



CASE STUDY 1

Supporting Students with SEND During a National Emergency.

Introduction

This is one of six case studies that have been written as 'finger-tip' guides to inform and enrich your support for students with SEND. Each offers an accessible, evidence-informed summary of advice. This support is both immediately actionable and can be used to enrich further discussions. All the case studies are aimed at supporting busy professional colleagues so that they can further develop their inclusive educational practices. Other case studies in the series include:

- Case Study 2: Supporting Students with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs
- Case Study 3: Appreciating the Role of the SENCO
- Case Study 4: Improving Attendance, Behaviour and Inclusion
- Case Study 5: Supporting Vulnerable Groups of Students in Our Schools
- Case Study 6: Supporting the Identification and Assessment of Needs

Each case study follows the same format. They are divided into six short sections, the first being a summary as to why this particular study might be relevant to you. The next section shares selected professional knowledge that could help to inform your context. The third section offers a summary of key motivations for change. Section four offers some ways to address these. The final two sections build on this by highlighting how professional support can be further developed, including identifying selected further sources of support.

We very much hope that you will find these guides to be both informative and actionable. We wish you well in your endeavours and thank you for all that you do for your learners.

1. Why this Case Study might be relevant to you.

The recent pandemic has brought to the fore the many ways in which pupils with SEND and their school communities were particularly adversely affected. This included that fact that many staff felt ill equipped to deal with the level of trauma that families were experiencing. Additionally many students with SEND, despite Government guidance and the pressure placed upon some families from social care, did not attend school during the lock-down. This was often because of many different, individual factors, but commonly because of high medical needs. Often SEND students or family members needed to shield; creating increased anxiety. Within some communities, such as amongst our BAME families, concerns were heightened because of the increased risk to members of their family. Additionally

schools needed to adjust and amend routines, often at short notice, putting additional pressures on students (especially those with autism) and their families to cope. Some families were reluctant to send their child with SEND (neuro-diverse) into school when it was deemed not safe for their neuro-typical child. If you can relate to any, or even all of these factors, then read on, we think that this case-study may have value for you.

2. Accessing Professional Knowledge

To help to inform our responses, we accessed the work of Professor Barry Carpenter, the UK's first Professor in Mental Health in Education. At the start of the global pandemic Barry became very concerned about the impact of the crisis on the mental health of children. Together with his son, Matthew a school principal, he wrote the Recovery Curriculum Think Piece (www.recoverycurriculum.org). This offers a systematic, relationships-based approach, based on five levers to 'reigniting the flame of learning in each child'. We found this approach to be both accessible and informative and used these to underpin our discussions. Italicised below are some key actions to consider and discuss. Can you exemplify how your school might respond to each?

Lever 1: Relationships – we can't expect our students to return joyfully, and many of the relationships that were thriving, may need to be invested in and restored. ***We need to plan for this to happen, not assume that it will.*** Reach out to greet them, use the relationships we build to cushion the discomfort of returning.

Lever 2: Community – we must recognise that curriculum will have been based in the community for a long period of time. ***We need to listen to what has*** happened in this time, understand the needs of our community and engage them in the transitioning of learning back into school.

Lever 3: Transparent Curriculum – all of our students will feel like they have lost time in learning and we must show them how we are addressing these gaps, ***consulting and co-constructing with our students to heal this sense of loss.***

Lever 4: Metacognition – in different environments, students will have been learning in different ways. It is vital that ***we make the skills for learning in a school environment explicit*** to our students to reskill and rebuild their confidence as learners.

Lever 5: Space – to be, to rediscover self, and to find their voice on learning in this issue. It is only natural that we all work at an incredible pace to make sure this group of learners are not disadvantaged against their peers, ***providing opportunity and exploration alongside the intensity of our expectations.***

3. Key Motivations for Change

As professionals, we are always ambitious to do more for our young people. In order to do this we found that it can often be helpful to clarify both our motivations for change and to identify some of the dilemmas that we face. By making these explicit, we can then prioritise strategies that might help us to address such concerns. We hope that you may find the lists below helpful. There could be both some drivers and dilemmas noted here that you also recognise. As you consider these insights, you may find yourself thinking of others, which are not recorded here. Please share them in your own teams and see if any of the strategies shared in section four might be helpful.

Drivers

We identified that we were ambitious to:

- Support school readiness – ensuring that SEND registers have been updated appropriately, despite the fact that students had not always been present in school. This aids transition.
- Improve self-esteem and self-confidence – being focused to consider strategies that support students so that they can develop their academic capabilities
- Develop monitoring and evaluation cycles – we recognised that whilst these had been disrupted, pupils' progress, attainment and engagement and teachers' planning and practice still needed to be captured and evaluated so that we could continue to improve.
- Ensure that our engagement with parents and pupils addressed BOTH wellbeing and teaching and learning, we did not want to lose sight of the importance of the academic work whilst also acknowledging the need to prioritise supporting students' mental health.

Dilemmas

We identified that we were concerned by:

- Behaviour – students in school were rebelling against the necessarily rigid rules laid down to protect everyone; students at home were engaging in anti-social activities and so were not always exhibiting behaviours that demonstrated that they were open to learning.
- Attachment – many schools reported that students exhibited behaviours similar to those commonly associated with students who have attachment disorders.
- Loss of learning – schools gradually improved the way that they delivered home learning but the process took time. Often for neuro-diverse students, the approaches taken could not and did not replicate the high levels of support that they

usually receive in the classroom. It was challenging to bring the learning alive in the same way for example, by the use of artefacts, the expert support of TAs and the high levels of differentiation usually provided by teachers.

- On-line learning - even for those students with access to laptops, there were issues with internet connection; guidance and support for educational activities; unsuitable and unstable learning environments; no learning environment in the home etc.

4. Putting professional knowledge and understanding to work.

By drawing on Professor Carpenter's five levers in relation to the drivers and dilemmas listed above we then considered evidence informed ways in which we could develop and improve our professional practices. The list is indicative, rather than exhaustive. We have tried to highlight how each action created the time and space for us to be more effective.

- The SENCO became part of the leadership team. This made communication more efficient and so created the time and space for the improved allocation of resources to meet identified priorities.
- Methodically provision mapping was valued. This saved time in the long term as gaps were carefully recorded and provisions could be made to address these.
- Staff and student well-being was addressed through dialogues rather than additional blanket activities. This targeted approach increased engagement rather than burdening teachers and learners with additional activities.
- The SENCO modelled how reasonable adjustments could be incorporated into online remote learning. This was an efficient way to increase the effectiveness of most staff, improving students' experiences.
- Schools established or re-branded 'Safe zones' / 'Resource centres' / 'Hubs' where there was a synergy between SEMH needs and learning need. There was a strong desire to create a space that the students felt they owned.
- Regular contact with parents/carers and students was enabled through individualised phone calls. Whilst this involved a significant investment of staff time, it meant that staff understood each student's personal circumstances, influences etc. This enabled the use of targeted approaches that better met the needs of individuals, increasing engagement and reducing the time needed to address dis-engagement.
- It was particularly helpful when the SENCO made phone calls home in addition to Form Tutors etc.
- For students in school, explicit teaching of learning behaviours was taught alongside managing misbehaviour. Simplified routines and procedures, and consistency proved to be essential.
- A range of interventions and programmes were used – the Achiever Programme, Calm Brain (home subscriptions for free if school subscribed) TEAMS, Showbie, etc.

- TAs were re-positioned as Learning Mentors who made regular phone calls home to support with learning rather than the emphasis upon well-being.

It is also worth sharing that a disruption to established school procedures can help us to re-examine some practices and led us to make permanent changes. For example

- I. Split lunch-times ensured that behaviours were kept to a minimum.
- II. Designated Year group areas/ zones/ floors helped to improve behavior by reducing the need for students to move around the school
- III. Students to line up outside and 'meet and greet' to take place by staff (issues picked up before students come on site) helped to increase engagement
- IV. Electronic devices are being kept by students, Year 11s to be redistributed to new intake.
- V. Lessons continue to be uploaded onto Teams to enable students at home to study.

5. Contributing to collective professional knowledge

The strategies prioritised in section 4 will often be enacted by individual members of our school teams, supported by our whole school ethos. In our reviews we also found it particularly helpful to highlight strategies that will depend on our collective and collaborative endeavours. Here we share some approaches that could usefully inform local area dialogues.

- Schools were keen to reflect on their experiences of lockdown: What worked well? What needs to be improved? It is important that local leaders provide an opportunity for their schools to collectively share such reflections so that future contingency planning can be streamlined
- Schools wanted to consider how best to meaningfully include the voice of the child / young person and their parents and carers in future emergency planning. This is best co-ordinated at a local level and so opportunities need to be facilitated to enable this.
- Consider how school communities could be enabled to work with other agencies to co-ordinate support for families and young people within a locality.

6. Sources of further information:

A 'recovery curriculum' or 'recovery conversations'? By Mary Myatt. Accessed at : <https://schoolweek.co.uk/a-recovery-curriculum-or-recovery-conversations/>

A Recovery Curriculum Part 2: with Matthew Carpenter and Professor Barry Carpenter (28th May 2020) Accessed at: <https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/learningshared/recoverycurriculum2-matcarpenter/>

Reducing Stress in Schools. Accessed at:

<https://archive.org/details/ReducingStressInSchools2017/page/n299/mode/2up> (accessed 16052020)

Reducing classroom noise levels - Too Noisy pro app <https://toonoisyapp.com/>

A detailed description of the strategies may be downloaded from this link:

<https://archive.org/details/ReducingStressInSchools2017>

Calmbrian - <http://calmbrianapproach.com/>

Learning from the New Zealand Earthquake Crises Response: Accessed at:

<https://www.healthprecinct.org.nz/stories/how-research-is-helping-our-children-after-the-earthquakes/>

More information can be found at: <https://www.sendgateway.org.uk/resources/recovery-re-introduction-and-renewal-safe-and-successful-returns-school>