



INTO THE UNKNOWN:

Preparing for a very different September

Hilary Fine, director of assessment development at GL Assessment, looks at four ways governors can support schools as they prepare for the new normal this September

As schools prepare for all pupils to return, everyone involved in education is reflecting on the past few months and looking ahead to what the new normal will be like. Teaching and learning outcomes will be a priority post-lockdown, as will pupil wellbeing and helping children to adjust back to school life. Governors will play an important role in supporting decision-making around curriculum planning and

intervention, and supporting holistic recovery.

To do this, governors will need to understand where pupils' learning and wellbeing are on their return – and how this may differ from other years. For example, there may be additional vulnerable pupil groups not previously recognised by the school.

To help, here are four key areas you might like to consider as a governing body. GM



MORE SUPPORT:

- Understand readiness and ability to learn: www.gl-assessment.co.uk/pass
- Identify knowledge gaps in English, maths and science: www.gl-assessment.co.uk/PTSeries
- Assess reading skills: www.gl-assessment.co.uk/NGRT
- Support transition: www.gl-assessment.co.uk/cat4/

1 Understanding readiness and the ability to learn

Being thrown into the remote learning scenario has been disruptive, not only to learning but to the routine of attending school and being part of day-to-day school life.

While schools have adopted various means of trying to keep pupils connected to school, some may have become disengaged and lost their confidence. Adding to this, some children have experienced a period of heightened anxiety and even bereavement. Others, meanwhile, may have adapted well to their increased independence at home and become used to the different way of working.

How these experiences play out once pupils connect with the reality of being back in school will be equally complex. Helping teachers better understand which pupils need greater support in adapting back to school life will be key to how they re-engage with their learning.

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How will we identify the pupils who are concerned about being back at school and who are not yet ready to learn?
- How will we understand if a pupil's confidence in their learning has been impacted?
- How will we measure the impact of this extended absence from school and implement any new support initiatives?

2 Identifying gaps in learning

When pupils return to school, they are highly unlikely to be where they normally would be in terms of their learning. Most will have gaps in their knowledge of any work that has been set from March until the end of the academic year. Some may have knowledge gaps from the first part of the academic year, too, having lost the chance to consolidate it. While online tools such as quizzes have provided a useful medium to practise skills and consolidate knowledge, pupils will have engaged with these tools to varying degrees.

We won't know for a while just how serious the impact of interrupted schooling turns out to be, particularly on those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Early indications are that sustained support for these children will be needed, not least as the Education Endowment Foundation says school closures are likely to reverse the progress made to close the gap since 2011.

The impact of lockdown will also differ across subject areas and year groups. While many pupils will have gaps, there will undoubtedly be results that surprise us too. What about those children from relatively affluent families who don't have devices for every child, or those who haven't had much parental input because their parents have been working? These children's learning may also have been disadvantaged by the lockdown, but schools won't be able to detect it solely by looking at pupil premium eligibility.

In most cases, and with the right support, pupils will quickly recover these learning skills. If schools are to help them as

effectively as possible, they will need to realise the different starting points children will have, and assessment information will be vital here. It is important to have a low-stakes approach to help pupils feel secure in what they already know and confident about what they need to learn.

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How are we going to find out if pupils have curriculum gaps?
- How will we know what knowledge has been retained?
- How will we support children in the classroom who have gaps?

3 Focusing on reading

During lockdown, some pupils will have kept up with their reading while others, with fewer books at home or without access to libraries and school reading programmes, may have stalled. The Education Endowment Foundation projects that school closures will widen the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers by 36%.

Developing literacy in primary school is key, and reading ability is fundamental to a pupil's ability to access the curriculum in secondary school. Having a reliable measure of reading ability will be critical in planning catch-up when pupils return. Also, the independent study required by remote learning may have further disadvantaged weaker readers without support at home.



QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How can we assess pupils' reading skills when they return?
- How will we find out if there is a reading gap across different cohorts – in particular, disadvantaged children?
- How have class teachers been able to monitor reading during lockdown?

4 Supporting transition at key phases

Managing the transition for pupils, including those going into Year 7, will be more complex this year given the absence of national data.

The key to successful transition is to establish an effective baseline – this allows schools to understand where children sit when they return and provides a starting point from which to measure progress. Without this baseline data, schools will need to consider what information they have for each pupil on transition, and the data they will need to support them in planning the curriculum for each phase.



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QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- What baseline data will we have on pupils at the start of the year?
- How will we support transition this year with the absence of national data?
- What information is most important to have about pupils to support them in successful transition?

