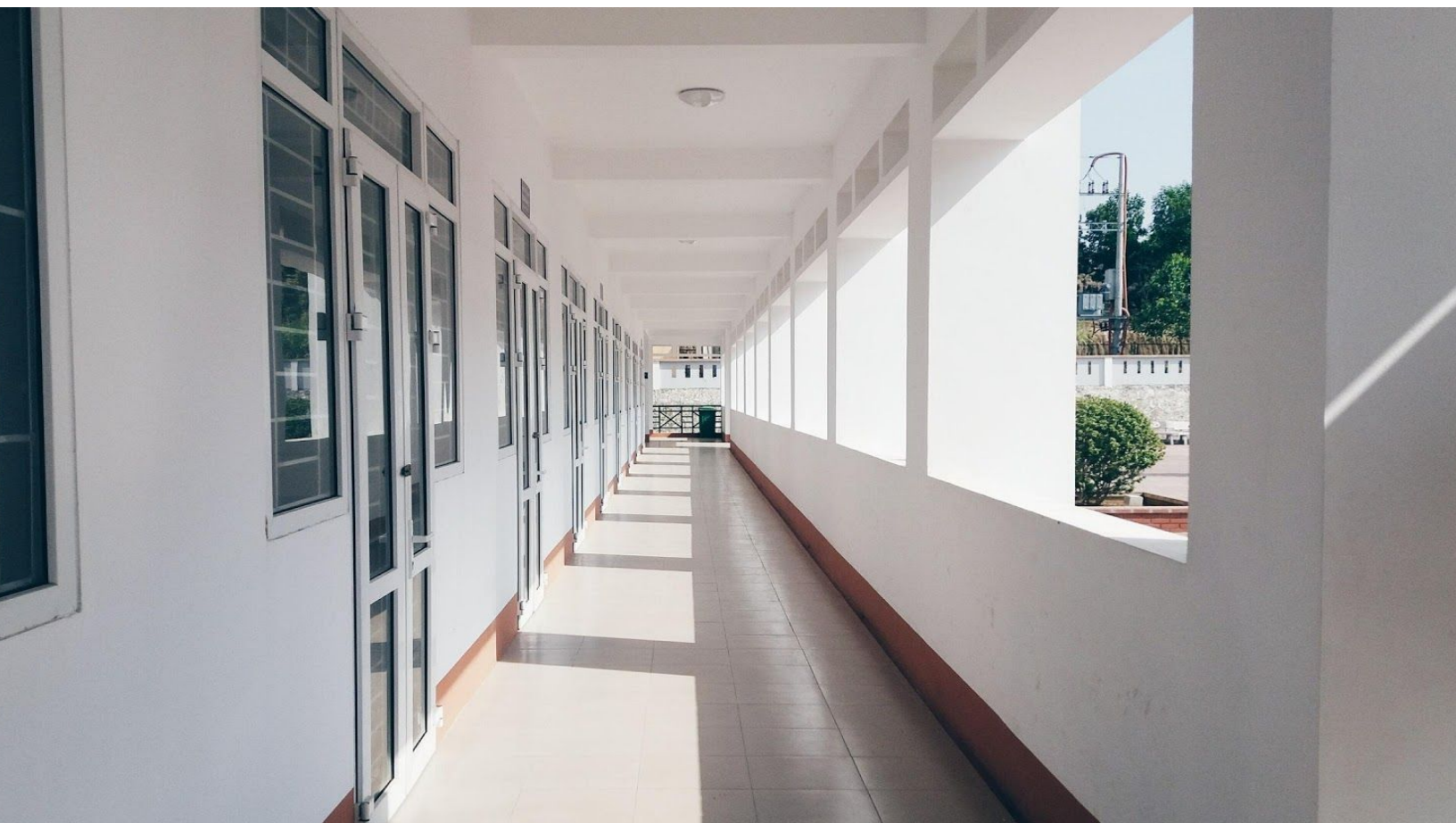


# Sustainable School Recovery

A Guide for School Leaders



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In collaboration with Cornelia Lucey, Rebecca Cramer, Mark Eyre and Martin Fleetwood.

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## Introduction

This guide for school leaders has been created, with expert inputs, to help you to most effectively support your school community's recovery following the measures taken to limit the spread of Coronavirus.

We are well aware that most schools haven't closed over this recent period, as they have continued to support vulnerable pupils, key worker children and their communities in a variety of ways. For ease of reading the temporary and partial closure of schools will be referred to as school closure.

This is not intended as a one size fits all solution. Instead, it shines a light on potential issues and opportunities, stimulates thinking and suggests ways to approach school recovery in a healthy, intentional and sustainable manner. This guide has been created with contributions from educators with experience in all-through, secondary, Post-16 and Alternative Provision settings.

Disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils are amongst those most likely to be significantly negatively affected, due to a range of factors including the digital divide, the availability of in-home support and the increased likelihood of social and financial challenges at home. Nevertheless, this guide is appropriate for use when supporting students from any and all backgrounds.

Please apply the principles, adapt the suggestions to suit the needs of your school and share it with colleagues.

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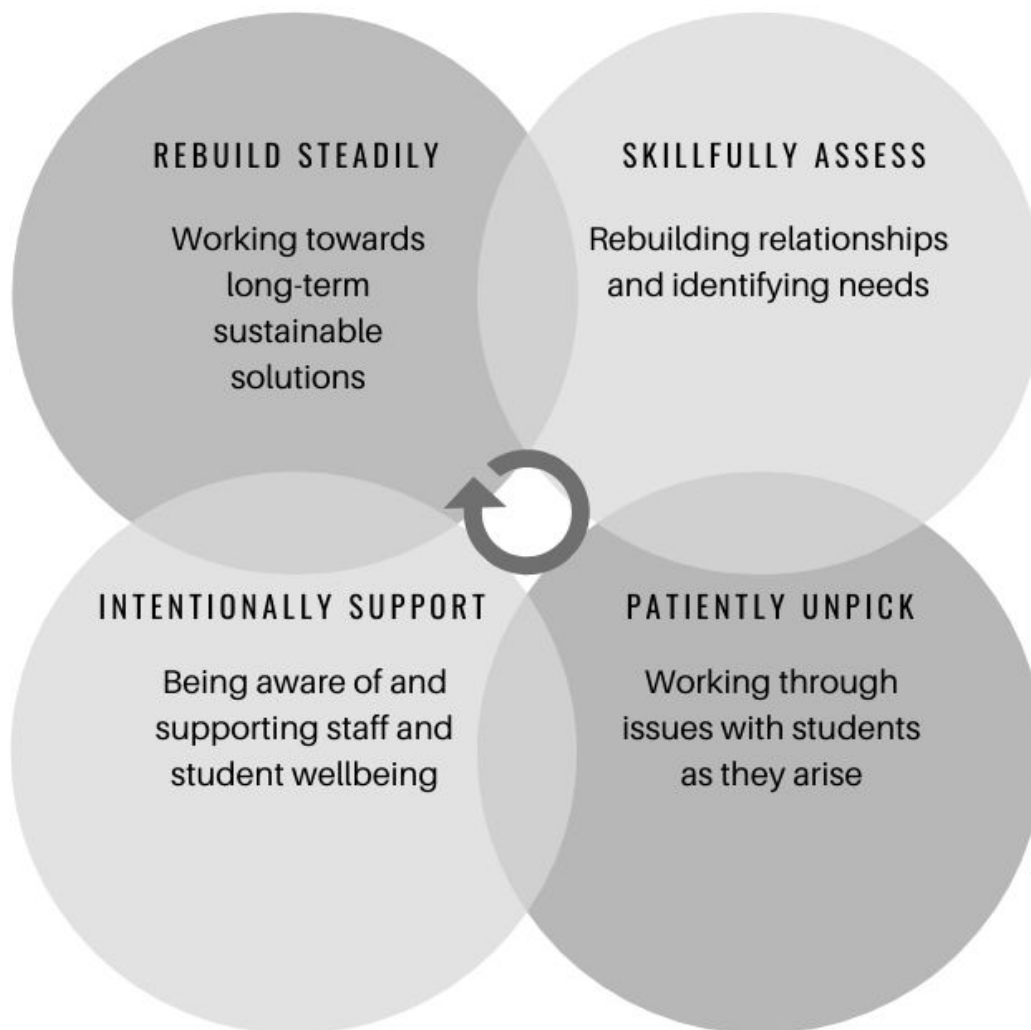
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## Contents

This guide features the following four key focus areas along with reflection questions and action points.



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## 1. Rebuild Steadily

During school closures, students will have been affected in a variety of ways and they may have been reconditioned by their recent learning experience. For example, some students:

- may now be used to reduced teacher input, minimal adult interaction and longer periods of self-study;
- others students may have diminished attention spans or excitement overload and therefore, they may find it difficult to focus in class;
- who have been supported in school throughout the crisis may have become used to a small group environment and personalised attention; and
- might have witnessed traumatic events at home such as domestic violence or loss of employment causing long-lasting impact on the whole family.

We will need to rebuild habits and behaviours which lead to successful learning. When returning to classrooms the noise, interpersonal demands and pace of instruction may feel like an assault on the senses to some. If students are seen to be ‘struggling’ with being back in the classroom it may have more to do with these factors than the pitch of the work itself. Increasing cognitive load slowly will be an important factor when seeking to ensure that students can resettle into classrooms and wider school life.

Resetting expectations and remodelling will be important building blocks when laying the foundations for future learning. In-the-moment assessment will help teachers to gauge whether a routine needs to be reestablished or whether pupils remember it and are ready to move on.

We will also need to rebuild social norms and connections. Having spent so much time physically away from friends and peers students will need support and structures to help them interact socially with others face-to-face. This will be of increasing importance for younger children and students with Special Educational Needs that impact their social skills. These factors will impact unstructured times such as break times and lunch times as well as in class activities. We need to recognise that many children will have experienced an intense period of online connectivity. We will need to explore the impacts of this on social interactions and safeguarding.

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*“When pupils return to school we need to recognise that not all experiences during this period have been equal. Some may find it challenging to now be away from family, some may need to reform habits and rebuild relationships. As teachers we need to recognise where each child and their family is, the things they have experienced and how these will continue to impact them for some time.*

*Our response should have the long-term aim of supporting all children to become pro-social and productive members of society.*

*We also need to be kind to ourselves. Sustainable recovery is a marathon not a sprint.”*

*Rebecca Cramer - Co-founder and Director of Education at Reach Academy Feltham*

### Reflection

What are the risks of moving too quickly when seeking to rebuild?

What might a differentiated approach to supporting students to settle back into in-school learning look like in your school?

### Action Steps

Plan how you could articulate the concept of rebuilding steadily to your staff

Identify members of staff who might find pacing themselves and their approach difficult.  
Consider how you might support them.

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## 2. Skillfully Assess

For a variety of reasons, some students may not have been able to fully focus on the work set by their teachers. Skills and knowledge acquired before the pandemic may not be retained, recallable or applied to the right context because of missed opportunities for consolidation. In addition, the varying volume and quality of work produced by students in recent weeks along with any potential newly formed misconceptions will also mean that new gaps will have emerged. The extent to which this has occurred will only be realised in time through skilful teacher assessment.

It is likely that students' learning and pastoral needs will emerge and change over time. The way in which students present in the initial weeks may be very different months later. Continual observation and conversations about learning with students will help to explore and identify evolving students needs. Therefore, it will take an investment of time in order to identify exactly where each pupil is at in their learning. Using creative forms of assessment and continually recapping and reviewing will support this process.

Student safety, mental health and wellbeing are of paramount importance and assessment is another important piece of the puzzle. The most effective teachers will find ways to simultaneously assess academically, meet pastoral needs, once again get to know their classes and reinspire them in learning.

Regular skillful assessment will underpin planning and ensure that any interventions and additional support can be properly directed.

### Reflection

What will assessment look like for the rest of this academic year?

How might you modify the types and regularity of assessment used in your school next year?

### Action Steps

Take an opportunity to re-evaluate the school assessment calendar.

Decide on your priorities during this initial phase and articulate them to your staff.

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### 3. Unpicking conversations

*“In these uncertain times, we cannot make assumptions that students will return with the mindset, manner or understanding with which they left. We must consider and assess how Covid-19 and the lockdown arrangements have impacted the lives of each student, their families and peer groups.*

*Leaders must remember that although students are likely to have used social media to remain in contact with peers, social media, at this time, is a limited substitute for the face-to-face interaction that students experience when attending school. Typically, social media is used as an extension of communication as opposed to being the primary means of establishing and maintaining contact.*

*Dr James Comer states that ‘no significant learning can occur without a significant relationship.’ Staff and students’ emotional health and wellbeing are fundamental in forming effective relationships.*

*Conversations must become the currency in schools. Conversations are critical in fostering positive relationships, understanding struggles and identifying interventions and solutions.*

*In particular, students will need time to re-establish their position within friendship groups, which could, in some circumstances, lead to heightened levels of anxiety and stress, manifesting itself in irregular responses, with limited capacity to think logically or critically.”*

*Mark Eyre - Principal Designate at CP Riverside School, an alternative provision academy.*

Every student is unique and so too are their experiences of lockdown. As a result, there will be different pinch points and hotspots across the school day that trigger negative reactions and behaviours. These may be based on the location, the time, the atmosphere or a range of other factors. For example, the corridors (although unlikely to be crowded for some time yet), the lunch queue or the unfamiliar (socially-distanced) entry routine into the classroom.

As and when issues arise it will be helpful to remember that young people aren’t always mindful of the longer-term consequences of their actions and decisions. This is because they more often process information with the amygdala (the emotional part of the brain) whereas fully developed adults are more able to engage their judgment processes in the prefrontal cortex (the rational part of the brain).

Whether out of frustration, anxiety, fear or irrationality, as we respond to behaviour incidents it is important to be patient and remember that these are symptoms rather than the core issues.

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If dealing with an incident only involves the giving of a sanction or consequence then opportunities to help students understand themselves, and develop self-regulation strategies will be missed. It is increasingly important to facilitate *unpicking conversations*. They provide students with the opportunity to pause, reflect and move forward after negative behavioural incidents.

*Unpicking conversations must be restorative and solution-focused in nature and must seek to unpick the underlying concern, the behaviour itself and its impact on others, that is, if sustained improvements in choice-making and behaviour are to be achieved.*

*Unpicking conversations must remain a priority until there is nothing left to unpick.”*

*Mark Eyre - Principal Designate at CP Riverside School, an alternative provision academy.*

### Reflection

How do these ideas align with your current behaviour management policy/system?

Which staff already/could model and champion this approach?

### Action Steps

Make plans to enable staff to prioritise the time required to facilitate this type of conversation consistently.

Consider how best practice and successes could be shared in your school.



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## 4. Intentionally Support

The coronavirus pandemic has implications for mental health as well as physical health. It is important to acknowledge that life has been far from normal for everyone recently. Friends and families have been kept at a distance, there have been restrictions on numerous activities and loved ones have been lost.

These issues have impacted and will continue to impact all members of school communities in a variety of ways. *Lockdown* can bring with it an increased risk of psychological stress and disorders including emotional disturbance, depression, stress, low mood, irritability, insomnia and post-traumatic stress symptoms, anger and emotional exhaustion. These factors can impact upon staff and students in different ways. Fortunately, some emerging research has also shown positive emotional growth through these challenging experiences such as compassion.

Students and staff alike will be processing recent events, dealing with current changes and thinking about what the future holds. All of this can take up significant mental and emotional capacity and for some, this might result in anxiety, agitation and frustration. If particular interactions with colleagues or students, or specific situations make us feel uncomfortable or anxious, that's ok.

We should endeavour to be patient with ourselves and others and recognise that we may all feel mental and emotional strain in different ways and at different times. Acknowledging and seeking to understand ourselves and others can help us relieve the burden of conflicted emotional responses, aid learning and move forward positively.

We can also take steps to reduce the mental load expected as outlined in Section 1 by rebuilding steadily and mindfully with one another. Taking a moment, being kind to ourselves, committing to a work/life balance and talking can all be helpful strategies. We can most effectively support others when we look after ourselves first.

*“Whenever we are rebuilding ourselves from challenging situations or circumstances, the support of those around us is crucial. Whilst we all have a personal responsibility to manage our own emotional regulation, our resilience can be supported hugely by the quality of the interactions in the organisations and systems we are part of. Evidence shows us that Positive Leaders can support through role modelling hope, efficacy and optimism in language and actions as well as authentically showing forgiveness, compassion and kindness in behaviours.”*

*Cornelia Lucey, Psychologist and Positive Leadership Expert Co-founder of livewise.how.*

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Reflection

How will you model these principles to your staff?

What steps will you take to support staff who find the transition back into school more challenging?






Action Steps

Review the Mind wellness action plan.

Seek feedback from your staff and create/improve your school's wellbeing plan.

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## Overview of contributors.

	<p>Dennis Simms is a leadership and behaviour specialist who supports school leaders through coaching and consultancy (<a href="http://www.simmscoaching.co.uk">www.simmscoaching.co.uk</a>).</p> <p>He Co-chairs Teach First's Headteachers Network (Heads Forward), is a senior researcher at The Centre for Social Justice and a former Alternative Provision Headteacher.</p>
	<p>Cornelia Lucey is a Positive Psychologist and Positive Leadership Development Expert. (<a href="http://www.livewise.how">www.livewise.how</a>)</p> <p>Cornelia is a speaker, researcher, writer and Co-founder (Resilience, Wellbeing, &amp; Positive Leadership). She has worked as a leadership development consultant and coach across sectors for over a decade with a specialism in teaching, learning and education.</p>
	<p>Rebecca Cramer is the co-founder and Director of Education at Reach Academy Feltham, an all-through school in West London serving a disadvantaged community from cradle-to-career.</p> <p>Rebecca is also a co-founder of Whatever It Takes, a charity which exists to break the destructive cycle of offending behaviours in children enabling them to enjoy lives of choice and opportunity.</p>
	<p>Mark Eyre is the Principal Designate at CP Riverside School, an alternative provision academy, a school within the East Midlands Education Trust.</p> <p>Mark has been instrumental in embedding a culture of relationships and restorative practice across the school. He is motivated to ensure all young people have a positive educational experience, irrespective of any challenges they may have previously encountered.</p>
	<p>Martin Fleetwood is a Teach First Leading Together Achievement Partner, former Executive Principal of Temple Moor High School and Temple Learning Academy and Strategic Leader of the Temple Newsam Learning Partnership, a Co-operative Trust of nine schools and two Children's Centres.</p>

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