

Supporting learning in the summer term



This document is a framework for supporting the continuation of learning for students.

Summer term learning during COVID-19 should be focussed on 5 key principles, whether children and young people are learning at home or in school.

We need to focus on:-

CARE
CONTEXT
CREATE
CONNECT
COMMUNITY



A. Focus on Caring

Caring about the wellbeing of pupils, families and staff needs to be the primary focus. Schools and colleges are social institutions which play a role at the heart of their community. The Government has highlighted particular groups of children as 'vulnerable', but many children may face abuse, isolation, friendship troubles, poor mental health, hunger, bullying and exploitation during this unusual term. For NEU guidance on vulnerable children, see [here](#).

Physical health and wellbeing: Many families will face increased financial and social challenges during this time. Ensuring families have access to support, including free school meals, food banks, and other services, is critical to meeting basic needs. It is as important to provide families with links and encourage them to do physical activities as it is to set academic work.

Mental and emotional wellbeing: This is a stressful time for many, with bereavement, chaos, social issues, loss of familiar routines, isolation and other issues impacting on pupil mental health and wellbeing. Supporting the development of reassuring environments, providing learning resources on COVID-19, mental health and general wellbeing, and supporting those conversations to happen within families, are central aspects of education at the moment. For more on supporting pupils' mental health, see [here](#).

The emotional health and **wellbeing of education staff** must be protected for them to support families. School leaders and mental health leads should work with unions and staff to develop plans to protect staff health and wellbeing, and to work out what it is realistic for staff to juggle. These plans should include regular breaks, flexible working for those with caring responsibilities and regular signposting to counselling and mental health services. All vulnerable staff and pregnant women must work from home.

Tailored care: All pupils need contact and support through this time, and this should be tailored as far as possible to what they need. Schools know that children approaching key transitions will need specific messages of reassurance and emotional support. The support offered to children with a social worker, to children with special educational needs and to other vulnerable children, should be co-ordinated and agreed with the child, their parents/carers and the local authority where appropriate. For more on external support services, see [here](#).



B. Focus on the Context for learning

This is not education as normal. We believe schools' goal during this time must be to keep students connected to a range of learning, by making sure that learning is relevant and based on students' experience. Evidence from education in emergency zones shows starting from students' individual needs and experiences is what works. We are asking the Department for Education (DfE) to create a transitional phase, which could remain in place for longer than anticipated. In this period, learning must be realistic, taking into account that teachers have children at home with them and many parent/carers are working, not 'home-schooling' their children.

Reassure parents: Being clear with students and families about what is expected of them and what the school is able to provide will help everyone feel more in control and less stressed by the current uncertainty. Teaching children at home is not the job of parents/carers, supporting children's learning is an additional responsibility. Teaching is a highly skilled role and, while some parent/carers will feel quite confident in supporting their children's learning, many will not be able to do this. The NEU recognises that a large proportion of independent (fee paying) schools are operating a near full timetable of lessons, where full participation is expected. While this is not possible for all of their pupils, we are providing support for our members in those schools and have provided further guidance [here](#).

Consolidation is the goal: It is hugely valuable for schools to support students to develop habits of learning at home in a way that consolidates learning and reinforces existing content and understanding. We do not want pupils to worry about learning or about progress they think others are making. Instead they should be reassured that as we get back to a new normal after the transition phase, their school will help them to adjust. Teachers and support staff should think of and frame distance learning as an opportunity for pupils to work independently or in small groups, on things they are familiar with and gently introduce some new ideas.

Language matters: References to "missed work" or "lost time" or "catch up" will increase anxiety. For as many as half your pupils, any independent working will be extremely challenging or impossible. Instead, consolidated learning could include, for example, quizzes and extension challenges on humanities topics learned before lockdown, such as Vikings or rivers; practice questions, extension challenges and practical application of maths work already taught, such as fractions, length, time; or reading other books by an author read in class, making comparisons of themes, characters and so on.

Realistic approach to assessment: When a teacher gives a pupil formative feedback on classwork, they know and understand the learning that led to that piece of work and the circumstances in which it was done. This is not the case for work done at home. Older children may receive more feedback on work from their subject teachers, where appropriate, but this needs to be kept proportionate to the teacher's circumstances and the work being done. Feedback should generally be short, supportive and encouraging. It does not need to be daily, or even weekly. Other communication, such as general praise for engagement in schoolwork, opportunities to share other activities, encouragement, etc. is just as important.

Iterative process: This is a period of emergency, which means we need to enable teachers to focus on positive relationships with students and attempting reasonable routines, rather than making linear progress. It will help teachers to seek feedback from parents/carers and students and adjust their practice in response, where appropriate. For most teachers and pupils in state-funded schools, a full programme of distance teaching and learning has been shown to be unrealistic and too complex. The Sutton Trust has found that most children are not accessing learning or returning work set by schools. To forge ahead in this manner is to ignore the reality of how challenging it is for students to find the motivation, space or equipment to study at home day in, day out.



C. Focus on a Creative curriculum

Using the summer term to let pupils create, make and perform projects that interest them can provide opportunities for students to express their feelings and emotions, spark their imagination, develop independence, maintain motivation and build resilience in the face of uncertainty.

Creative projects: There are a range of ways that schools can support pupils to learn through making and creating. For example, baking and cooking provide opportunities to talk about science (materials - changing states and senses - taste). For those with a garden, allotment or balcony, there are opportunities for planting seeds, understanding how plants grow, identifying plants and insects, and drawing plants. Making music doesn't necessarily require traditional instruments. Children can be challenged to make an instrument out of recycled materials, compose a musical score and create a performance.

Support social and emotional needs through creativity: Creative projects support children and young people's social and emotional needs and will help them to process the current worrying and disorienting situation. Examples of this kind of learning are provided in the [AGENDA toolkit](#) with activities like [What jars you?](#), getting children to 'felt' their feelings, create mood boards or make a relationships web.

Reading challenges: Encouraging students to use the time to read for pleasure is not straightforward but is worth the effort, because it is transformative for resilience and triggers success in all areas of learning. Reading is shown to help students make sense of their anxiety and worry, and can counteract excessive screen time. The NEU has worked with education expert Debra Kidd to produce free [creative reading packs](#) that schools can use with parents and children from Reception to Year 6. You can also check out the [UKLA](#), [Book Trust](#) and [Penguin](#) for ideas on books and [poetry](#) for older and more advanced readers.



D. Focus on Connecting

Creating drawings, lists, plans or homemade postcards can connect children to neighbours, relatives or friends and keep that connection. Include some prompts in your home learning packs. Include the [Covid Time Capsule](#) to help students creatively chart their experiences (suitable for primary and secondary).

Stay in touch: Don't underestimate how helpful a school newsletter or subject weekly email can be. Many students feel lonely and disorientated and miss the rhythms of school. Levels of communication need to be realistic for staff, and students will have different reactions - some will worry that they want to get the work done and some will feel very unmotivated. Online platforms and printed home learning packs provide a structure, but staff do not need to follow the normal curriculum or aim to push students through the content at a 'normal' pace.

Pupils with peers: Many pupils will be missing their peers. Facilitating calls and assigning projects to be worked on together or in pairs will maintain social and learning relationships. Creating fun activities or book reviews for students to discuss with each other can keep that connection and engagement.

Younger pupils: Connecting younger pupils with online assemblies, or setting students online challenges to do at home and getting them to send back pictures of the results, helps children share their work and stay connected. Creating pictures and writing letters, and either dropping them into the school letter box or uploading and emailing them, is a fun way for pupils to engage with their teachers.

Exam groups: Exams will not be taking place this summer as we know it. Pupils who were scheduled to sit GCSE, A-level or AS-level exams now find themselves in a very different place academically and emotionally, as those exams have been cancelled. Those pupils can still be engaged in learning, in extension projects to consolidate their learning, and opportunities to think about what they will be doing next. Exam groups are a positive support network connecting pupils going through the same experiences and emotions. More guidance on exams can be found [here](#).

E. Focus on building and celebrating your Community

A sense of agency and belonging for students: Research shows that it will really help students to develop resilience if they feel that they are making a positive difference, are trusted and viewed as responsible - whether that is helping in their home, helping with younger siblings, or helping people in their street/estate/area. Make sure your school validates this use of time and this contribution or informal care which students might be making within their home, or in the community around them. Activities such as putting up posters in the window, or making care packages for neighbours, have benefits for both learning and wellbeing and should be celebrated and validated.

Supporting families: The NEU has developed a [parent microsite](#) to support families through this unusual term. The NEU has also produced a [model poster](#) for your school to use with families to publicise helplines and national sources of information about mental health, domestic violence and other challenges.

Supporting the community: The NEU is recommending that schools put together free [Create Boxes](#) to send home for children who might not have creative supplies available. What could students create for their neighbourhood? What art activities could your school community do together, to still feel connected? Could students drop posters in to display on the school gates? Could students decorate stones or tiles with what they are missing?

Community of professionals: As a professional learning community, staff need the opportunity to talk about what training and professional development would help them to respond to the new challenges. Trauma informed approaches? Online skills? Reading for pleasure? Although there are multiple short-term challenges, this is not the time to give up on CPD. Your NEU union group should identify what CPD is the priority to support you to adjust the curriculum, refresh assessment skills and respond to the social and emotional needs of your students. Your school will need to build its capacity to respond to children's emotional and learning needs, and to manage the transition phase when it comes - this needs to be a collective discussion.

Support for all school staff: NQTs, trainees, cleaners, school nurses, food preparation workers and supply teachers are all key workers. All school staff need support. As a school team you will know the particular needs of your colleagues, and your [union rep](#) will be able to support members where necessary. The NEU expects [exceptional treatment](#) to be given this year for those on initial teacher training, with those on course to gain QTS receiving it. The NEU has also called on schools to [continue paying supply educators](#) until the end of their engagement and to maintain contracts, including those agreed but not yet started. The NEU encourages schools to support all their workers, regardless of their role or activity level, at this time.

