

Pupil views on their education in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: A joint report by Southend and Nottingham City Educational Psychology Services



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Executive summary

This report is designed to inform education policy and practice as we move forward into the next academic year. We would like to invite school staff, professionals in education and those in the government making decisions about education, to think about the short- and long-term impact of the coronavirus situation on our children and young people and to explore the available opportunities for change

Many pupils were worried about the “potential impact on learning” from being at home. They felt a need to “catch up”, have “extra lessons” and “get back to school quickly”, fearing that they might “fail exams”. This view has also been reflected in the media. We suggest this “catch up” narrative has permeated the lives and beliefs of young people in a way that potentially puts a high level of pressure upon them, giving a sense of missed opportunities and creates risks for their mental health and well-being.

We suggest a need to shift away from this dominant narrative of “catch up”, which does not reflect the scale of the impact of the pandemic and which sits within a narrow construct of a National Curriculum. Instead, we advocate a narrative centred on a recovery curriculum, a focus on emotional health and well-being and the enjoyment of, and motivation for, life-long learning. We need to explore and celebrate what has been achieved during the pandemic and focus on the skills used or developed, as this is what is going to help our young people to grow and develop in the future.

Many pupils are anxious about coming back to school and they may find it difficult. Social anxiety, low confidence, and fear of pressure and expectations may all contribute to emotionally based school avoidance. Schools will likely need to seek training from outside professionals in how to support pupils who feel unable to return to school. New ways of learning throughout the pandemic using various technologies will need to be considered and utilised.

Implications for policy-makers

- Policy makers and leaders should attend to the experiences of different Local Authorities (LAs), areas within each Local Authority (LA) and of different school communities during Covid-19. The variance of experience means responses need to be multi-faceted, flexible and co-produced.
- Policies should prioritise community re-engagement and rebuilding, in schools and beyond, and shift away from a dominant narrative of “catch up” for learners.
- LAs and central government policy makers should support schools in planning for a graduated return to academically rigorous work, enabling schools to have flexible responses to learners, to rebuild and consolidate their learning over time in an achievable and realistic way.
- The LA and schools should ensure that the additional funding allocated by central government to schools for a ‘recovery curriculum’ is underpinned by placing children and young people’s well-being and social and emotional health as the priority.
- The LA and central government should ensure all schools have finances and timely access to professionals who can support schools to prioritise children’s mental health in September, as well as direct services for children and young people
- The LA should ensure all school staff have access to services that can support staff well-being and training in trauma-informed approaches to create an ethos of care and co-regulation.
- The LA and central government should ensure that vulnerable groups who were already at risk of long-term disadvantage gain appropriate resources to enable them to enjoy success in their learning and not experience further disadvantage because of COVID-19. These groups include Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) pupils; care experienced pupils; pupils with Special Educational Needs; pupils at risk of or currently excluded from school; pupils with health needs.
- The LA and central government should support schools in identifying and working with children who show Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), and their families. Local policy on a graduated response to EBSA should be created and disseminated to schools.

Key Themes

How do we build a better education system for children and young people? We listen and act on what they tell us...

We have all had different experiences during this pandemic. Many factors have impacted on this, e.g. age, social economic status, culture etc. It is important that all experiences are heard, accepted and validated. This document shares the views of children and young people; it also shares the impact the pandemic has had on them and their views/hopes for the future.

Five key themes were highlighted and are outlined in the image below; each will be discussed in turn.



Rationale and Methodology

Why...?

The aim of the work carried out by Southend-on-Sea Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and Nottingham EPS was to explore two key areas of the experiences of children and young people as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic:

1. To understand how this situation has been for them
2. To guide the planning of a return to school which takes into consideration their thoughts and needs

We felt it was of the utmost importance to listen to the children and young people and make plans, develop resources and make changes based on their experiences, ideas and expectations.

The aim was also to explore the experiences and views of children and young people from different areas of the country to see if there were any shared experiences – which is why Southend-on-Sea and Nottingham EPSs worked together. Sefton EPS (2020) have also just released a paper outlining the views of 1260 pupils (using a similar questionnaire). We also had the pleasure of liaising with Phoenix Education, who also completed a survey involving 2063 pupils from across England, to compare and combine data from different areas. A survey carried out by the Children’s Commissioner in Wales, where 23,700 children and young people responded, has also been reviewed.

The geographical and socio-economic differences in these areas enables us to feel confident in suggesting these themes as shared experiences of children and young people in the United Kingdom (UK) as well as offering the strength and validity to themes we present here.

As the key authors of this paper, Nottingham City EPS and Southend EPS offer an overview of the key demographics of their respective areas for reference.

Nottingham City and Southend-on-Sea demographics and indices of deprivation:

Deprivation:

<https://www.nottinghaminsight.org.uk/themes/deprivation-and-poverty/indices-of-deprivation-2019/>

The most recent indices of deprivation were published on 26th September 2019. The Indices of Deprivation measure relative levels of deprivation in 32,844 small areas or neighbourhoods, called Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), in England. Each area is given a score and a rank for seven distinct domains of deprivation which are combined to calculate the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Nottingham City comprises of 182 LSOAs. Nottingham ranks **11th** most deprived out of the **317** districts in England using the Average Score measure.

- 56 of the 182 **(30.8%)** City Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) fall amongst the 10% most deprived in the country.
- 104 fall in the 20% **(57.1%)** most deprived. This compares to 61 and 110 LSOAs in the 2015 indices.
- The lowest ranking LSOA in the City is in **Bulwell** (E01013877), which ranks 130th nationally out of 32,844, but, unlike in 2015, no City LSOA ranks in the most deprived 100 LSOAs in the country.
- **8** LSOAs in the City rank in the 20% least deprived in the country

Southend-on-Sea ranks **129th** most deprived out of the **317** districts in England using the Average Score measure.

- 9 of the 107 **(8.4%)** Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) fall amongst the 10% most deprived in the country compared to 13 out of 107 (12.2%) in the 2015 IMD.
- 23 fall in the 20% **(21.5%)** most deprived. This compares to 26 (24.3%) in the 2015 indices.
- The lowest ranking LSOA in the Borough is in Kursaal Ward (E01015842), which ranks 136th nationally out of 32,844, but, unlike in 2015, no Borough LSOA ranks in the most deprived 100 LSOAs in the country. In 2015 the above LSOA was 88th in the country.
- 26 of the 107 LSOAs (24.3%) in the Borough rank in the 20% least deprived in the country

Child poverty:

<https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/kristina-mccormick/child-poverty-nottingham-city>

Number of children in low-income families aged under 16 (2019) & number of children in low-income families aged 0-19 (2019) for Nottingham:

Child poverty under 16= 16,382 (26%),

Under 19=19,423 (29.2%)

Percentage of Children (Aged Under 16) living in Relative low-income families, 2018/19, Southend = 16%

Percentage of Children (Aged 0 - 19) living in Relative low-income families, 2018/19, Southend = 17%

In January 2019 29,816 children attended schools within the early years, primary, secondary, post-16, special educational needs and alternative provision sectors in Southend.

17.9% of Nursery and Primary School pupils have Free School Meals (FSM)

11.3% of Secondary School pupils have FSM

How...?

Four questionnaires were developed to explore the differing circumstances that children and young people found themselves in as a result of the coronavirus restrictions. It was important to reflect these differing experiences and acknowledge the differences between attending school and being at home.

Many schools in the United Kingdom did not close and quite a few children and young people (particularly children of key workers and those deemed to be in a vulnerable group) attended school throughout the pandemic.

The four questionnaires were sent out via Nottingham City and Southend Schools; signposted by local organisations and shared on the service and LA websites. The questionnaires explored the experiences of:

- Primary aged students who have been at home during the pandemic
- Primary aged students who have been in school during the pandemic
- Secondary aged students who have been at home during the pandemic
- Secondary aged students who have been in school during the pandemic

The questionnaires were developed using Google documents. This format was used as there were limitations to being able to print off and post a high number of questionnaires and for families to be able to return these questionnaires. Google documents provide anonymity; however, there were also widely available resources to offer guidance and support for any wellbeing difficulties children, young people and families may have been experiencing.

The questionnaires were also developed to be accessible for children and young people with additional needs, with the inclusion of pictures and carefully worded questions. Southend-on-Sea EPS piloted all four questionnaires before sending them out.

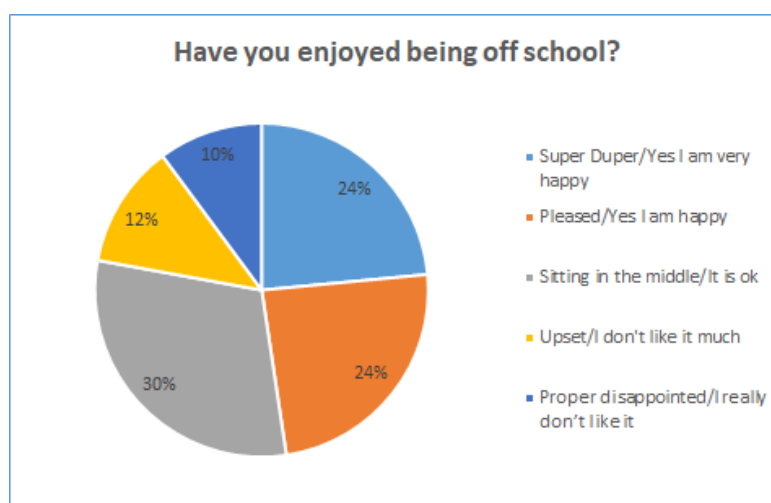
Southend-on-Sea EPS collected and analysed data in May/June 2020 and Nottingham EPS in June/July 2020.

Overview of Findings and Themes

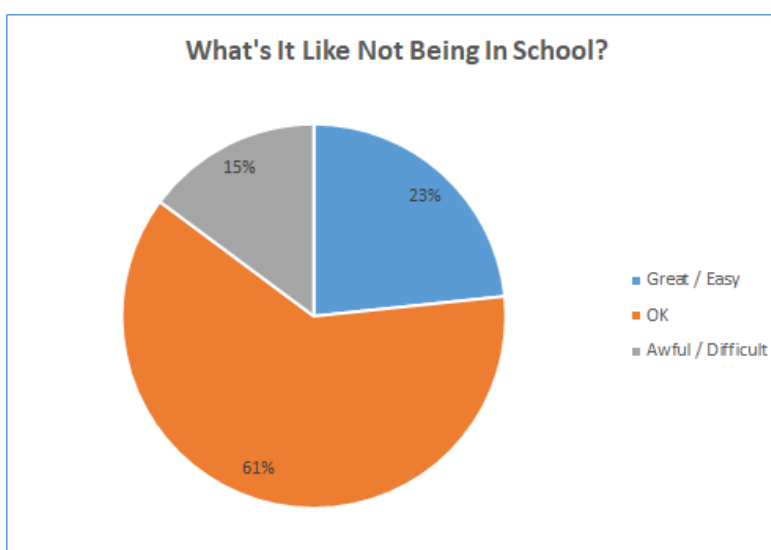
We were astounded by the number of responses from children and young people in the Nottingham and Southend areas (**1758** pupils across all year groups) and we were moved by the experiences and thoughts shared with us.

In this section we provide an overview of both the quantitative and qualitative data gained from analysing the pupils' views across both areas. The data and themes do reflect those presented by Sefton EPS (2020 – a similar questionnaire), Phoenix Education (2020) and the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020).

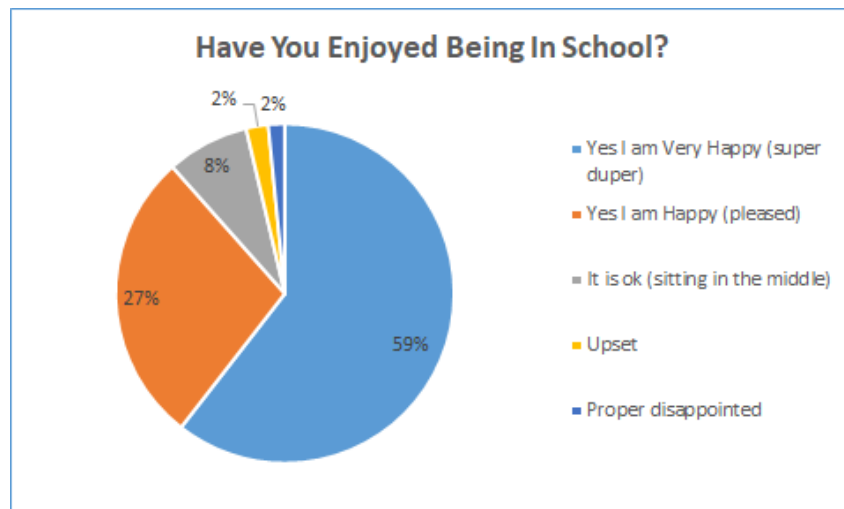
Experiences of Primary Pupils at home (786 pupils)



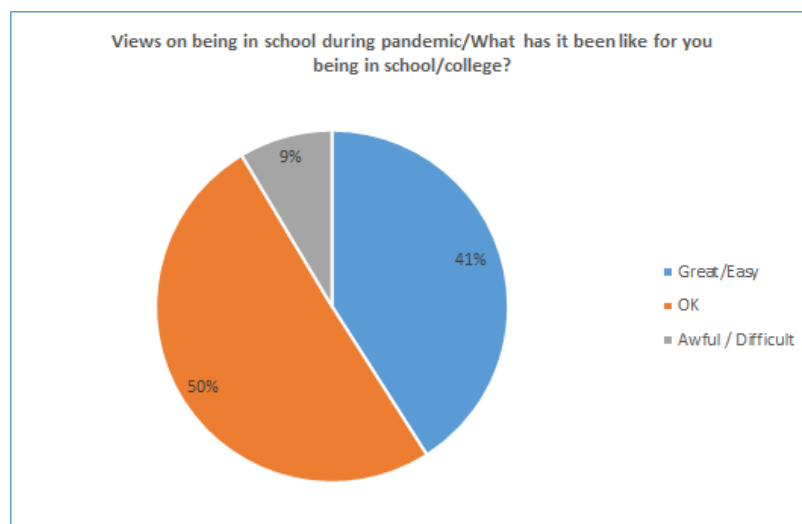
Experiences of Secondary Pupils / College Students at Home (677 pupils)



Experiences of Primary Pupils Attending School (193 pupils)



Experiences of Secondary Pupils Attending School / College Students (102 pupils)



While many of the students have enjoyed or felt their experiences at home and school have been OK, there is still a meaningful percentage of the pupils who completed these questionnaires who have found it difficult to manage.

There will be a wide range of individual differences between experiences and the reasons why these experiences have occurred: personal, environmental, economic and others. These experiences are brought further to life by exploring the themes which emerged from the views shared by the pupils.

Key Themes

There were 5 key themes which emerged from the views shared by the children and young people:

- **Basic needs:** “I have missed snack time”, “I have missed the food”, “I have missed eating”, “I have missed breakfast club” -many of our pupils have missed having a school meal. There was also a strong theme of cooking, baking and eating as activities for pupils at home, e.g. “cooking new meals [has helped me to cope]”.
- **Preparedness:** “I would like to know how it will work because I don’t want to look stupid or embarrassed if I do something wrong”. It was also incredibly important that things were safe and things were in place to keep the pupils and their families safe when returning to school “I don’t want to take the virus back to my family”, “I want to know it will be safe”.
- **Relationships and Connectedness:** “I miss my friends and social interactions” (90% of 1758 pupils said the thing they missed most about school was their friends).
- **Learning and Expectations:** “I am nervous as I don't want to get lots of work because we missed a lot of school” (22% of primary pupils and 17% of secondary pupils said it will be difficult for them to return to school; equal to **684** pupils)
- **Opportunities:** “I wish that my school could continue to do Zoom lessons because that would be more easier for me”

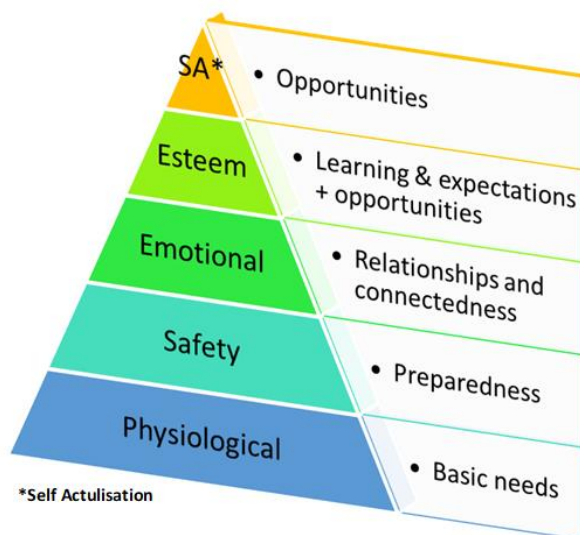
Psychological Underpinning of Themes and Implications

The findings from the data are underpinned by psychological theory and can be understood through the lens of the Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954; 1987); the Eco-Systemic Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979) and the Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018).

These three theories highlight the need to keep in mind individual, group and systemic elements when thinking about the impact COVID-19 has had on children and young people. These theories also speak to the way we need to work with these three elements to move forward with hope.

Pupil Views Mapped on to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy provides structure and an order of needs which have to be met for development and growth. The hierarchy splits needs into basic and higher level needs. Before the higher level needs (top of pyramid), such as the self and intellectual achievement can be addressed the basic needs (bottom of pyramid), such as safety and survival, must be met. As we extracted our data and considered the themes arising, it was clear they were aligned to the hierarchy. If we don't get this right, children and young people will not be ready to learn and engage in other higher order skills.



Bronfenbrenner's Eco-Systemic Model

Bronfenbrenner's Eco-Systemic model was developed to show how the inherent qualities of children and their environments interact to influence how they grow and develop. The model emphasises the importance of studying children in multiple environments, also known as ecological systems, in the attempt to understand their development. This viewpoint is particularly important when considering the pupils experiences of COVID-19 and how we can plan for the future using a layered approach.



The Power Threat Meaning Framework

The Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF) was developed by Lucy Johnstone and colleagues (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018) to be used as a way of helping people to create more hopeful narratives or stories about their lives and the difficulties they may have faced or are still facing. The PTMF provides an alternative view to 'within person', 'deficit' narratives, instead conceptualising difficulty and distress as being context-bound and influenced by cultural and societal phenomena.

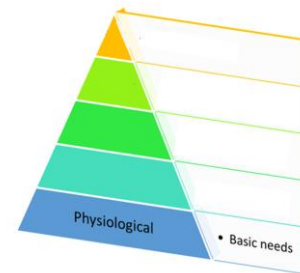


These three psychological theories offer a way to understand the thoughts pupils have shared about their experiences of COVID-19 in a rich and multi-layered way. This will be explored in more depth in the next section and paired with implications for schools and policy makers.

Themes, Discussion and Implications

Basic Needs

Definition: This theme emphasises the importance of having fundamental needs met in order to feel safe and secure. This focuses on the aspects of being looked after physically with a focus on food.



Discussion

Food was mentioned by many pupils across the survey. For some it was a coping strategy and an activity they have enjoyed engaging with whilst being at home. Many mentioned baking, cooking and eating with family as positives which have come out of this time. For those who were at home, lunch time was a key aspect missed from the school day; with many pupils in primary school sharing they missed their dinner ladies, breakfast clubs and the school food.

Although many pupils mentioned positive and fun aspects which they have engaged with around food, there was a key group of pupils who raised food in a different way. For these pupils food was discussed in terms of a necessity for living. Pupils explained the importance of having access to their free school meal vouchers or food parcels from school. Some pupils shared the impact of the lack of food on the family. It is important to recognise that although we have all been through the same pandemic our experiences will have been very different depending on life circumstances.

Food is widely recognised as a basic need for all humans and these surveys really highlighted how important this is for all and the impact this can have. Schools have provided a vital role in supporting vulnerable pupils to have consistent access to food and engaging in social food times. It is important that we recognise the role food plays within families and society and the impact this can have when it is not easily available. Having reliable and consistent access to food is a basic need and essential for all to be able to function and engage in society. This is no different for children and young people attending school.

Moving forward it is important that we appreciate and recognise that children will have had different experiences during this pandemic, and they are all valid. Food is an aspect which is clearly important for children and young people in many different ways. This needs to be considered and responded to where appropriate.

Key Quotes:

“Support with food from the government”

“Being able to eat and listen to music whilst I work”

“I love the dinners [at school]”

“[I have enjoyed] the nice dinners... yummy food”

“Lunchtime and everything else”

“I have missed snack time”

“I have missed the food”

“I have missed breakfast club”

“I’ve missed eating with friends”

Implications for Schools and Policy Makers

- ❖ There is a wide variety of experiences for our children and young people, especially around the importance of food. This needs to be acknowledged and appreciated by all. Validation of experiences will be important for all children and young people and their families.
- ❖ Food is a fundamental need for all. Schools need to continue to be supported to provide this for vulnerable families both when children and young people are in school and if they are unable to access the school environment.
- ❖ Opportunities to engage with food in a social and engaging way have been seen as a supportive strategy. Focus should be placed on this not only during the return to school but also long term. The curriculum and ethos of schools can reflect this through more opportunities to engage in cooking and eating together, including both staff and pupils.

Preparedness

Definition: This key message incorporated information about the importance of routine and safety for pupils, as well as their feelings of anxiety and the need to feel prepared for arrangements for when they return to school.



Discussion:

Many children and young people said they have missed the routine and structure of being in school. Those at home highlighted the importance of feeling safe at home and building a routine into their day. Pupils at school reflected their view that the routines in place were keeping them safe.

The issue of safety was a key concern across all age groups. Many pupils have a heightened awareness of the danger of COVID-19 and want reassurance that they and their families will be protected. They are clearly worried and anxious about safety measures when they return to school and want to know what the arrangements and hygiene routines will be. Secondary pupils particularly expressed a need to understand how government guidance applies to their school and situation.

Children and young people also expressed more general concerns about whether school would be the same or different to how it was before. Pupils expressed their need to have a clear overview of what measures will be in place within their school setting in advance of their return to school so that they can feel prepared and know what to expect.

Key Quotes:

"I would like to know how it will work because I don't want to look stupid or embarrassed if I do something wrong"

"What measures in school are going to keep me safe?"

"I would like reassurance that everything will be alright and my nanny and grandad won't have to worry"

"More hygiene products put in and more specific social distancing rules so people are safe"

"Making me feel I am protected from the virus"

"Knowing what has changed and what is happening and what is expected of me"

"Making sure I know what to do now it's all changed"

"Can you still go in the playground and do you still get sweets if you work hard"

"I don't want school to be scary and more rules than before I want to be happy at school"
"Meeting my new teacher and seeing my new classroom, also to know if any of my friends will be in my class"
"An update on what we are doing so I am more prepared"
"A thorough and well thought through plan of how things will work and what they will look like"
"Video clips to watch before returning to school, signs in school building"
"To know what school will be like before I have to go back"
"The school having enough PPE and hand wash"
"Knowing I'm not going to bring anything home and my family will die"
"A chat about how we will be able to play and learn with social distancing"
"Knowing who can help if I'm scared"

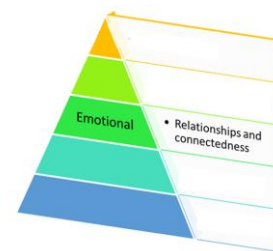
Implications for schools and policy makers:

- ❖ Pupils are holding many questions about their return to school. Schools will need to ensure that clear information is communicated to students and their families about safety arrangements and new ways of working in advance of their transition back to educational settings. Pupils need reassurance about what school life will look like, what may have changed and whether some elements will remain the same.
- ❖ Ensuring clear structure and expectations for everyone can enable pupils to know what to expect and facilitate feelings of preparedness. This is likely to have the effect of containing their anxieties and contribute to a sense of safety, a key element of a 'recovery curriculum'. It is essential to consider the need of children to have a sense of 'emotional' as well as 'physical' safety. This will be essential in facilitating their readiness for learning.
- ❖ It is advisable that any new COVID-19-related rules regarding hygiene practices should be kept short, simple and worded positively (i.e. 'Do' rather than 'Don't'). Older pupils may particularly benefit from knowing how school advice fits with government and wider advice issued.
- ❖ Students may benefit from having an overview of what the school environment will look like, e.g. images or videos to create a virtual tour of the arrangements/layout would be beneficial to ensure predictability and promote feelings of safety and calm.
- ❖ Pupils may benefit from having access to a comprehensive plan of what is going to happen across the school day (e.g. start and finish times; where pupils need to go/be dropped off or picked up; how the day will be structured; who will be there; what will they need).

- ❖ It will be helpful to think of all pupils as new starters, in need of clear and reassuring instructions and to re-teach familiar, predictable routine activities. It will be important to be explicit about physical safety and to whom pupils can speak if they are uncertain or need to talk. Having access to transitional objects may support some children to feel safe and to feel connected to someone who cares about them (e.g. a favourite object/toy from home).

Relationships and Connections

Definition: Relationships and staying connected with friends, family and teachers was a strong and powerful theme and spoke of the importance of relational connections and how important these are in the lives of children and young people.



Discussion

The pupils spoke about many different relationships that are important to them and have helped them to cope. There was also a sense of enjoyment of having time to spend with family in ways that have not been possible before (because of time spent at work and school). Pets also featured often in the pupils' responses as something that had brought comfort and company.

There was also a thread of sadness at being separated from friends and teaching staff. Many pupils were looking forward to seeing their friends again. There was also a thread of uncertainty weaved through the pupils' thoughts in terms of who their new teacher might be and whether they would be able to say goodbye to their current/previous teacher, class or school.

It will be vitally important to think about a reconnection and re-engagement phase after this period of physical distance. While it is important to celebrate how connections have been sustained and built, it is also important to acknowledge that not all pupils would have experienced this and there will be those that have felt isolated and alone.

There will need to be a strong emphasis on relational approaches to learning - pupils do not learn effectively if they do not feel a sense of belonging and safety in the relationships with others. The well-being of the school staff also needs to be supported as they will have also experienced many challenges, personal losses and changes during the pandemic. This was highlighted in another piece of research conducted by Southend EPS which explored the experiences of teaching staff; a webinar outlining the findings can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvON46lyzIM&t=5s>

Key Quotes:

"Playing games with my sister"

"Having fun with my family"

"Time to talk to my teacher, I really miss her"

"To know Year 10 form"

"I have liked having more time with mummy"

"To see my friends"

"Not having to interact with people I'd rather not (who I have to when at school)"

"Offloading and having an outlet that would usually be readily available when in school"

"Talking to friends when I need them most"

"Talking to my learning manager and that helps make things slightly more normal"

"I feel very left out I haven't spoken to my class teacher since lockdown and my school has only put lessons online to print off with no video teaching like at other schools"

"I miss my friends. A lot of them are at school but I am not and I want to be at school"

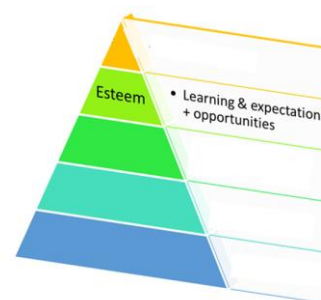
"Having a cuddle from mummy before going in to school"

Implications for Schools and Policy Makers

- ❖ The emphasis on relational approaches in school will require a move away from the dominant narrative of "catch-up" learning and a move to emotional re-engagement. This requires a focus on wellbeing rather than academic achievement. It also needs a focus on the wider school community - pupils, staff and parents.
- ❖ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there was a pilot of the Mental Health in Schools teams and leads. It will be vital to continue to evaluate this project and ensure more schools are funded to have this in-house provision for all pupils.
- ❖ This relational approach also requires a sense of belonging, which in turn threads into the theme around learning, expectations and opportunities. The changes which can be made to the curriculum can also include a wider diversity of learning, which shines a light on the life and history of our richly multicultural country. This should include moves to decolonise the curriculum, embrace a "No Outsiders" ethos and allow different and diverse stories to be told.

Learning and Expectations

Definition: This key message presents the information given to us by pupils regarding their learning in terms of expectations when they return to school, experiences of new ways of learning and enjoyment in feeling a reduced amount of pressure during the pandemic



Discussion:

Pupils indicated that they are worried about the amount of pressure that will be on them to 'catch-up' when they return. The narrative around a 'catch up' curriculum may be causing additional and unnecessary anxiety for pupils in the run up to September.

Pupils in school during the pandemic also talked about enjoying the new and different activities they have engaged with in school and at home, particularly outdoor learning. We believe there is an argument for considering a 'recovery curriculum' that incorporates the enrichment activities that have helped pupils to cope during the pandemic.

Some children talked about missing the sense of achievement they typically feel at school and the difficulty experienced with independent learning. This is linked to intrinsic motivation and feeling a sense of achievement. Schools should think about how they can use the psychological underpinnings of intrinsic motivation to support well-being in relation to learning when pupils return.

Some students have preferred to be at home because of the reduced pressure and demands. This begs the question: are we expecting too much from pupils?

It will also be important to consider the implications of the pandemic in relation to Emotionally Based School Avoidance.

Key Quotes:

"I am worried about catching up with my school work"

"I feel if I have GCSEs next year I will be very stressed. Maybe a reduced work load for GCSEs??"

"The GCSE's should be easier for year 11 next academic year because there is so much information that we have had to teach ourselves so it would be unfair to hold us to the same standard"

"It would be great to spend more time outside when we are at school"

"It's relaxing because you don't have teachers watching your every move and I think that helped me find a new type of learning"

"Being away from school I have enjoyed being in nature - climbing trees and visiting nature reserves"

"I have missed school trips and residential"

"I am nervous as I don't want to get lots of work because we missed a lot of school"

"Use some of the extracurricular activities we have been doing during values/form time"

"When I go back to school I hope that the teachers give us more support and that the teachers don't be angry at us if we haven't done our work during the coronavirus"

"More relaxed approach to learning"

"More art and creative lessons"

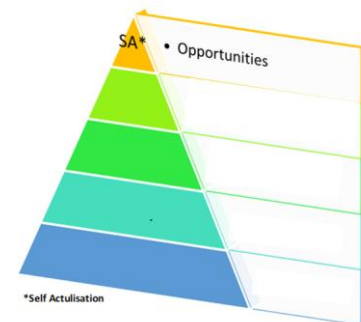
Implications for schools and policy makers:

- ❖ Many Secondary pupils were worried about the "potential impact to learning" of being at home. They felt a need to "catch up", have "extra lessons" and "get back to school quickly", fearing that they might fail exams. This view has also been reflected in the media. We suggest this 'catch up' narrative has permeated the lives and beliefs of young people in a way that potentially puts a high level of pressure upon them, giving a sense of missed opportunities and creates risks for their mental health and well-being.
- ❖ We suggest a need to shift away from this dominant narrative of 'catch up', which sits within a narrow construct of a National Curriculum. Instead, we suggest a focus on a narrative centred around enjoyment of and motivation for life-long learning (Sivers, Wendland, Baggley & Boyle, 2020). The National Curriculum states where children and young people 'should be' in terms of academic progress. This is not fixed and should not be seen in this way. We need to explore and celebrate what has been achieved during the pandemic and focus on the skills used or developed, as this is what is going to help our young people to grow and develop in the future.
- ❖ Many pupils are anxious about coming back to school and are likely to find it difficult. Social anxiety, low confidence, fear of pressure and expectations may all contribute to emotionally based school refusal. Schools will need to seek training from outside professionals in how to support pupils that are refusing to return to school. New ways of learning throughout the pandemic using various technologies may need to be considered and utilised.
- ❖ To support positive transition, schools should consider adapting the curriculum through a focus on well-being activities (e.g. circle time). Staff should spend time welcoming the children back and build in time for discussions about their thoughts and feelings.

- ❖ Schools will need to normalise the worry students may have about missed education. Staff will need to reinforce that students are not expected to ‘catch up’, that everyone is in the same situation and that teachers are there to support them with this. Adults within settings need to be mindful of their use of language and use their interactions to support and be a calming presence for pupils (e.g. minimising pressure and reassuring them around situations such as GCSEs and SATs). Gradual introduction of curriculum learning: (e.g. by initially reviewing previously-learned material) is advisable to ensure feelings of ‘efficacy’ for students, i.e. feeling confident that they are able to learn and do well).

Opportunities

Definition: This theme brings to life the positive opportunities to try out new things, meet new people and connect in different ways. It also presents the flip-side where opportunities feel missed, lost or unachievable.



Discussion

The two-sides of the opportunities theme was a powerful message across all the age ranges of pupils.

On the positive side there seemed to have been opportunities for many children and young people to enjoy different activities when learning (online classes, creative tasks and being active) and opportunities to learn at a different pace; not so pressurised or strict as at school. There were new hobbies to learn and old ones to re-experience; listening to music, reading, baking, dance and exercise were also enjoyed as extra-curricular activities. The use of technology was also an opportunity to learn and connect with others differently.

However, there was a flip side of missed opportunities and some pupils experienced disadvantage and/or increased disadvantage as a result of the restrictions; particularly those children who were at home. We know many children felt they had missed opportunities with their learning and there was a real strong sense of worry about opportunities which may be lost in the future with exam results and college, university or job opportunities.

There are the pupils which the questionnaire will not have reached because they do not have access to the technology or data to allow them to complete an online form. Groups of pupils and their families were disadvantaged by socio-economic factors before the coronavirus pandemic and will have been doubly deprived. The laptops, data and school meals proposed by the government are still only just getting to some of those who need it most.

It is also important to acknowledge those groups of pupils, such as those with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those known to be in other vulnerable groups in regards to education (pupils in the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community (BAME) and care experienced children and young people. There was already a substantial

gap in learning for these pupils and reduced opportunities. This is why change in education for all is vitally important and the focus which has been highlighted in the Learning and Expectation and Preparedness themes needs to be considered alongside a call for more dynamic, creative and equitable opportunities in education for all.

This theme of opportunities can be seen as mirroring the esteem and self-actualisation layers of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The power and potential of increasing and widening opportunities also resonates in every layer of Bronfenbrenner's Eco-Systemic Model. We could also see these experiences as being the strengths or resources that the children and young people have to manage the threat of COVID-19's impact.

Key Quotes:

"[I have enjoyed] learning new things" "[I have enjoyed] doing gardening and lots of outdoor adventures"

[I enjoyed] "Making and painting" "Making new friends" "New activities" "Doing just dance in PE... swimming, playing outside, gardening"

"I am able to have more fun at home and learning new skills at home"

"I understand that it's a necessary precaution to protect people, but i'm very concerned about the impact that missing 3+ months of sixth form will have on my university applications and ability to get the grades that I will need to get in."

"I'm finding it difficult to work at home and concentrate as I am used to a classroom environment which I certainly work best in"

Implications for Schools and Policy Makers

- ❖ Development of a new equitable National Curriculum, which is creative, dynamic and advantages all pupils. This would provide opportunities for a range of learning and skill development, which would not be solely focused on academic progress and ability. This should also be reflected in the types of inspection and/or criteria that educational outcomes are graded by, with as much esteem and value attached to vocational skills as academic.
- ❖ Creation of more flexible and dynamic learning opportunities which would offer those pupils who may find it difficult to attend school a varied learning experience. This could include children and young people who have physical and mental health needs; those who may need a more sensitive, nurturing approach (for example children and young people who have just been placed into care or bereaved or experienced a traumatic life event). This would include more extensive use of Google classrooms, Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc. to offer online learning. This would also include providing access to technology for all.

- ❖ Continue to consult with and act upon the views and experiences of children and young people in a constant dialogue where they feel genuine participation and involvement in educational decisions and planning. Opportunities for children and young people to shape the future of education. This will shift the power dynamic from a top down approach to a bottom up approach.
- ❖ If pupils' feel they have opportunities, agency and choice then school life may feel more meaningful for them, there will be more pro-school roles to choose from (Bonell, Blakemore, Fletcher & Patton, 2019) and there would be increased chances of success, at school and into the future. The positive social and cultural capital created will be higher for the individual; group and wider systems and communities.

Concluding Statements

We would like to thank the children and young people of Nottingham and Southend for sharing their thoughts and experiences. We have heard your views and are committed to making a difference with you and for you.

The pupils' views showed us the importance of looking at every layer of a child and young person's life and experiences; both their lived experience and the impact and power of the wider systems around them.

To enable pupils to have a full capacity to learn we need to ensure all layers of the Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954, 1987) are addressed and met. We also need to keep in mind that the impact of COVID-19 ripples across every layer of life as can be illustrated by the Eco-systemic model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The themes emerged from the collective experience of the central element (the individual - the pupil) and ripple back and forth between the layers.

If we look to the Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone and Boyle 2018) there is an opportunity to operate power to make a positive difference, embrace change and create new opportunities and narratives about education. By working together and listening to the views of pupils we can create an equitable, robust and dynamic education system, where threat (e.g. the threat of falling behind; of not managing to 'catch-up'; of being less worthy on account of lower grades etc.) is reduced or ideally obliterated.

In all of these themes and implications there is a space for Educational Psychology. Educational Psychologists have shown we can be innovative in our working during times of change and difference. We have shown that we can join together, connect, collaborate and create change for pupils, families and school communities. We have shown very clearly that we care and we are committed to continuing our work with and for children and young people.

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