Education Achievement Service

Striking the Balance

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Please note this is an accessible front cover with all formatting removed.

Striking the Balance

**Instead of focusing on what learners have lost,
let's focus on what they need next…**

Our Pledge: We will continue to over communicate with clarity, to strengthen collaboration, support schools and settings to embrace change, promote innovation and support the continuation of learning.

The pandemic has reminded us that even in the most challenging of circumstances positive change has been possible. Schools and settings have seized opportunities to explore innovative ways of working and delivering meaningful teaching and learning experiences through a creative blended learning approach. These experiences should be built upon to avoid a 'snap back,' keeping the positive learning that has been developed during this time and preparing for the future.

Context

Schools and settings have experienced their own unique set of circumstances during the pandemic. There is no one size fits all model and schools have adopted differing approaches which are best suited to the needs and circumstances of their school communities. During this time, the region has supported schools to reflect upon and refine their approaches to teaching and learning. There was no blueprint for what constituted effective distance and blended learning, nationally or internationally and it has been important to collaborate with schools, learning together.

Schools have been supported with the following:

- Developing agile responses to ensuring continuity of learning and provision.
- Professional learning for all staff, responding to evolving needs and utilising alternative methods of delivery, including provision for Welsh medium settings and the provision of all resources bilingually.
- Well-being webinars and support for leaders, staff, learners and their families/carers. In addition, professional learning and guidance was provided to support disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of learners along with guidance on family and community engagement.
- A programme of virtual Professional Learning for Governors and management committees.
- Guidance for governors and leaders in evaluating and planning for an effective blended learning strategy.
- Preparing for curriculum reform.
- Staying connected through a range of networking opportunities.

All of the above is captured through the Supporting Our Schools website and the Distance and Blended Learning website. Engagement from our schools throughout this period has remined high. During this period, there has been a responsive professional learning offer. This has included the facilitation of sharing opportunities to capture emerging practice and to discuss their developments

and refinements via the Blended Learning task and finish groups and subsequent Masterclass events. These activities have been undertaken alongside the scheduled professional learning programme which was reimagined to respond to the current context.

Responsive professional learning offer to meet the challenges that a pandemic presents
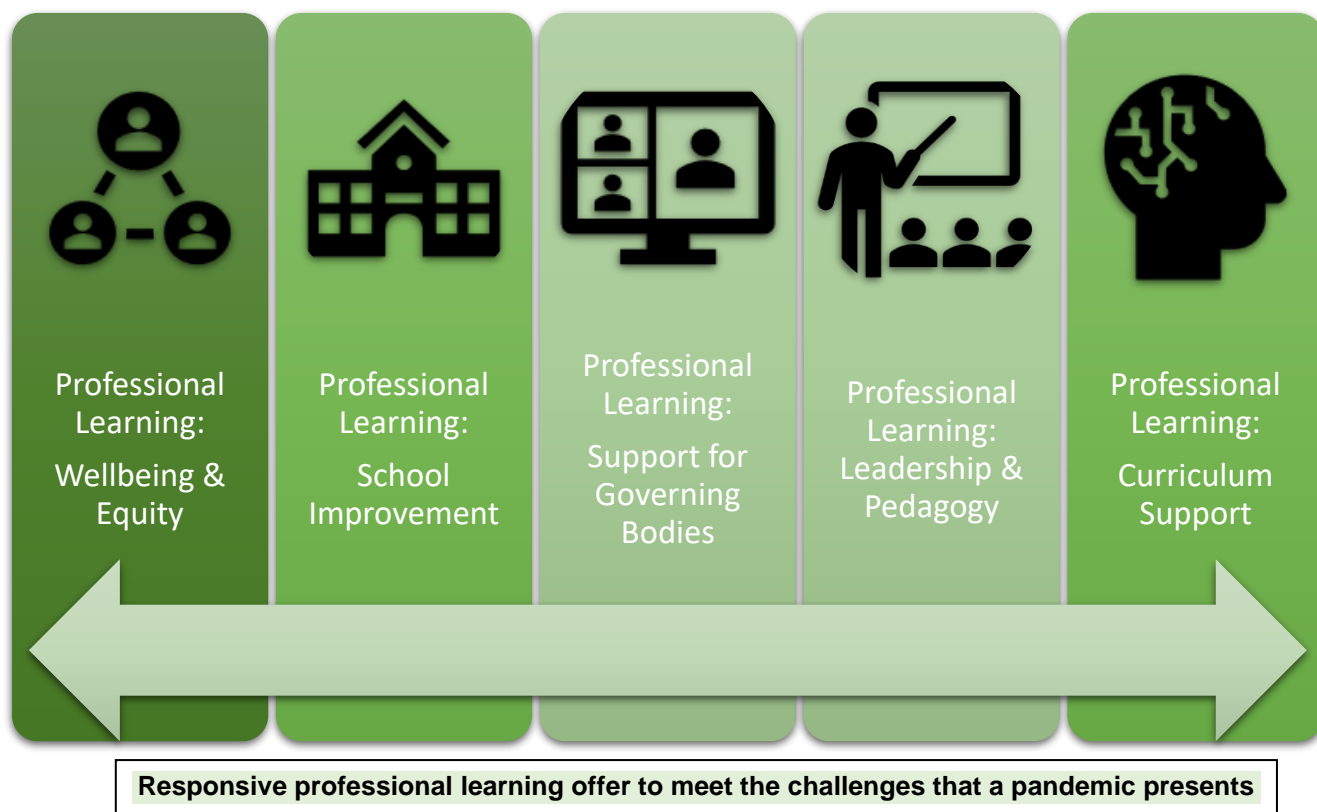
Whilst the challenges schools and learners have faced have been recognised, nearly all leaders have acknowledged that not all learners have been adversely affected by the pandemic and many learners have had positive learning experiences which have improved over the period of the pandemic. Many leaders and practitioners have reacted positively to this period of change, responding with resilience and agility, including evolving their use of technology innovatively to:

- Improve communication with learners and the wider school community.
- Provide the opportunity for innovative pedagogy, enabling more flexible and tailored learning experiences.
- Enable and enhance collaboration, both internally and with a wider range of partners.
- Broaden opportunities for Professional Learning across the school workforce.

At the start of the pandemic, it could have been difficult to foresee or anticipate the disruption to the lives of learners, staff and school communities that would happen during the course of the year to come. Early on in the pandemic, international organisations such as the OECD were asking us to contemplate the likely longer-term disruption that the pandemic may cause. However, in order to focus on the positives that this period may bring to learners, some of our schools decided to consider the potential benefits that learning at a distance may bring. One example of this was captured by Langstone Primary in this You Tube clip which they promoted through their Twitter feed during the summer term of 2020. Langstone Primary School - Video Link

This document outlines considerations and guidance to support schools for the remainder of this academic year and beyond.

Striking the balance

How do we strike an appropriate balance between considering the wider learning experiences that have led to positive progress for some, whilst understanding the potential barriers to pupil progress that have developed for others?

It is appropriate to acknowledge that the pandemic has not necessarily been a positive time as many have experienced loss and had difficult lockdown experiences including isolation, physical and mental health challenges, and anxiety. Home learning experiences will have been varied. We know that some learners have struggled and, due to a range of factors including digital exclusion, many have not engaged adequately. It is important to note that some children and families are struggling and that they are concerned that they are not making progress.

In contrast to the above however, some learners have excelled, showing that they can self-regulate, work with independence, and adapt to using technology as well as many more skills that they may not have had opportunity to exercise in the period pre-pandemic.

It is important that schools are enabled to effectively evaluate and assess the progress their learners have made during this period. Schools are in the best position to judge the needs of their learners and identify any support that each learner may require in the coming months.

Teaching and Learning

The quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning at a classroom level is key. Where practice uses effective and nuanced formative assessment strategies, schools and settings adapt teaching practice to meet the needs of individual learners and continue to consult and inform their wider stakeholders. These schools use evaluative information and progress data to inform and refine future practice and provision, shaping their priorities for improvement.
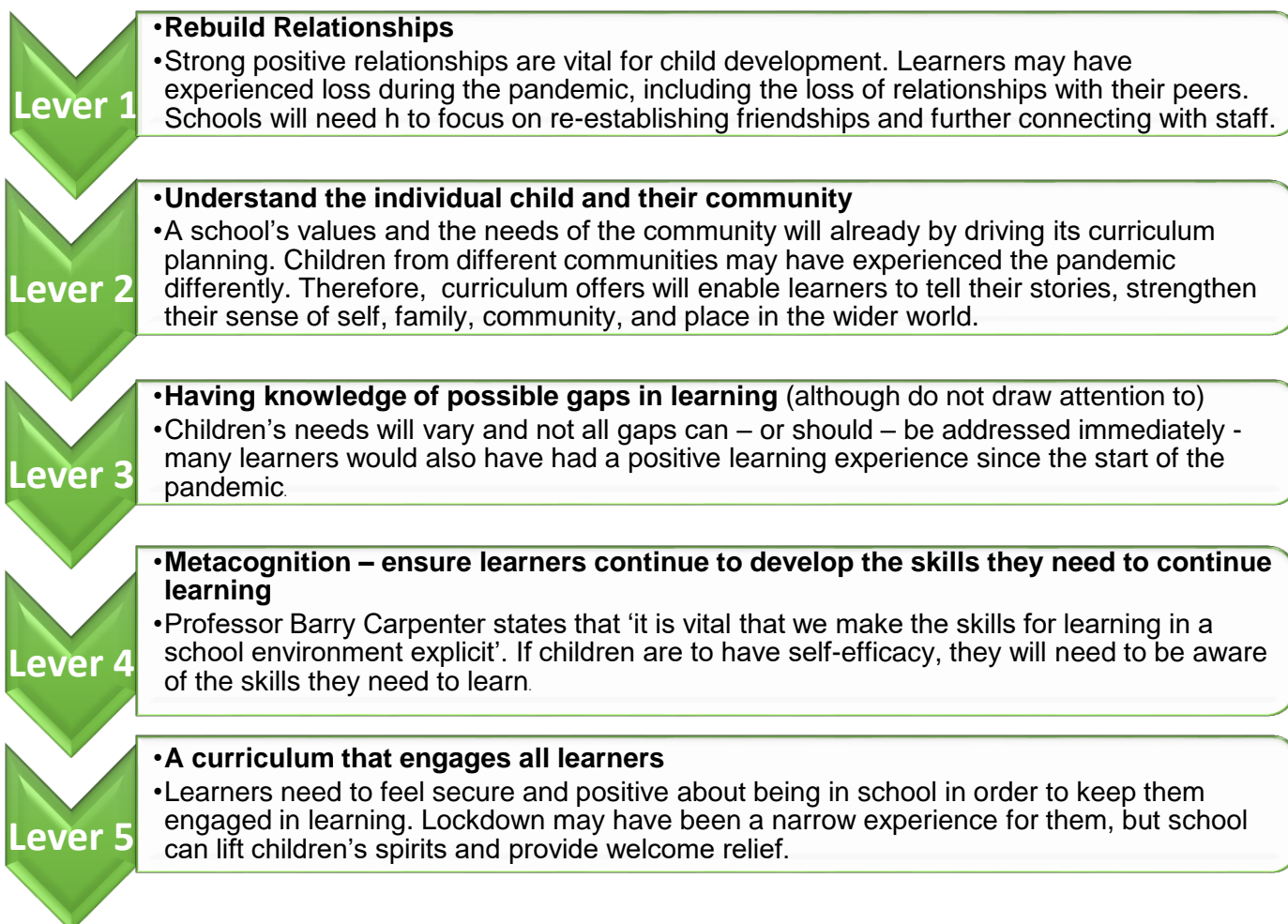
With the date of realisation of the curriculum for Wales drawing nearer, schools have started to reflect upon their experiences of supporting learners through the pandemic in ways in which will support them in developing their curriculum in the longer term. A range of examples are provided below. Schools have reflected upon:

- The centrality of wellbeing of all in the school community

- The purpose of their curriculum offer – Why is the curriculum offer shaped in the way that it is and how can aspects of distance learning provide a broad, balanced learning experience?

- How to broaden their curriculum offer, for example by providing remote learning experiences with third party providers

- How to continue to meet the linguistic needs of all learners, including Welsh-medium learners from English-speaking homes and those who have English as an additional language.

- How technology has helped to facilitate a more bespoke approach to supporting groups of leaners or individual learners

- How the use of some learning platforms has facilitated the opportunity to provide a broader range of feedback e.g. verbal feedback using mote.

- How the use of technology to facilitate learning may provide the opportunity for greater flexibility in a learners' timetable in the post-Covid era.

- Trialling aspects of the curriculum for Wales framework to frame learning experiences e.g. the use of the Statements of What Matters and descriptions of learning to support planning.

Evaluating these practices will be crucial in ensuring that the lessons learned during this period become the foundations upon which the future curriculum can be built.

Research Informed Approach

Recently, a think piece entitled <u>A Recovery Curriculum: Loss and Life for our children and schools post pandemic</u> was published. In it, mental health expert, Professor Barry Carpenter recommends five sensible 'levers' that can help a school recover following a 'systematic, relationships-based approach to reigniting the flame of learning in each child'.

Lever 1
- **Rebuild Relationships**
- Strong positive relationships are vital for child development. Learners may have experienced loss during the pandemic, including the loss of relationships with their peers. Schools will need h to focus on re-establishing friendships and further connecting with staff.

Lever 2
- **Understand the individual child and their community**
- A school's values and the needs of the community will already by driving its curriculum planning. Children from different communities may have experienced the pandemic differently. Therefore, curriculum offers will enable learners to tell their stories, strengthen their sense of self, family, community, and place in the wider world.

Lever 3
- **Having knowledge of possible gaps in learning** (although do not draw attention to)
- Children's needs will vary and not all gaps can – or should – be addressed immediately - many learners would also have had a positive learning experience since the start of the pandemic.

Lever 4
- **Metacognition – ensure learners continue to develop the skills they need to continue learning**
- Professor Barry Carpenter states that 'it is vital that we make the skills for learning in a school environment explicit'. If children are to have self-efficacy, they will need to be aware of the skills they need to learn.

Lever 5
- **A curriculum that engages all learners**
- Learners need to feel secure and positive about being in school in order to keep them engaged in learning. Lockdown may have been a narrow experience for them, but school can lift children's spirits and provide welcome relief.
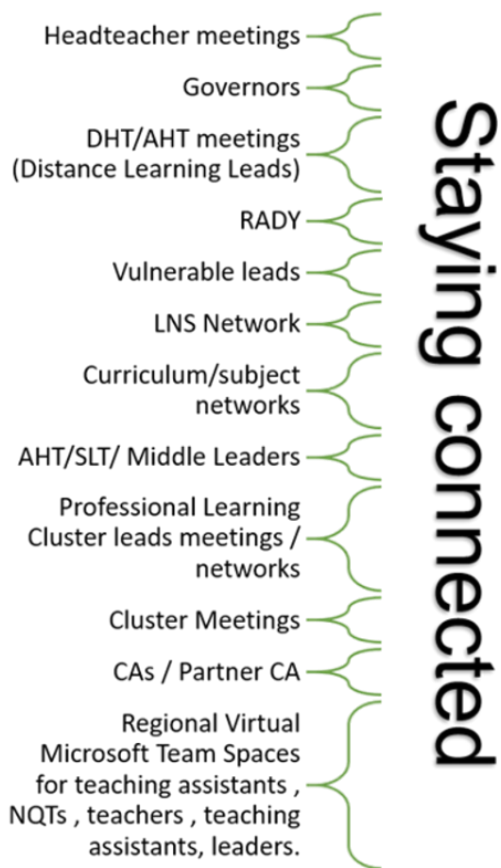
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Regional Support

Wellbeing continues to be at the forefront of the regional approach. Schools and their communities will have had their own unique set of circumstances and will require a bespoke and flexible approach to learning together. Every learner will have differing requirements to engage successfully in their continued learning, receiving personalised support enabling them to fully integrate into the whole school experience when the time is right.

What do we need to consider in the next few months?

- Schools' ability to continue to respond flexibly and be agile based on their circumstances.
- Continued distance and blended learning approaches.
- Continued support for schools to use innovative technology to support effective teaching and learning.
- Reintegration back to face-to-face learning for the younger children in the first instance.
- Possible phased return of face-to-face learning for all learners.
- Refining effective formative assessment approaches to establish the needs of all learners.
- Developing and refining innovative transition arrangements.
- Supporting learners to secure qualifications and secure suitable pathways.
- Targeted, needs-led self-evaluation and informed planning for improvement.
- Re-establishing enrichment activities and aspects of the 'informal' curriculum in innovative ways.

How will we support schools during this time?

Staying connected
- Headteacher meetings
- Governors
- DHT/AHT meetings (Distance Learning Leads)
- RADY
- Vulnerable leads
- LNS Network
- Curriculum/subject networks
- AHT/SLT/ Middle Leaders
- Professional Learning Cluster leads meetings / networks
- Cluster Meetings
- CAs / Partner CA
- Regional Virtual Microsoft Team Spaces for teaching assistants, NQTs, teachers, teaching assistants, leaders.

Supporting our Schools

Research — Engaged with research and international education systems, learning from systems ahead of us in the pandemic.

Refine — Refined and developed guidance and advice based on the changing situation of the pandemic.

Wellbeing

Respond — Advice, support, guidance and "just in time" PL based on the current need.

Reflect — Listened to the experiences and reflected on challenges and needs. Adapted approaches and support.

We will continue to research, refine, respond and reflect on school needs. Our established networks will continue to be the mechanism of communicating with schools and settings. The Supporting our Schools website will continue to be the 'go to place' for all resources and guidance materials.

Please click to access | Cliciwch i gael mynediad:
Distance and Blended Learning | Dysgu o Bell a Dysgu Cyfunol

Please click to access | Cliciwch i gael mynediad:
Supporting Our Schools | Cefnogi Ein Hysgolion

Overview of Support

The EAS Business Plan contains the main priorities that will be the focus of our work for 2021-2022. The summary below provides an overview of key support, including Striking the Balance.

Wellbeing

- Professional Learning Keynote speakers with guidance on supporting learners returning to fulltime face to face learning.

- Altogether Again Playlist resource

- The Wellbeing Toolkit Programme

- Developing an ACE Friendly School Programme

- A Whole School Approach to Emotion Coaching Techniques

- Embedding Rights of the Child into the curriculum

- Developing a Teaching and Learning Strategy based on a tiered approach for disadvantaged and vulnerable learners

- Health and Wellbeing AoLE Toolkit with supporting PL programme

- Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Learner Lead Programme (Primary and Secondary)

- Relationships and Sexuality Toolkit Programme

- Grant planning support leading up to the academic year 2021-2022

Intervention Programmes for Support Staff:

- Coping and Connecting

- Reading and Regulating

- Engaging Empathy

School Improvement

- Continue to work with schools to roll out the 'Celebrate, Support, Share and Refine' (CSSR) model, supporting schools to review and refine their models for blended learning, sharing examples of practice from different schools and settings from within and outside the region.

- Support schools and settings to evaluate the impact the pandemic has had on learners, staff and the school community. As a result, provide bespoke support to schools in line with their identified school improvement priorities, including support for NMS.

- Support schools to refine their Transition arrangements.

- SDP and self-evaluation support leading up to the academic year 2021-2022, including arrangements that align to the new Welsh Government School Improvement Guidance

- Team around the school approach for schools with the highest level of need, collaboration, support for school leaders, bespoke support for improvements to the quality of teaching, assessment and learning.

- The continuation of the Teaching and Learning Strategy project with identified schools.

- Facilitate opportunities for collaborative models / networks of schools working together to support one another with their priorities, including the use of established support networks e.g. LNS

Curriculum Support

- Continue to provide access to Programme for Senior Leaders and Headteachers - (Synchronous / Asynchronous options)

- Continue to provide access to Programme for Middle Leaders and Teachers (Synchronous / Asynchronous options) (From Summer term 2021)

- Develop the Secondary curriculum designers' network (to support realisation of the curriculum for Wales)

- Continue to run all existing subject and area-based networks (in partnership with Learning Network Schools)

- Continue to provide Digital professional learning support

- Continue to provide Welsh language support, including Welsh-medium learners from English-speaking homes. Continue to run pre-existing professional learning as advertised in the professional learning calendar

- Continue to support schools to develop and implement their skills strategy

Professional Learning: Leadership & Pedagogy

- Continue to support the refinement and development of distance and blended learning provision including the work of the task and finish group, masterclasses events and the sharing and networking of effective practice from within and beyond the region.

- Continue to facilitate professional learning that supports schools in developing effective practice in pedagogy in the current context, including areas such as assessment for learning, metacognition, effective synchronous and asynchronous learning design.

- Continue to provide national leadership development opportunities reflecting the challenges of the current pandemic for leaders at all levels including: Middle Leaders, Senior Leaders, Aspiring Headteachers, New and Acting Headteachers and Experienced Headteachers. In addition to regional collaborative networking opportunities.

- Develop a regional approach to the identification of aspiring leaders through a Talent Management Approach.

- Continue to provide a virtual professional learning offer for all those who support statutory induction including newly qualified teachers, school-based induction mentors. In addition to regional collaborative networking opportunities.

- Work with strategic partners to begin shaping a national professional learning induction offer to commence September 2021.

- Developing a regional coaching and mentoring approach to support school improvement.

- Facilitate the teaching assistant learning pathway (TALP) professional learning offer which includes support for induction into the TA role, development for practicing teaching assistants and aspiring Higher Level Teaching Assistants.

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- Continue working with strategic partners to support Initial Teacher Education pathways.

Governors

- Support for the full range of virtual governing body meetings, including Annual General Meetings.

- Support, according to a school's SLA option for virtual statutory committee meetings where required.

- Continued delivery supported by wider teams of the EAS of Virtual Professional Learning Programme for all governors across the region.

- A Virtual Conference for Governors in March-April with a focus on Governing Body's strategic leadership role in Celebrating, Sharing, Supporting and Refining, ensuring that our school communities learn lessons from the last 12 months and plan to emerge strengthened.

- Increasing the range of communication to our governors beyond the regular email updates, termly newsletters and the Supporting our Schools site, to expand the use of Social media.

- Exploring opportunities for Governors to expand their understanding and use of coaching and mentoring to support school leaders and each other.

Appendix A - Questions schools and settings may wish to consider

- Do we want to use the term lost learning?
- What language and vocabulary should we adopt to avoid the negative messaging associated with 'lost learning' 'recovery' etc.
- How do we quantify this loss in learning? Is this data accurate and is it helpful?
- Do we need to quantify this loss in learning? Is this data accurate and is it helpful?
- What does 'lack of progress' mean within the context of your school or setting?
- Do we know how effective distance and blended learning has been?
- Do we really know what pupils have retained and what they have "forgotten" over the course of lockdown?
- Do we know what effect missing the parts of the curriculum we did will have on pupils' long-term learning and progress?
- Do we know which pupils have thrived and/or made progress in other aspects of their learning during this period?
- Do we know what aspects of this period have strengthened pedagogical practice and therefore we will want to retain moving forward? How will we continue to support the wellbeing of both staff and learners?
- How will we support learners who are reluctant to return to school?
- How will we continue to develop relationships with parents and our wider community that have strengthened during this period?
- How will we use formative assessment to ensure all our learners receive learning experiences that best suit their needs on their return to school?
- How will we build on opportunity and innovation from this period – use of technology, pedagogical approaches, parental / community relationships and engagement?
- How will we ensure that there is a significant and intensified focus on quality of teaching and learning, on effective classroom practice 'intervention in the classroom' and particularly on assessment for learning and formative assessment? How will we evaluate this?
- Will there be specific and nuanced support required for specific year groups or phases, e.g., Foundation Phase, Exam year groups?
- What additional support will Welsh Medium schools require with regards to language development for learners from non-Welsh speaking homes?
- How will we identify and address the skills gaps, e.g. those learners who were digitally excluded or those that have English as an additional language?
- How will we ensure provision for NQTs / induction?

Appendix B - Promoting positivity in language

Vocabulary

Language to encourage	Language to use with caution
- Tomorrow will be a good day - Powering Up - Reconnect - Seize opportunities - Bringing solutions - Co-construction - Moving together 'a catalyst for far more bespoke learning' - Opportunity and innovation - Relevant intervention - Continuity of learning	- Deficit of learning - Everyone needs to Catch-up - Narrowing the COVID gap - Addressing the deficit - Start learning - Learning lost / loss - Lost learning - School closures