RESILIENT EDUCATION

Building School Resilience to Disruption

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Politika's mission is to engage young people with politics and to provide a platform for the creation of tangible output, such as opinion articles, policy papers, events, and other forms of political content. Since our merger with the Think Tank Radix in February 2020, we have now had the ability more than ever before to support our team to engage with policy creation; which is such a powerful tool in democracy to provide access to everyone to have more of a say than a vote, to see the positive impacts policy can make on people's lives and futures is the fundamental reason that should be motivating people in politics.

This is our first policy paper we have provided a platform for. We are monumentally proud of the team that researched and wrote this paper. The team that spent many hours brainstorming ideas, researching and writing this paper with the iron-cast belief that they can make a positive difference.

Governance is a stakeholder balancing act, which requires all stakeholders to express their views and for them to be taken into account. As those who wrote the paper are in the education system, it is so important for students themselves to express their opinions on how to improve the education service. Being on the receiving end, students have a unique insight into the education system, it is about offering constructive ideas in order to help the education system be more inclusive, be more resilient in a crisis and ensure that no students are left behind in this current crisis or any future crisis.

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EIGHT STEPS TO MAKE SCHOOLS MORE RESILIENT

- *Create comprehensive and effective contingency plans for continuing teaching during times of disruption, on a national and local level*

- *Provide annual teacher training on creating meaningful remote learning environments*

- *Integrate technology into teaching, including the usage of devices by children in the classroom*

- *Provide devices and broadband for the most disadvantaged of students*

- *Make more funding available for schools, particularly in the most deprived areas, to ensure that disadvantaged children can make the best start in life*

- *Reintroduce Sure Start centres to support disadvantaged families*

- *Create an online platform for educational resources to enhance learning in times of normalcy and provide an additional layer of resilience*

- *Introduce flexible learning into the curriculum to ensure intrinsic motivation and build resilience against disruption*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The enforced shutdown of schools due to COVID-19 has exposed many issues in the educational sector's resilience to disruption.

Teachers have experienced difficulties in adapting to a remote learning environment, and their productivity, through little fault of their own, has fallen. A lack of contingency planning for serious disruption left schools vulnerable even to disruption from extreme weather events in the local area. An enforced months-long shutdown has, therefore, had serious consequences for schools.

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LOW RESILIENCE LEAVES SCHOOLS VULNERABLE EVEN TO WEATHER EVENTS

Disadvantaged children have suffered most from the closure of schools. Often with insufficient access to devices and connectivity at home, and with concerns around safeguarding inhibiting one-to-one online communication between teachers and students, the new online nature of work has not proved conducive to learning for those in poverty. Already a vulnerable group, with mental health issues more prevalent in disadvantaged children[1], the setbacks to their learning and progress will have caused even more cognitive damage. It is right that schools are returning safely for these reasons, but support for disadvantaged children must be strengthened to improve the resilience of schools to future disruption, which can come on a local or national level.

More commonly, though, disruption in the lives of individual students will lead to setbacks to learning, and so this group must receive particular targeted support.

DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN HAVE SUFFERED MOST FROM SCHOOL CLOSURES

We also propose an open-resource platform as a backup plan to build a further layer of resilience to disruption within schools. It is inevitable that disruption will lead to shortfalls in the amount of contact time between teachers and students. Open, shared resources covering all aspects of the curriculum for all age groups would ensure that the damage caused by these shortfalls can be minimised. Such a platform would also be useful in minimising the effects of disruption in the lives of individual students.

Finally, we propose a more fundamental reform to the education sector: reform of the curriculum.

The content-dense, prescriptive curriculum, particularly for GCSE and A-Level students, is not conducive to intrinsic motivation, which is the willingness to learn because of genuine enjoyment. Instead, students are extrinsically motivated by the need to learn for exams, a less powerful tool. Reforming the curriculum to include aspects of project-based, independent work in all subjects would ensure that students want to continue learning even in times of disruption, and place significantly less stress on students studying for GCSEs and A-Levels.

LEARNING SHUTDOWN LESSONS CAN LESSEN CRISIS IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

Implementing serious long-term reforms to improve school resilience would be a positive outcome of the coronavirus crisis, which has disrupted the development of students and claimed many thousands of lives. If we learn the lessons of the shutdown, then we can lessen the impact of crises on education and young people in the future.
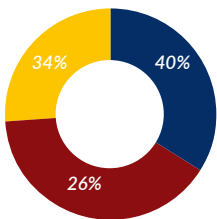
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1. Reiss, F. (2013). Socioeconomic inequalities and mental health problems in children and adolescents: A systematic review. Social Science & Medicine, [online] 90, pp.24–31. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953613002608

While the children of key workers have remained in school during this crisis[2], their friends have been left with the equally difficult task of learning from home, through online lessons and emailed tasks. The current crisis has proven the current system of teacher training and contingency planning to be inadequate in a number of ways.

1. TEACHER TRAINING AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

TEACHER TRAINING AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING ARE INADEQUATE

Teachers have felt overwhelmed with the pressures of not only catering for the pupils that are in school, but also those in the homes, sitting around laptops and computers, waiting to receive their lessons. This means that only four in ten pupils have had regular contact with teachers, as found by multiple studies reported in the Guardian.[3] Furthermore, a third of pupils were not engaged with their lessons, and only 42% "bothered to return work". Around one in five pupils had done between none and only one hour of work a day since the beginning of lockdown.

The importance of engaging lessons and the ability of teachers to maintain classes while online should not be underestimated. Yet our research found only one course that provided "online-teaching" specific content for those teaching English[4], which was unaccredited and whose certificate was only accessible behind a paywall.

Clearly, a need for training which was not previously understood has been identified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Public policy needs to address this need in order to improve the resilience of schools. Staff trained for circumstances such as these are necessary for resilient schools.

Moreover, planning for high-level scenarios has been lacking across the country. The rules made by the government left parents in the dark over whether their children would be accepted in school or be sent home. The disorganisation at the start of lockdown meant schools determining the eligibility of parents' claims they were "key" workers[5] at the school gates, a wholly unnecessary problem.

How much contact time are students having with their teachers?

- Regular contact with teachers — 40%
- Some contact with teachers — 26%
- No contact with teachers — 34%

2. GOV.UK. (2020). Guidance for schools, childcare providers, colleges and local authorities in England on maintaining educational provision. [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision

3. The Guardian. (2020). Four in 10 pupils have had little contact with teachers during lockdown. [online] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/15/2m-children-in-uk-have-done-almost-no-school-work-in-lockdown

4. FutureLearn (2019). Teaching English Online. [online] FutureLearn. Available at: https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/online-tutoring

5. Day, J. (2020). School closures: "Overwhelmed" teachers crack down on parents lying about 'key work.' [online] Express.co.uk. Available at: https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1258845/uk-school-closures-coronavirus-nhs-latest-school-monday-boris-johnson-virus-outbreak

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DISORGANISATION AND POOR RULES CAUSED CONFUSION

Our research found that where planning for outbreaks was present, it was often limited in geographical scope and the types of infectious diseases. This was evidenced in both Public Health England[6] advice as well as individual school policies.[7] Use of PPE and good hygiene were mentioned, but they were limited to small, localised outbreaks, rather than national or international pandemics.

The British Council's Graham Stanley has recommended that teachers need training on: controlling classes remotely, effective use of video conferencing technology, and remote presentation of lessons.[8] The National Education Union has also spoken of the need for teachers to understand how to create meaningful learning environments online, not only to support students generally, but help those from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular.[9]

CONTINUOUS TEACHER TRAINING IN DIGITAL EDUCATION IS NOW A NECESSITY

Courses must be specific to teachers' subjects and age groups. Flexibility and adaptability are necessary in any course delivered to staff in the use of technology in the classroom because of variables such as broadband coverage in the area, socio-economic status of the catchment area, and the needs of different children. The courses on teaching online and including technology more broadly in the classroom should be specialised to the needs of the pupils.

However, the continually developing and fluid nature of technological advancement means that teachers will need "refresher" courses on these developments. Because of the pace of change[10] in technology, however it is also likely that such a course needs to take place every two years or even annually.

As seen in the research, the policies in place that inform schools of appropriate actions to take during a crisis are limited in scope. Therefore, headteachers and government (both local and national) need to work together to create contingency plans for national rather solely localised outbreaks of infectious diseases. The types of infectious diseases included in the contingency planning should also be increased to include a greater variety of viruses and bacteria, such as the different flu strains, so that school leadership is well-versed in how to effectively manage their schools in a variety of scenarios.

6. GOV.UK. (2017). Guidance on Infection Control in Schools and other Childcare Settings. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658507/Guidance_on_infection_control_in_schools.pdf

7. SANDYMOOR SCHOOL CRISIS MANAGEMENT POLICY Crisis Management Policy. (2016). [online] Available at: http://www.sandymoorschool.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/10-Crisis-Management-Plan-November-2016.pdf

8. INNOVATIONS SERIES Innovations in education Remote teaching. (2018). [online] Available at: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Innovations%20in%20Education%20-%20Remote%20Teaching-V8_1-164_WEB.pdf

9. NEU. (2020). Remote Learning. [online] Available at: https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/remote-learning

10. https://www.facebook.com/washpostvisuals (2017). What 'tech world' did you grow up in? [online] Washington Post. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/entertainment/tech-generations/

Many teachers have been unable to create meaningful learning environments during to the COVID-19 pandemic.

700,000 pupils, around 9% of all pupils in the UK, had received no schoolwork at all from their teachers, as of May 17th, 2020. Ten percent of all secondary schools had been set no work from the start of the summer term. A further 8.2% had been set just one learning activity per day, the study found.[11]
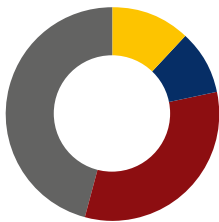
How much work are secondary schools setting?

- *No work*
- *1 activity per day*
- *2-3 activities per day*
- *4-5 activities per day*

Many reasons were cited by schools for the lack of provision. Some schools, particularly those in deprived areas, had too many pupils who did not have a device and connectivity at home, meaning that setting work would be futile for most. Over half of secondary school teachers said that the provision of technology to pupils would be a necessary step, according to a Sutton Trust study.[12] A 2020 study[13] suggested that a million pupils could be at risk of falling behind due to slow broadband or a lack of devices.

2. OPEN RESOURCES

ONE MILLION PUPILS CAN FALL BEHIND DUE TO LACK OF TECHNOLOGY

However, other reasons were given for the lack of provision. Some teachers reported feeling uncomfortable with giving virtual lessons, and some felt unable to adequately use the technology and applications suggested by their schools.

A lack of work set has affected pupils from 50% of primary schools and 27% of secondary schools, and has done so for nearly three months of the education.[14] Such a break will have an effect on their cognitive development and their progress towards examinations, particularly for those in Years 10 and 12.

11. Internewscast. (2020). Covid's classroom divide: Survey reveals 700,000 state pupils get NO home lessons at all. [online] Available at: https://internewscast.com/covids-classroom-divide-survey-reveals-700000-state-pupils-get-no-home-lessons-at-all/

12. Sutton Trust. (2020). COVID-19 Impacts: School Shutdown. [online] Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/

13. Herts for Learning. (2020). Bridging the digital divide - how to help disadvantaged students stay connected. [online] Available at: https://www.hertsforlearning.co.uk/blog/bridging-digital-divide-how-help-disadvantaged-students-stay-connected

14. Internewscast. (2020). Covid's classroom divide: Survey reveals 700,000 state pupils get NO home lessons at all. [online] Available at: https://internewscast.com/covids-classroom-divide-survey-reveals-700000-state-pupils-get-no-home-lessons-at-all/

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TEACHERS ARE NOT PREPARED FOR ONLINE TEACHING

Some gaps in provision have been made up for, however, by the expanded BBC Bitesize service and the Oak National Academy's resource platform. The usage of BBC Bitesize more than tripled when the expanded service was launched, suggesting that it was a helpful resource for children and parents across the nation.[15]

Both of these services attempted to cover as much content as possible for different exam boards, while focusing on common skills for various subjects that are required for all exam specifications. However, it is unsurprising that neither comprehensively covers the whole curriculum, having only expanded their operations with such an ambition in response to the pandemic earlier this year.

While there are measures which can be taken to prepare schools and teachers to deal with future disruption and improve resilience within schools, it would be sensible to create a comprehensive national platform for learning resources, which can be used by both teachers and students. This platform would be owned by the DfE, and all verified teachers could submit resources, which would then go through approval by the DfE and the exam boards, to ensure that the content and skills are being taught correctly.

A NATIONAL ONLINE, OPEN SOURCE LEARNING PLATFORM IS REQUIRED

In this way, education would become more open-source, and the curriculum could be comprehensively covered through recorded lessons and other resources. Payments for the submission of resources which are approved would encourage teachers to partake in building this platform.

Such a platform would enhance learning in times of normalcy, but also provide a layer of resilience against disruption, on an individual, local, and national level.

It is important to recognise that while national school shutdowns are rare, disruption on a local level and for individual pupils is much more common. It would allow those with inhibitive physical and mental illnesses to learn from home while they recover, but also ensure that schools have an effective back-up plan for larger disruption to teaching, such as extreme weather events, which are becoming more common due to the effects of climate change, nd their impacts worsened due to urbanisation.[16]

This would not directly help disadvantaged students, though, if the issues they face with accessing broadband and devices persist. Our proposals to solve the systemic issues they face and which have been exposed by the pandemic must also be implemented in order to make an open resource platform meaningful for this critical group of students.

15. d'Ancona, M. (2020). How the BBC bounced back during the coronavirus crisis. [online] The New European. Available at: https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/matthew-dancona-why-the-bbc-is-back-1-6642776

16. nerc.ukri.org. (2017). NERC - Is climate change causing more UK floods? [online] Available at: https://nerc.ukri.org/planetearth/stories/1849/

Students were expected to work from home, by accessing resources online and with parents assisting teaching. This expectation proved problematic for the most disadvantaged students, who are far less likely to have access to broadband and devices.

A 2018 study[17] found that 36% of parents stated that their child has experienced internet problems when attempting to complete their homework. Even if these students do have internet access, they may not have a device from which they can work, or they may have to share this device with other family members.

LACK OF ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY HITS DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN WORST

A Sutton Trust study (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020)[18] found that, in the most deprived schools, 15% of teachers report that more than a third of their students learning from home would not have adequate access to an electronic device for learning, compared to only 2% in the most affluent state schools. The Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, found that 90% of disadvantaged children were going online for less than two hours a day during the shutdown.[19]

3. SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

These data show that the issues which disadvantaged children are facing when it comes to access to technology and internet connection are having a real impact.
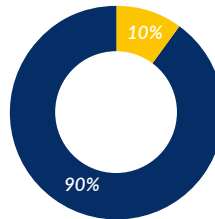
How long are disadvantaged students spending online per day?

10%
90%

- More than 2 hours
- Less than 2 hours

A further issue is parents being tasked with teaching their children whilst schools were closed. Some parents did not feel qualified to do this. Some, having other commitments such as work or other children, had no time to teach their children with.

17. The Independent. (2018). More than 1m children's education at risk due to poor broadband access, finds study. [online] Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/slow-broadband-internet-risk-education-children-online-homework-a8274671.html

18. Sutton Trust. (2020). COVID-19 Impacts: School Shutdown. [online] Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/

19. Weale, S. (2020). Organise catch-up summer schools to help disadvantaged pupils, UK told. The Guardian. [online] 3 Jun. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/03/organise-catch-up-summer-schools-to-help-disadvantaged-pupils-uk-told

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Disadvantaged children tend to have parents who were not educated at a degree level, so likely would feel less comfortable to be teaching their children. Cullinane and Montacute's study also found that fewer than 50% of parents without higher education qualifications felt confident to direct their child's learning.[20]

PARENTS OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN ARE LESS ABLE TO PROVIDE HOME SCHOOLING

It would be useful for schools to provide devices which are suitable for use at home. These could be given out to students, with the option of a staggered payment plan for all parents, and with the most disadvantaged students being provided devices for free. This relatively small investment in disadvantaged children could provide large benefits and prove good value for money.

Cullinane and Montacute found that over half of secondary teachers believed that the provision of tech devices would be the most effective way to prevent students from falling behind during school shutdown periods.[21]

Another useful solution would be the provision of broadband and data packages for the most disadvantaged students who do not have existing access. These solutions would allow all students to be able to access resources and schoolwork remotely, reducing the likelihood of pupils falling behind in case of disruption.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING IS NECESSARY FOR SCHOOLS IN DISADVANTAGED AREAS

More broadly, though, more funding is necessary for schools in deprived areas, in order to bridge the existing disadvantage gap and level up, ensuring that all schools can operate at a similar standard. The reintroduction of Sure Start centres would be extremely beneficial to help those in the most deprived areas and ensure every child has access to equal opportunities and a healthy start in life.

20. Sutton Trust. (2020). COVID-19 Impacts: School Shutdown. [online] Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/

21. ibit

Our proposals thus far have focused on the most necessary and viable of policies.

Better training for teachers, contingency planning, support for disadvantaged students, and a resource-sharing platform are all straightforward reforms which would represent excellent value for money in the long-term for the taxpayer. But those problems we have highlighted, relating to a lack of work completed and work set, reveal more fundamental issues with the curriculum.

Sherrington and Caviglioli (2017) summarise the four dimensions of the curriculum: the intended, enacted, assessed, and learned curricula.[22] The coronavirus-related shutdown of schools has created a discord between the intended and enacted curriculum, with teachers unable to give the type of lessons which are necessary in conveying large amounts of required content.

Teachers have also been unable to rely on independent learning of the content, as it does not create the intrinsic motivation in students on which independent learning is predicated.[23] Instead, the current curriculum is more conducive to extrinsic motivation; that is, learning for the purpose of passing exams rather than for the enjoyment of learning.

A MORE FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM IS NEEDED TO MOTIVATE CHILDREN TO LEARN

A curriculum less heavy on content, with a lesser degree of prescription in terms of required subjects and content, would enable students to pursue their genuine interests. A curriculum reformed with these considerations at the forefront would intrinsically motivate students. This would

4. CURRICULUM REFORM

exert positive upwards pressure on the willingness to learn of students during times of individual, local, or national disruption to their education – as well as in normal times.

Lee et al. (2017)[24] argue convincingly that many school-based approaches to curriculum reform have a detrimental impact, with teachers simply "reinventing the wheel". Any curriculum reform should, therefore, retain a significant aspect of nationally directed required content and subjects, but introduce elements of individual work into every subject to enable the pursuit of students' genuine interests.

Failure to retain a core element of the national curriculum would be at odds with a national online learning platform. As such, a core national curriculum could be supported by this platform, and then flexible local learning could be supported by resources provided across multi-academy trusts and local authorities.

Creating an engaging curriculum is a much subtler and nuanced task than our other policy proposals, but it would help to improve significantly the resilience of schools to crises and disruption.

22. Sherrington, T. and Caviglioli, O. (2017). Learning rainforest - great teaching in real classrooms. John Catt Educational Ltd.

23. WeAreTeachers. (2018). Understanding Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation in the Classroom. [online] Available at: https://www.weareteachers.com/understanding-intrinsic-vs-extrinsic-motivation-in-the-classroom/

24. Lee, T., Cheng, Y.C. and Ko, J. (2017). Curriculum reform with a school-based approach: intellectual, structural and cultural challenges. School Leadership and Management, [online] 38, pp.278-301. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13632434.2017.1386647?journalCode=cslm20

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Politika is a youth-led, cross-party, non-profit organisation founded in 2018 with a mission to engage young people with politics.

Currently operations provide a platform to young people to write articles, develop policy, participate in events with political figures and create other forms of political content. Since 2018 Politika have grown to over 60 volunteers across the country and since the February 2020 merger with RADIX, Politika has subsequently become their youth branch further enhancing the mission of Politika to engage young people with politics.

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