

## **SEA Statements on Key Areas of Educational Policy post-COVID-19**

Regardless of the outcome of the debate over school reopening, there will be the need to identify immediate priorities and issues that need to be addressed. There are opportunities for seriously innovative thinking but most of all there is the need to be clear about how schools should operate while taking account of all that has happened

1. Priority needs to be given to pupils' wellbeing. Many will have had a very difficult time and in every class there will be a wide range of different experiences. Children need to feel safe in school and need to re-establish relationships with staff and fellow-pupils. Their initial experience will need to focus on these issues. Teachers will need support both through specialist guidance and through access to specialists able to work with young people who have had particularly challenging experiences.
2. Educationally pupils will be in very different places given that their access to and the content of home learning will have been very variable. It will be essential not to adopt a deficit model and not to use language like "left behind" or "needing to catch up". Establishing the starting point for future learning will be difficult and complex and will need to respond to the particular experiences of individuals. A significant diagnostic period will be needed and conventional notions of progress will be entirely inappropriate. Staff should be reassured that tangential discussions about the COVID crisis, grieving, the economic impact etc, should be encouraged. Ultimately the success of education post COVID will be about rebuilding positive relationships between staff and pupils. To support this process the role of pastoral support workers, be they mentors, counsellors, mental health support etc will be vital. Funding should be available to employ more and develop their skills in response to issues like bereavement through training programmes. There will need to be a substantial re-setting of curriculum expectations. This will affect all age cohorts. This is not a request for an immediate national revision of the National Curriculum but an acceptance that every school will need to make its own decisions about what is appropriate for their pupils. At the same time there will be an urgent need for government to provide clear guidance for schools as to how the curriculum should be developed over the next couple of years at least. Breadth and balance to include the full range of subjects and learning experiences should be maintained.
3. There are indications that the government is attempting to use the crisis to impose so called 'traditional teaching methods'. Teachers should still be encouraged to use a variety of pedagogical approaches, safely, including collaborative ways of learning, to meet the needs of their pupils.
4. It also follows that examinations will need to change. Clearly there is no case for holding baseline assessments this year and none for re-instating any external primary testing in 2021. Instead, government should take this opportunity to develop an entirely different approach to primary assessment.
5. For the next two years at least, it will be impossible to simply return to GCSE and A level examinations in their old form – even if that were desirable. Pupils' experiences will have been too varied and time lost too significant for that to be possible. But schools will need to know well before pupils return to school just what will be expected of them and their pupils in summer 2021 and 2022 at the least. Seriously out of the box thinking will be needed to ensure that these cohorts are not disadvantaged. Allowing schools to opt out of parts of specifications as is being proposed in English GCSE should be fully explored. Employers and higher education may well have to adjust their expectations as well.

6. Schools need to be encouraged to build on the creative uses of ICT that we have seen since lockdown. This also requires government to take a much more positive approach to the use of and teaching of ICT and to the need to resource schools appropriately. They need to reverse the shutting down of the support and procurement agencies that took place after 2010. There is a danger though that schools will rely on reductionist mass-produced on line materials rather than those designed to link in with the school's own context and pupils' own individual needs. Longer term, teachers need time and space to develop their own content with colleagues, to meet the needs of their pupils.
7. The current inspection framework is dead in the water. Expecting schools to adjust to it in the present circumstances is entirely unreasonable. For the academic year 2020-21, inspections should be suspended (with the exception of urgent safeguarding concerns) and Ofsted should use its resources to support schools and local authorities in making the kinds of adjustments identified above. There should then be a full debate about a radically different approach to accountability.
8. There needs to be significantly enhanced provision for disadvantaged pupils as the Education Policy Institute has proposed. This should include a temporary doubling of the pupil premium in years 1, 7, 11 and 13 as well as for Early Years pupils. Existing supply staff, as well as retirees where needed, should be delivering extra support for pupils