not able to return they may meet that parents/carers feel they have less opportunity to discuss concerns or issues with their child's school or setting. Schools and settings should be aware of the range of communication methods for parents to discuss their concerns or have these conversations, including non-digital approaches for those parents/carers who are digitally excluded.

Transition

Transition is a key and settling can be an unsettling time for learners. The current situation may have exacerbated any anxieties. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many transition activities, such as transition days, have been cancelled. Schools and settings should be aware of the impact of cancelling these activities and ensure that they are transitioning into place for learners who are moving to a new school or setting, and that they are prepared and the next place of learning.

The local authority and/or school or setting should contact learners and their parents/carers to discuss the transition process, including what changes and will need to be made to the transition process, and where appropriate, support agencies, to discussions that relate to transition. Schools and settings should be aware of the Welsh Government's guidance the implications of coronavirus (COVID-19) on statutory transition, medium/health related issues, financial support, and any increased support need for learners and their family.

Learners may be anxious about how their learning experience may look when they return to school or college. Schools and settings should be aware learners may also have concerns about how they will be able to cope with the new environment, and how they will be able to cope with the new expectations where schools and settings have, for example, undertaken a risk assessment. Schools and settings should be aware that learners may also have concerns about how they will be able to cope with the new direct contact, pupil/student materials and/or websites. Consideration should be given to how learners will be supported to overcome any anxiety including that education would be disrupted by a lockdown, e.g. learners with SEN, learners with EAL/EMLD, or learners who are from the Gypsy Roma Traveller community, or who are looked after.

There is a concern that learners who are vulnerable or disadvantaged as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. It is important that learners who have been vulnerable or at risk of being vulnerable, and those who have been given 'B' settings, and those who are disadvantaged, receive a positive destination (whether education, employment or training) through the transition process. Schools and settings should be aware that learners settings have concerns about a positive transition (whether education, employment or training). they should flag this up with the local authority and/or other appropriate organisations, such as Careers Wales, so that appropriate support can be put in place.

Social distancing

The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the Welsh Government provides guidance on social distancing. The following messages are provided:

- minimising contact between individuals whenever possible
- reducing the number of contacts between pupils and staff
- keeping contact groups for both learners and staff apart where possible

The guidance goes on to state that, where possible, the individuals will be or separating groups, and for older learners it will be social distancing.

The concept of 'groups' and 'older' may be generally more appropriate for secondary schools and colleges. For primary schools, the concept may be more 'bubbles' bubbles. Bubbles are a way of minimising contact and mixing between groups. It is a way of planning for individual learners, including, for example, those learners who present challenging or complex behaviours.

The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the Welsh Government provides guidance on social distancing and on ensuring between groups of people. The guidance includes the consideration when considering the needs of learners with SEN, ALN, looked after children, and those who are vulnerable or at risk of being vulnerable, and those who are disadvantaged by the crisis.

Settings should consider the use of consistent, small contact groups, particularly for learners that cannot socially distance from staff or their peers.

Transport

Guidance for local authorities, schools and settings is provided in the Operational guidance for schools and settings from September 2020. For the majority of learners, including those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, it is likely that they will be able to travel to school or for learners who are transitioning to a new school or setting, in particular those with SEN, there will be additional considerations. The Welsh Government has provided additional guidance on how to provide further support.

The use of personal protective equipment

The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by staff should be settings or a local assessment of risk. The Welsh Government provides guidance on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term provides guidance on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Public Health Wales has provided guidance on the use of PPE in health and social care and non-healthcare settings.

The use of PPE with some learners, especially those with SEN, should be considered in the context of their individual circumstances.

Due to the individual nature of some learners and the need for some specific types of PPE will need to be used at different times of the day, schools and settings will need to be flexible in their approach and arrangements for the use of PPE for such learners. Schools and settings should be noted in their individual learning plan to ensure all staff are aware of the need for the use of personal protective equipment.

The wearing of face coverings in secondary schools and colleges in low coverage should be seen. Individuals who may find it difficult to use face coverings, for example, because of SEN, ALN or mental health, or who may be exempt for medical reasons, should be encouraged to be ready to respond to the use of face coverings by others should also be considered. Schools and settings should be aware of the impact of face coverings and how it may affect communication, particularly for those with EAL, Phase.

When considering the use of masks, schools and settings will need to take careful and fair assessment decisions on individual circumstances, including the need for clear communication with learners and their families.

Schools and settings should be aware of the Welsh Government's guidance on the use of face coverings.

Exclusions

Exclusions should be used as a last resort. Where pupils cannot be kept safe in school, or where persistent behaviour includes their school and pupil attendance, it may be appropriate to consider exclusion. Schools and local authorities should be aware of the impact of exclusion from school and from pupil referral units.

The guidance is not clear about their in the most exceptional circumstances, schools and settings should avoid permanently excluding a pupil. Schools and local authorities should be aware of the impact of such excluding learners who are large impact on Ofsted, Estyn, School to School Action Plan, including Review or School Action Plan who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Schools and settings should be aware of the exceptional circumstances, issues where school after closures are concerned. Schools and settings should be aware of the impact of exclusion from school and from school and should seek local authority and other advice and support.

Avoiding exclusions and referrals to EOTAS

There is potential for an increase in challenging behaviour among learners who attend mainstream education. This will be particularly the case for those who have been out of school for a long period of time, or who attended neither COVID-19 and who may struggle to adapt to change in routine, including the more structured routines and expectations in relation to learning and behaviour in school.

Understanding the cause of the behaviour change can be a starting point in supporting learners to modify and regulate their behaviour.

Schools and settings should consider adopting a trauma informed approach to behaviour management. Guidance about Trauma Informed Schools has been published.

This does not mean lowering general expectations in terms of behaviour, but it means being aware of the impact of trauma and adversity on learners and

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Summer 2020/21 examinations

The Welsh Government believes it is in the best interests of those learners due to take their exams in summer 2021 to be so, with clear adaptations to mitigate the loss of learning and factoring time that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has taken from learners' lives. We want to give learners a fair chance.

Different considerations will apply depending on the subject and type of assessment. Some assessments will be adapted to take into consideration disruption to teaching and learning (GCSE) or make adaptations on a subject-specific basis following consultation with stakeholders (A levels). We will also make changes to increase learners' ability, while recognising that they have had less time to learn the content and teaching. It will also provide learners more time to deliver certain assessments, for example, the Welsh baccalaureate skills challenge and Welsh baccalaureate individual project, and provide more time for marking and moderation.

In considering the adaptations that will be made for each qualification, Welsh Government has taken into account the advice of the regulators and the existing access and reasonable adjustment requirements specified by Qualifications Wales.

To further support learners due to take their exams next year, they will also be able to access a range of support, such as revision and assessments – for example, practice papers – and other resources to support their learning and preparation for exams.

Well-being support for learners due to take exams in summer 2021, who may feel under particular pressure, will also be in place.

Video-conferencing and live-streaming

Through trial, the digital learning platform for Wales, learners and teachers, has been made ready for use by schools and colleges. We are providing tools such as Microsoft Teams for Education and Google Meet in G-Suite for Education. Using Microsoft Teams and Google Meet, teachers can live-stream lessons, record lessons, set assignments and collaborate with other teachers and learners in a secure and accessible way.

Safeguarding is an integral principle of digital learning. The safety and welfare of learners is paramount and takes precedence over all other considerations.

The Welsh Government has published the following safeguarding principles and practice for education practitioners provides advice and guidance to practitioners and the leadership of schools and colleges.

The guidance may also be of use to other practitioners such as therapists, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, youth workers, and those who provide services for children with additional needs (ALN/SEN) and delivery staff that support schools.

The guidance was originally published in May 2020, during the period of school closure, when most practitioners were working from home. It has been updated to reflect coronavirus advice practitioners and learners will see on their return.

Peripatetic staff

Wherever possible, the school or setting should facilitate the ongoing provision of peripatetic services to learners. This will be most important for learners with Special educational needs but will also be important to a wider impact on the learning and support of all learners. For example, peripatetic services may include: English as an additional language, social education (PSE), Welsh language immersion, physical education delivery methods, such as assistant practitioners live-streaming physical education lessons, or providing approved coronavirus (COVID-19) measures are put in place.

Local authorities should provide advice to schools in their areas to support the provision of services to learners in the school and the local environment for learners across the local authority is equitable in the support received.

Participation

Participation has mixed links with well-being and serves to meet children's rights to participate in decisions making in their school or setting. Participation is also a key part of the curriculum and should be considered in all practitioners' decisions. It also underpins the ethos of the school or setting and should be reflected in the way it operates. For groups, can take part.

Schools and settings need to consider a range of arrangements for facilitating participation from September 2020. Arrangements often underpinned by technology will need to be in place for those who cannot attend. The approach may not always be possible in September 2020/21. Therefore, alternative models may need to be considered, such as using technology to support participation, or providing a mixed approach, phased or using blended models.

Provision of food and drink in schools for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners

The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term provides information and high-level principles with regard to provision of food and drink.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged learners may require additional support to access food and drink in school, and local authorities should consider how this can be provided in a way that is safe and meets the needs of children. Additional needs will vary between learners but may include issues around physical access, difficulties with communication, and sensitivities around food and drink. Schools and settings will need to consider how to provide support to learners who need it, in a way that is sensitive to their needs and circumstances. Support should be consistent and support measures put in place.

Learning guidance

On 10 July 2020, the Welsh Government published Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term. The guidance provides information on how schools and settings will operate from September 2020.

The guidance provided in this document is supplementary and both documents should be read together with each other. The autumn term guidance provides information on how schools and settings will operate in learning of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

The Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term advises schools and settings that they need to prepare for a range of learners returning to school, including those who may find it difficult or struggle to respond to learning in a school setting.

The priorities for learning should be based on the principle:

- the health and well-being of learners and staff
- all learning should be assessed
- schools and settings have sufficient time to develop skills that are relevant to their current and future progression and employment
- the curriculum, delivery and support should ensure that learners progress and develop their skills and knowledge
- schools and settings should focus on assessment and assessment practices and where appropriate, other commitments.

The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term provides information and high-level principles with regard to the expectations of schools and settings. The guidance sets out the Welsh Government's expectations of how schools and settings will operate which may not be known to all learners. It also sets out implications of the particular needs and pre-existing barriers to learning. It is possible that some learners will be more vulnerable than others to the impact of the pandemic. The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term notes that learners who have been vulnerable before the pandemic may be more at risk now. It is that practitioners will need to have particular regard to learners who have been vulnerable before the pandemic and ensure that their needs are not supplanted, remedied, it also provides information on developing a school or setting's approach to learning and teaching. The Operational Further guidance on supplementary to the autumn term guidance is found in the Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term.

The Welsh Government has also developed a new online school information website for parents and learners. It will be a single source of information for parents and learners on what to expect when their school or college begins to operate in September 2020. It will provide information on the expectations of learners and what attendance at school or setting for some learners will be like, including what they will be expected to do and what school or college will be like. It will also provide information on the particular needs and pre-existing barriers to learning. It is possible that some learners will be more vulnerable than others to the impact of the pandemic. The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term notes that learners who have been vulnerable before the pandemic may be more at risk now. It is that practitioners will need to have particular regard to learners who have been vulnerable before the pandemic and ensure that their needs are not supplanted, remedied. It also provides information on developing a school or setting's approach to learning and teaching. Further guidance is available in the Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term.

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Specific considerations

Special educational needs

Learners with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) and the local authority duty to comply with the statement

The ability of the local authority which school or setting is fully meet the educational requirements of a learner with a statement of SEN. The local authority duty to comply with the statement.

Many learners with SEN may not have been attending their usual setting. This may have made it difficult for local authorities and schools and settings to secure the range of provision for those learners both during the period of school closure and after. Local authorities and schools and settings should consider what provision they have and should have been providing parents/learners with learning and support materials, including those who are home educated. Local authorities and schools and settings have been using the Welsh Government Distributing Service rather than using their own local arrangements. Local authorities and schools and settings have been using the Welsh Government Distributing Service rather than using their own local arrangements.

The local authority and school or setting, where appropriate, should ensure parents/carers, learners and, where appropriate, other agencies, is aware of the provision that is being made available and how it will be delivered. Local authorities and schools and settings should also ensure that the provision is appropriate to the learner's needs and that it is being delivered in a way that is appropriate.

Extra has worked with the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) to develop a set of principles for local authorities to provide advice and support to schools and settings in accordance with school information website. The advice carefully captures principles for using technology and supporting vulnerable learners in schools and settings.

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Support that learners with SEN receive from teaching assistants, support assistants, specialist education services and/or therapists

Learners with additional learning needs (ALN) may have their needs met through a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or may be specified in the statement is made by the school or setting.

Provision in place prior to the COVID-19 outbreak may not be provided in the same way or may not be provided at all. For example, staff in schools and settings may be redeployed to other positions which their usual duties may be subject to self isolation.

Local authorities should work with local authorities, schools and settings, and other agencies to ensure that provision is provided wherever and flexible approaches, including providing services remotely, the should continue, wherever safe and practicable.

As noted above, other health professionals, such as speech and language therapists, may be able to provide assessments and support remotely. Local authorities should work with Local Health Boards and other agencies to ensure the range of provision for those learners both during the period of school closure and after. Local authorities should also ensure that parents/carers are aware of the provision that is being made available and how it will be delivered. Local authorities should also ensure that the provision is appropriate to the learner's needs and that it is being delivered in a way that is appropriate.

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Local authorities, schools and settings must continue to ensure the provision of services to learners in the school and the local environment for learners across the local authority is equitable in the support received. The support measures put in place. The approach may not always be possible in September 2020/21. Therefore, alternative models may need to be considered, such as using technology to support participation, or providing a mixed approach, phased or using blended models.

Provision for learners with SEN in schools and settings from the autumn term

The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term provides information and high-level principles with regard to provision of food and drink.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged learners may require additional support to access food and drink in school, and local authorities should consider how this can be provided in a way that is safe and meets the needs of children. Additional needs will vary between learners but may include issues around physical access, difficulties with communication, and sensitivities around food and drink. Schools and settings will need to consider how to provide support to learners who need it, in a way that is sensitive to their needs and circumstances. Support should be consistent and support measures put in place.

Learning guidance

On 10 July 2020, the Welsh Government published Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term. The guidance provides information on how schools and settings will operate learning from September 2020.

The guidance provided in this document is supplementary and both documents should be read together with each other. The autumn term guidance provides information on how schools and settings will operate in learning of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

The Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term advises schools and settings that they need to prepare for a range of learners returning to school, including those who may find it difficult or struggle to respond to learning in a school setting.

The priorities for learning should be based on the principle:

- the health and well-being of learners and staff
- all learning should be assessed
- schools and settings have sufficient time to develop skills that are relevant to their current and future progression and employment
- the curriculum, delivery and support should ensure that learners progress and develop their skills and knowledge
- schools and settings should focus on assessment and assessment practices and where appropriate, other commitments.

The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term provides information and high-level principles with regard to the expectations of schools and settings. The guidance sets out the Welsh Government's expectations of how schools and settings will operate which may not be known to all learners. It also sets out implications of the particular needs and pre-existing barriers to learning. It is possible that some learners will be more vulnerable than others to the impact of the pandemic. The Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term notes that learners who have been vulnerable before the pandemic may be more at risk now. It is that practitioners will need to have particular regard to learners who have been vulnerable before the pandemic and ensure that their needs are not supplanted, remedied. It also provides information on developing a school or setting's approach to learning and teaching. Further guidance is available in the Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term.

The Welsh Government has also developed a new online school information website for parents and learners. It will be a single source of information for parents and learners on what to expect when their school or college begins to operate in September 2020. It will provide information on the expectations of learners and what attendance at school or setting for some learners will be like, including what they will be expected to do and what school or college will be like. It will also provide information on developing a school or setting's approach to learning and teaching.

Addressing attendance issues

In September 2020, when settings are open to all learners, local authorities will need to work with schools and settings to ensure attendance is put in place for all EOTAS learners to support their attendance. Where local authorities directly provide services, such as home tuition, the local authority should ensure learning plans.

Local authorities should prioritise learners who did not take an examination or assessment in the summer of 2020 and who are disadvantaged or vulnerable. Local authorities should also ensure that learners who are home educated are provided with support.

Communication and conversations will be critical to supporting learners throughout the transition period. School staff, supported by local authority officers, will need to be able to provide reassurance to learners and families. It is normal that they may experience different reactions and be concerned about the return to school. Some learners may have been especially around COVID-19. Information should be provided in an honest, developmentally appropriate manner.

Increased behavioural issues

EOTAS provision is increasingly different to mainstream education and provision. Many learners who are EOTAS have complex emotional and behavioural address and overcome barriers which are preventing them from accessing education. Many of the barriers to learning and attendance. Learners attend EOTAS for many reasons, including: disengagement, disorderly conduct and support provided by their setting during lockdown. Local authorities should ensure that EOTAS learners who have not accessed the support COVID-19 can be identified and provided with support learners. Risk assessments should also be undertaken, as appropriate.

It may be necessary for settings to put in place a range of support for support learners, and to adapt necessary to challenging behaviours. Local authorities should ensure that EOTAS learners who have not accessed the support they need to transition back into school, settings. Settings should work with other agencies to ensure that learners are provided with the support they need, including: mental health services, youth offending services, local authority services, and other services.

Learners from low-income families

It is at the core of our education system that learners from low-income families achieve their best educational outcomes. Ensuring that this school means all SEG is used as a proxy indicator for deprivation. We know that learners who are eligible for free school meals are more likely to face disadvantage. Disadvantage including barriers accessing learning, material deprivation, and lower aspirations, which can limit their ability to reach their full potential. The COVID-19 outbreak risks undoing the progress made over recent years.

Learners from low-income families may need a range of support from schools and settings, local authorities, and other agencies to overcome barriers to learning and progress. This may include support for mental health and well-being, as well as additional support with learning.

Schools and settings will need to work with local authorities and other agencies to ensure that learners receive the support they need. Schools should work with other agencies to ensure that learners receive the support they need, including: mental health services, youth offending services, local authority services, and other services.

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education when they return to their school or setting may be a challenge. Consideration of needs on an individual learner basis should be undertaken at the start of the autumn term and an individualised programme of support and intervention should be put in place.

Schools and settings may need to consider how they can adapt existing parenting or family learning programmes to better support parents/carers to support their child's learning.

The Welsh Government's key programme for supporting disadvantaged learners is the **Pupil Development Grant (PDG)** which is at a record £100 million for 2020/21. This year, schools and settings have been provided with greater flexibility in terms of the use of the PDG, so that it can be targeted to address local need in the context of COVID-19. Priorities might include, for example, ensuring practitioners receive refresher professional learning on trauma-informed practice and/or adverse childhood experiences (ACE) awareness, or additional focus on the 'tracking' of learner progress to help the learner progress to the next stage of their learning.

Schools and settings should continue to consider how to implement effective practices to support learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and this should be at the heart of school development planning. The Welsh Government continues to advocate the use of the **Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit** to support planning. The Education Endowment Foundation has produced a range of resources to support practitioners tackle the attainment gap, which are specifically relevant to the COVID-19 context.

Estyn has also produced a range of best practice reports to support schools and settings, including one on **supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable learners**.

The PDG strategic advisers based in each regional consortia are the point of contact for all schools and settings on effective and evidence based approaches for supporting learners from low income families. They can provide support and guidance on:

- appropriate interventions based on the latest evidence
- using whole-school approaches
- the benefits of tracking
- supporting evaluation of current practices
- facilitating regional support networks.

In the current circumstances more than ever, the strategic advisers can support schools and settings to ensure the best use of their PDG allocations to support disadvantaged learners as we move into the new academic year.

Cost of the school day

Given the current challenging economic circumstances for many families, and the likelihood of this deepening over the coming months with significant increases in the number of families in receipt of benefits anticipated, it is essential that schools and settings consider 'the cost of the school day' when planning their core business and activities or events.

Children in Wales has produced a **suite of guides** for schools and settings covering key aspects in addressing the cost of the school day, including understanding the causes and impact of living in poverty, food and hunger, and school uniforms.

Schools and settings should be mindful when setting their uniform policy for the 2020/21 academic year as many disadvantaged families may not be able to afford additional items of clothing. Further guidance on school uniform is provided in the **Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term** and in the **Statutory guidance for school governing bodies on school uniform and appearance policies**.

The **Children's Commissioner for Wales' resources** are a tool for learners, staff and governors of schools and settings to map the costs that might be difficult for children and families to afford – both over the course of the school day and over the school year. The resources can support schools and settings to find practical solutions to reduce the cost of the school day.

Care-experienced learners

Many care-experienced learners, including looked after children and adopted children, will have found lockdown difficult. Due to lockdown measures, some children will have had limited face-to-face contact with their birth families and their support network, including social workers. For some families, lockdown will have put pressures on foster placements leading to placement breakdowns. For some children, lockdown measures will have made it difficult to maintain contact with friends and these relationships will now need to be re-established.

These circumstances may have resulted in care-experienced children feeling isolated and contributed to increased trauma and attachment issues. Many schools and settings have received trauma and attachment training, which is invaluable in being able to fully support care experienced learners. Further information on trauma and attachment is provided in the **Operational guidance for schools and settings from autumn term**.

All maintained schools and settings in Wales must have a designated person for looked after children with responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of looked after children. Essentially, the designated person is responsible for ensuring the needs of looked after children are met within the school or setting. A key part of the role is working with others to ensure the well-being of looked after children is monitored effectively and their welfare needs are addressed.

Every looked after child should have an effective personal education plan (PEP), which should describe what needs to happen to help them reach their full potential. While it is recognised there will be practical implications in the delivery and review of PEPs during this current time, the local authority should continue to work in partnership with the learner and the school (especially the designated person), to develop and review the PEP in light of any changed circumstances, so that it fully reflects the needs of the learner, remains up to date and is implemented. PEPs and guidance are available from the local authority looked after children in education (LACE) coordinator.

While many learners will have struggled during this period, it's important to note that for some the experience will have been a positive one. Some learners may have engaged better with their learning through a distance model and some, including care-experienced learners, have thrived from a personal and well-being perspective, e.g. as a consequence of spending more time with their families or foster families and building secure attachments. We must recognise, learn from and build upon the positive experiences and aspects. However, a positive experience may also mean some learners will be reluctant to return to school for this reason and may need support to overcome this.

Young carers

Young carers may be concerned about returning to school. They may worry about how the person they care for will be supported while they are in school. They may also be concerned about transmission of the virus and the risks of taking the infection home to parents/carers, siblings or other family members who are unwell or who have care and support needs that make them vulnerable to illness or infections.

They may have experienced an increase in caring responsibilities during the pandemic; either in the number of hours they are caring, the type of tasks they have been carrying out or in the number of people they are caring for. This may mean that a young carer has not been able to fully engage in home learning and has fallen behind in their studies, which may cause anxiety about returning to school. Increased caring responsibilities may also have made it difficult to maintain communication with friends or wider support networks.

We know that many children and young people don't identify themselves as being in a caring role, or they don't tell school staff that they are a young carer. Schools and settings can help young carers understand their rights under the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**. All young carers have the right to a carers' needs assessment. This is not dependent on any individual they are caring for having a local authority needs assessment and identified care and support needs. In November 2019, the Welsh Government published a **short guide to carers' rights**, recognising that local authorities, schools and settings may require support to improve their understanding of the needs of young carers.

The Welsh Government has funded **Carers Trust Wales** to produce guides and lesson plans, which will be launched in September 2020. Also, in 2019, Estyn published the thematic review **Provision for young carers in secondary schools, further education colleges and pupil referral units across Wales**. Schools and settings may find this useful in planning support for young carers in the new academic year.

Young carers and their families should be encouraged to discuss concerns about returning to education with their school or setting and any other agencies working with the family. A multi-agency approach could be beneficial in finding ways to support a return to school. Schools and settings could also offer information about the help and safeguarding plans they have put in place to protect their learners and the support in place to help young carers with their studies on returning to school.

More generally, a young carer can access a range of online information and advice, or other forms of support, which can include local authority young carers' services. Information about how to access these can be found on their local authority website or by calling their local authority. Contact and website details of all local authorities regarding carers services and support is also available via **Meic**, the national young people's support service. Young carers can also access support via local or national carers' organisations such as **Carers Trust Wales** or **Carers Wales**, or a local carers' centre.

Learners from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities and those who have English or Welsh as an additional language (EAL/WAL)

Learners and families from (BAME) backgrounds may have concerns about their increased vulnerability to COVID-19 and the potential risks associated with their child returning to school. In particular, the learner taking the infection home to family members who may be vulnerable to illness or infections.

Where learners have English or Welsh as an additional language (EAL/WAL) they may not have used their language skills during the lockdown period and they may have lost confidence. This might lead to anxiety or disengagement from school.

Parents/carers of learners with EAL/WAL may not have the English or Welsh language skills to support their children's distance learning. There can be particular challenges engaging with families with low levels of literacy or with EAL/WAL. This may have been exacerbated by a lack of access to easy to read text or audio information.

Guidance for parents/carers has been published and is available in a range of languages.

Access to materials in home languages can be an issue. Some local authorities have developed guidance for schools and settings to emphasise the barriers that learners with EAL/WAL face at such a challenging time. This includes guidance on suitable websites to promote learning, banks of resources to download, and support for schools and settings in using visual and audio resources. It reminds staff of the importance of encouraging families to use home language for learning where skills in English or Welsh are not well developed. There are examples of local authorities having bilingual staff in place providing support and feedback for learners in their home language where needed.

Learners with EAL/WAL may need extra support with learning and to refresh their language skills when they return to school. We must reassure learners and their families and give them the confidence they will receive all the help and support they need on return to school.

During this period, local authority minority ethnic achievement services have been working with schools and settings, learners and their families to support learners and their families and share good practice across their local authority areas. In some local authorities, staff report that three-way calls between families, schools and settings and the EAL/WAL services have proved beneficial. They have helped to ensure parental understanding of how they can best support their children's learning and get access to resources.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners

Anecdotal evidence from local authority Gypsy Traveller service providers is that there has been a higher level of disengagement of these learners during lockdown. Issues they cite are concerns about exposure to the virus, a lack of access to learning materials and late acquisition of digital equipment and connectivity.

With regard to delays in access to digital devices and connectivity generally, local authorities have worked hard to supply equipment and internet access for these groups. However, a minority still report that the quality of ICT equipment, internet access and the low technical competency of some learners and their families continue to be barriers to learning.

For some families, particularly in the Traveller community, digital technology may not be a chosen method of interaction. It is best therefore, to include a mix of media that matches the needs of the learners and their families. We know in many instances, work packs were provided to learners during lockdown.

There is also a possibility that low literacy levels among some parents/carers has meant they are unable to support their child's learning. Culturally, there can be a low level of confidence in education based on parents'/carers' own experiences.

Building better relationships with these groups is key to understanding why education is not a priority for some learners and their families, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. There can be a lack of mutual understanding between schools and settings, and families which may challenge learners' engagement and attainment. These include cultural barriers where families may not understand what schools and settings expect, while schools and settings may not understand the extent of support families may need.

In the best-case scenarios, there is a well-embedded multi-agency approach to supporting individual families and learners in these groups. Where this is the case, schools and settings and support services have continued to build on already well-established relationships.

Beginning in September 2020, the Gypsy Traveller Forum – the Welsh Local Authority Gypsy Traveller service provider network – is planning a task and finish group to share good practice and develop strategies to re-engage Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners and their families in education post-lockdown.

Children at risk of harm, abuse or neglect

Learners will have encountered different experiences and home environments during lockdown and all staff should be reminded of their safeguarding duties within the statutory safeguarding guidance for education settings **Keeping learners safe** and under the **Wales Safeguarding Procedures**.

The role of the designated safeguarding person (DSP) will be vital and all staff and learners should be informed of who the DSP is and how to contact them. Accessing a trusted adult, or the DSP, may be more difficult with efforts to minimise contact so schools and settings should consider how learners can talk to them privately. **Guidance for education settings** is available.

At the early stages, schools, settings and children's services should continue to work closely together to ensure every child and family has the support needed. Local authorities will already have a range of working practices in place to ensure that safeguarding partners can work together to keep learners safe. There is an opportunity now for these working practices to be further consolidated.

The Welsh Government has produced **guidance to remind practitioners working across agencies of their responsibilities to safeguard learners** and to support them in responding to concerns about learners at risk. The guide links to, and should be used with, the national **Wales Safeguarding Procedures**.

Preparing for a further lockdown or blended learning approach

Many uncertainties face the education system as we prepare for the next academic year.

The UNCRC's right to an education applies without exception, regardless of the scenario or any barriers to learning faced by individuals. A further lockdown or a period of blended learning does not absolve local authorities of their duty to provide a suitable education. However, it is recognised that the duty may need to be implemented differently for some learners for periods of time.

Local authorities, schools and education settings should prioritise preparation for potential further national or local lockdowns to seek to ensure as little disruption as possible to the learning of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Many schools and settings, including special schools and PRUs, provided a valuable service for vulnerable children and the children of key workers during lockdown.

As part of their planning, local authorities must now consider how they will continue to provide education and wider support for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners should there be future local or national lockdowns. This should include keeping schools and settings open. As part of this planning, local authorities need to consider how best to deploy resources, creatively and flexibly to meet the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, and their families. The Welsh Government recognises that any such response needs to be based on appropriate public health advice.

In planning arrangements for potential future lockdown, local authorities should reflect on the arrangements put in place during the previous lockdown, including strengths and areas for improvement, and feedback received from parents/carers and learners. Other sources of feedback and intelligence may also be available, e.g. from Estyn and the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

The **Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term** sets out expectations around contact with learners and duration of learning should there be a future lockdown or implementation of some form of blended learning approach. It is clear that all learners should be:

- contacted regularly to 'check in' – this will provide an opportunity to check on the safety and well-being of the learner, as well as to explore their learning experience and consider possible additional support
- provided with the duration of learning time they would have received were they in their school or setting, regardless of whether or not some of their learning is taking place at home or elsewhere – there will be exceptions to the implementation of this expectation, however, it should be the starting position for all learners.

The public health situation will continue to be carefully monitored over the coming months and this guidance will be kept under review. Further, additional guidance will be provided, if necessary.

Ensuring continuity of learning

Schools and settings are expected to plan for a number of scenarios for the 2020/21 academic year. This is to include any future lockdown situation. The learning and well-being needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners must be considered fully as part of that planning process.

Local authorities, schools, settings and partner agencies have shown great resilience to date. There have been many examples of creative and flexible ways of working. Local authorities, schools and settings will have identified aspects of their approaches that have worked well and those that may require refinement.

The Minister for Education is clear that the priority for all education settings, as they increase their operations and as they prepare to welcome learners in September 2020, is the well-being of its learners.

Estyn has recently published a suite of reports that provide a brief overview of how education settings have supported learners' well-being and learning. Separate reports are available on approaches from **primary schools**, **secondary schools**, special schools and **pupil referral units**.

In addition, **Insights into how independent schools and specialist colleges have responded during the COVID-19 pandemic** highlights the approaches taken by this diverse sector in supporting learners during the pandemic. The Estyn report presents a number of cameos that profile the work undertaken in relation to adapting learning, supporting transition, developing learners' skills and establishing routines to assist in reducing anxiety.

The above publications complement Estyn's report **Learner resilience - building resilience in primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units**. The report recognises the vital role that schools and settings have in supporting the mental health in building resilience of children and young people. The report may help education providers in considering relevant approaches.

The Education Endowment Foundation has produced guidance on **Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools**. The guidance aligns well with the Welsh Government's ambition for inclusive education and **Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action plan 2017–21**. The report states very clearly that 'learners with SEN have the greatest need for excellent teaching and are entitled to provision that supports achievement at and enjoyment of school'.

The guidance provides useful materials on engagement with parents/carers, SEN misconceptions, high-quality teaching, and plotting overlapping needs.

Local authorities should consider what support schools and settings need in order to ensure the continued learning of children and young people facing significant barriers to learning. This may be necessary, for example, to ensure learning objectives within statutory or other education plans are met, e.g. statements of SEN, IEPs or PEPs. Specialist staff in local authorities may be well placed to identify any gaps and provide schools and settings with advice on how to adapt their approach, including resources to better meet learning needs.

Local authorities, schools and settings should engage with parents/carers in order to ensure continuity of learning. The information gathered from this engagement can be used in discussions between the local authority, school or setting, and staff from other agencies, to ensure the work set and support provided meets the needs of learners.

Schools and settings must ensure that any learning materials are appropriate to the needs of learners. They must use their in-depth knowledge of learners to provide high-quality, differentiated learning activities and experiences for learners. Schools and settings must also give careful consideration to the appropriateness of remote or blended learning activities. Additional support should be provided to enable access to learning. Alternatives may include schools and settings providing materials via mail, post or hand-delivery. However, it might be that a multi-agency approach is required in order to support the continued learning of some individuals.

Local authorities, schools and settings should also review the availability of technology, equipment and other resources that may support learners with learning at home or elsewhere.

The 'check-in, catch-up and prepare' sessions will have helped schools and settings review any outstanding accessibility issues their learners are experiencing, including access to digital tools. Support has been made available via local authorities, including £3 million additional funding from the Welsh Government, to specifically address the issue of access to hardware and/or internet connectivity. We are aware that considerable efforts have been made by local authorities, schools and settings to address these needs. We expect any such residual access issues will be quickly resolved as we move towards full operation and all learners to have full and equitable support for learning in the autumn.

Some learners may ordinarily have access to specialist equipment, toys and other resources. Local authorities, schools and settings should use their in-depth knowledge of learners and plan to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged should their return to school be part or full-time, or during any future lockdown situation. Specialist staff may coordinate this and provide ongoing support to learners and their parents/carers.

Multi-agency working

The importance of multi-agency working and partnership at this time cannot be underestimated. It is especially the case in terms of the effective support of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, e.g. where there may be a role for social care or specialist services in supporting the learner.

Innovative ways for ensuring multi-agency working will be required in the event of another lockdown. This was demonstrated during the recent period where schools and settings were closed to most learners, e.g. with multi-agency meetings and support for learners moving online, and will need to be built upon should another lockdown be implemented.

As a result of COVID-19, health practitioners may have been redeployed to other areas of work within the health board and this could feature more acutely if there is a significant increase in transmission rates in the future. Wherever possible, contact should be maintained with local authorities, schools and settings, and learners and alternative support arrangements discussed and agreed as appropriate.

Statutory assessment/annual review process

Wherever possible local authority officers, schools and settings, and multi-agency partners continued the SEN statutory assessment and annual review process remotely during lockdown. This included the work of local authority special educational needs panels. Educational psychologists and others, where they were able to, undertook assessments and consultations online. It is recognised that this will not always be possible, as some assessments or consultations require face-to-face contact or use of specialist equipment. Local authority specialist officers worked remotely to provide ongoing advice, support and guidance to schools and settings, learners and their parents/carers, e.g. mobility officers worked alongside school staff to identify adjustments needed to meet the needs of learners.

Where legislation requires meetings to be held in relation to SEN, or other barriers to learning, they do not have to be held in person. Those responsible for arranging meetings should consider other ways of holding them, e.g. virtually. But in doing so, they will need to have regard to the importance of the parents/carers, and where appropriate the learner, being able to meaningfully participate. Their preferences for how meetings are held should be sought and taken into account.

Schools, settings, local authorities and their partners may wish to consider whether elements of these adaptations and innovations could be adopted generally as part of standard working practices. In any event, these sorts of adaptations will need to be implemented again should there be a further lockdown.

These principles apply beyond SEN. They should also be considered, for example, in the context of care and support plans and/or PEPs.

Working with parents/carers

Ongoing contact with families will be essential in the event of a further lockdown. It may be appropriate for individual members of staff to be allocated responsibility for ensuring that contact with parents/carers is maintained. Local authorities and/or schools and settings should keep in touch via telephone, e-mail, letter and/or by meeting online. Local authorities should also consider setting up designated helplines for parents/carers. In some situations, and where they are within the normal realm of practice in the circumstances, it may be appropriate for staff to deliver learning resources and equipment and to keep in touch by making socially distanced and safe visits to the home.

During the previous lockdown, some local authorities and/or parent partnership groups produced bespoke information packs or resources for parents/carers. These focused on a range of issues including supporting parents/carers in developing their child's understanding of the current situation, establishing routines, reducing anxiety and supporting the return to school transition. Some local authorities made these available directly to parents/carers and placed them online, including via social media. Schools and settings may have created virtual tours and shared these online to assist the transition process.

Many organisations, including local authorities, provided information and resources via their websites. **Learning Disability Wales, for example, have produced a range of easy-read materials** on COVID-19, including on well-being and mental health.

There is also a wealth of information and resources available on Hwb, which practitioners may find helpful in informing their engagement with parents/carers in the event of another lockdown.

Annex: Recruit, recover and raise standards – the accelerating learning programme

Context

During the crisis, it became clear that many learners suffered negative impacts in terms of their progress in learning, some heavily so. Evidence from a range of reliable sources, including those focusing on Wales, suggest that most, or all, learners have been affected, and that the most vulnerable have been affected the most.

Affected cohorts

The most affected cohorts currently appear to be:

- learners preparing for national examinations in the forthcoming academic year
- vulnerable and disadvantaged children
- Year 7
- Reception
- all other learners.

This summary is in line with the findings of many other countries and territories with similar characteristics to Wales, and will inform the priority groups we expect to be addressed by the work we do. We should note, however, that there will be individuals not in these groups who will need support.

The investment

Our response to this situation is to dedicate financial resources to the creation of new capacity in the system. The investment amounts to almost £29 million between September 2020 and August 2021, and will be enough to grow capacity in the system by around 600 teachers and 300 teaching assistants. Alongside this, we will use our current investment in professional learning, digital infrastructure, connectivity, devices and content to enrich the experiences schools and settings make available to learners.

make available to learners.

Curriculum for the accelerated learning programme

Curriculum reform remains our central priority for education in Wales. It is essential that all our work with the education system in the context of COVID-19 aligns with international best practice, which is also the basis of our curriculum reform proposals. Our focus for the coming year will be:

- literacy, numeracy and digital skills within a broad and balanced curriculum
- development of independent learning skills
- supporting and engagement through coaching.

This focus will be particularly relevant for the priority cohorts. We will work closely with Qualifications Wales to ensure our approach to curriculum and learning is consistent with and promotes the credibility and validity of the 2021 exam series.

National framework, local realisation

We will not impose a rigid formula for how to respond to the situation at local level, but provide a framework and guidance that schools and settings, local authorities and regions can make use of in developing the plans, approaches and solutions their local communities and young people need.

Annex: Contingency planning for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners

The contingency planning tool (see below) has been made available to support practitioners in ensuring the learning and support of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners is maintained in all eventualities and is disrupted as little as possible during this academic year. The three scenarios that follow are intended to aid the planning that practitioners will already be doing for their vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

While use of the contingency planning tool will disproportionately benefit vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, its wider use could also be beneficial; since what works for our vulnerable and disadvantaged groups will likely benefit all learners. For example, some learners who would not have been considered vulnerable or disadvantaged pre-COVID-19 may now require additional support because of their experience during the spring lockdown and/or the ongoing local and 'fire-break' lockdowns.

Local authorities, schools and settings should ensure as little disruption as possible to the learning of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the event of further national or local lockdowns. Use of the contingency planning tool can support that planning process.

It is important when undertaking this process that the learner is at the centre of any planning and the appropriate input of parents/carers is also considered. Local authorities, schools and settings should consider an 'active offer' for the involvement of parents/carers in this process and identify effective solutions to facilitate involvement and collaboration despite the challenges of social/physical distancing.

There are circumstances where learners would be unable to attend school for health reasons irrespective of COVID-19 and they should be supported to learn from home if they are able to do so.

The **Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term** provides the current Public Health Wales advice and support on issues including COVID-19-secure operations, transport, risk assessments, and health and safety.

The **Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term** also provides information on how to facilitate learning that is flexible enough to respond to changing conditions while providing for the well-being of all learners. The guidance provides advice on what learning priorities should remain constant including developing a blend of in-school and out-of-school learning, broad and balanced learning experiences, and partnership with parents/carers and learners.

Principle 2 in the **Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards: the accelerating learning Programme** also describes the focused support learners should receive during the current academic year.

Under no circumstances should learners or staff attend schools/settings if they feel unwell, have any of the identified COVID-19 **symptoms** or they have tested positive for COVID-19, or live in a household or are part of an extended household with someone who has symptoms of, or has tested positive for **COVID-19**.

Contingency planning tool

Learner's name:

The following should be considered when developing a plan for support for learners during this academic year.

- The support the learner received pre-COVID-19 should be reviewed to ensure it is still relevant and reflects their experience during the spring and summer term closure.
- Support to transition back to school will be crucial for all learners, as their level of anxiety may be greater due to the length of time many have been away.
- Schools and settings should maintain regular contact and work with other professionals – such as youth workers, mental health support services, support workers and young carers services as appropriate – to support the return to school, including continuing to maintain regular contact with the learner's social worker if they have one.
- Schools and settings should be alert to identify and support learners who exhibit signs of distress. Pastoral care and bereavement support should be planned for and put in place.

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