

## Written evidence submitted by Achievement for All

### **Achievement for All 3As Response to the Education Committee's call for evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services**

Achievement for All welcomes this opportunity to provide evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services. Achievement for All (AfA), an education charity, working across England and Wales, was founded in 2011 by Professor Sonia Blandford; the recommendations of the Lamb Inquiry-*Special educational needs and parental confidence* (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2009)- became the foundations of the Achievement for All charity programme. This followed a successful DfE funded pilot (2009-2011) in over 450 primary, secondary and special schools, along with PRUs. In 2012, the government announced extended funding for Achievement for All to include looked after children and those receiving free school meals. In 2014, the Achievement for All approach was recommended for all schools in the SEND Code of Practice:0-25 years (DfE/DoH, 2014, updated 2015). To date we have worked with over 5000 schools, colleges and early years settings.

Too often, being poor or having a special need will define the futures of our young people. This need not be the case. We know that disadvantaged children and young people can thrive given the right educational support and opportunities. We exist to ensure that all children have the right to achieve regardless of their background, challenge or need. We achieve this by working in partnership with teachers and involving parents, to break down the barriers to each child's learning. We believe that the COVID-19 crisis has pushed the learning and consequent life outcomes of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people towards a precipice and we believe an immediate response is needed.

Schools and Colleges have reported very low engagement rates despite reaching out to troubled families; PRUs are reporting disturbing new trends such as coughing in the face of staff to trigger exclusion processes; children and young people with social emotional and mental health problems are being retraumatised in abusive family environments or through cyber-bullying; and school leaders are facing the prospects of jump-starting their school communities that were unprepared for the societal upheaval that lock-down has caused.

Never before has the social and emotional health of an education setting been more important nor valued.

### **Schools supported to remain open for children of critical workers**

Whilst schools have remained open for **'The implementation of the critical workers policy, including how consistently the definition of 'critical' work is being applied across the country'** - these include children of key workers and vulnerable children

(those with an EHC Plan, those who have a social worker and others identified by the education provider or local authority) - attendance of these groups of children has generally been lower than anticipated, particularly amongst the vulnerable groups. Across the country, many children and young people from vulnerable groups have not attended school and have not carried out work set by schools.

In addition, we know that some children lack good parenting and loving relationships, which make a big difference to their development and social mobility. Some parents, be it through lack of employment, ill-health, or through their own negative experiences of school, lack the resources and/or personal capacity to provide this, which is even more stark in challenging times.

Poor mental health - particularly of the mother - is a significant impact factor for a child's development of social and emotional skills. During the current challenging times, this reality can become heightened as pupils operate in isolation when we know that even in the best of times, too many children and young people have no one to talk to at home when they are worried or anxious.

*Never before has the social and emotional health of an education setting been more important nor valued.*

### **The capacity of children's services to support vulnerable children and young people**

The reintegration of children and young people back into education will be a monumental challenge. That is why Achievement for All, for the foreseeable future, will place wellbeing at the heart of learning.

**Achievement for All's high impact offer to support learning communities (*from 2 - 24 years old children and young people, their teachers, and their families*) with a range of classic and COVID-19 bespoke improvement programmes during these intensely challenging times.**

Never before has the social and emotional health of an education setting been more important nor valued. The stresses and challenges that Covid-19 has placed on teachers, learners and *all* their family members have been profound and unprecedented:

- School Leaders have had to redeploy human and technical resources to support remote learning, whilst at the same time considering the continued schooling of essential worker children and the health and wellbeing of staff with underlying health conditions, they need our support
- Teachers have had to switch in a heartbeat to delivering high quality remote learning by whatever means possible, stretching their knowledge and capacity, with the risks of fracturing fragile relationships with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in their school communities, they need our support

- The nature of the lockdown experience has had a disproportionate impact on low income disadvantaged children and young people and their families- be it overcrowded family homes, lack of access to assistive and social technologies, childcare, income uncertainty and the intense social pressures that arise from unstable family relationships, they need our support
- Finally, despite the best efforts of schools, some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people in our schools have been re-traumatized by the loss of regular schooling (acknowledged as one of the major protective factors in guaranteeing positive life outcomes) and contact with their teachers and learning assistants, significant and sustained emotional and social pressures due to family circumstances, and through exposure to harm in the ungoverned spaces of the street, the park, social interactions on the internet, they need our support.
- And come the return, school leaders, teachers, learning assistants, children, young people and their families, can be supported in these intensely challenging times through our [Achieving wellbeing](#) programme.

### **The effect of provider closure on the early years sector, including reference to:**

- **Children's early development**

By September 2020, children in pre-school will have missed almost half a year of learning at a very critical phase of their educational development. This will mean more children 'unready' for primary school in September and the opportunities it has to offer; more children with unmet needs in their physical, social, emotional and behavioural development, including unidentified SEND or health factors and others presenting with issues impacted by social deprivation; and with loss of learning over almost half a year, teachers will have less knowledge of where the children are in their learning.

Transition activities are usually undertaken in the Summer term, comprising of a series of meet the teacher, visit your new class type events; where evidence from the Achieving Early programme (Achievement for All) shows that transition points are part of a journey for children, not an event. Good transition is about aligning practice, ensuring change is smooth and that each new stage or phase builds on what has gone before, ensuring individual needs are fully met. In the challenging times of today, transition for many children, along with teachers, will be a harsher experience.

### **The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need)**

The COVID-19 crisis has exasperated the existing attainment gap between disadvantaged groups and their more advantaged peers. This has been further hindered through digital disadvantage, including the digitally marginalized (those without access to a computer), those who have no experience of using online learning platforms or video conferencing and others whose school has failed to provide guided online learning along with regular video conferencing of lessons.

Although local authorities are overseeing how schools in the state sector are providing online learning and communication, this has been inconsistent across local authorities, exasperating the relatively significant divide in digital learning between the state and independent sectors.

Schooling cannot fail to overlook the important place of the teacher in day to day interactions with pupils for their learning, wellbeing and future life chances. Independent schools have been significantly more likely than state schools to speak to pupils regularly through audio or video conferencing (including lessons via Zoom/ Teams along with tutorials), arrange online enrichment activities and provide formal opportunity for pupils to socialize virtually. Turning to the future, schools- primary, secondary and special schools, along with alternative providers, need to look towards blended learning programmes. If pupils and teachers are not experienced in this approach to learning, they are not going to use it effectively and efficiently in a crisis similar to what we are experiencing in the current pandemic; it is anticipated that some post-16- pupils may not return to education.

### **What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency**

#### **Early Years**

The present moment is the right time to develop a more consistent child-centred approach to transition, with standardised expectations for the process, along with materials/ resources and strategies to ensure continuity in learning and development, with support and development online. With inconsistent opportunity for online communication across settings in England, teachers and practitioners have limited means to provide children and their parents/ carers with the support and direction needed and few may be thinking beyond what they normally do at this time of year. A robust evidence base, built over decades, shows that attending good quality early years provision benefits children's later outcomes, and that disadvantaged children can benefit in particular from this effect (DfE, 2015). More recent evidence shows that investing in focused professional development activity in the early years, to improve skills and practice in the existing workforce, can lead to rapid improvements in setting-level quality, children's cognitive outcomes in language and numeracy development and their socio-emotional development (NSW, Department for Education, 2018). This approach needs to be available digitally.

Achievement for All works with schools and settings and has a workforce skilled and experienced in leading and embedding change. Having run a successful pilot project on Transition (Early Years), AfA is successfully supporting schools and settings so that they can make arrangements for September.

#### **Schools**

We continue to develop and sustain support for our learning communities (from 2 - 24 years old children and young people, their teachers and their families) with a rich and varied provision of classic and COVID-19 bespoke improvement programmes during these intensely challenging times:

- AfA has developed, implemented and evaluated a **wellbeing** programme [[Achieving wellbeing](#)] that offers schools and academies a complete leadership and professional development toolkit to rapidly review current practice, identify strengths and needs, then implement bespoke action plans, led by our experienced Achievement Coaches, to affect evidence-based impact on learning, progress and close the gap.  
AfA can also provide a diagnostic tool for checking teacher and pupil wellbeing.
- It is anticipated that there will be **attendance issues**, and the strong possibility that **exclusions** may increase in September, where some of the most disadvantaged children and young people will have had no routine of any sort during the COVID-19 crisis; the Achievement for All Schools programme has improved attendance by up to 10% and reduced exclusions by 70% (AfA evaluation 2018).
- In partnership with Whole School SEND (and informed by Regional School Leaders), AfA intends to offer Local Authorities a wide range of **Schools' SEND Workforce Development opportunities** that address a selection of critical identified areas for support, from building the SEN Support provision clarity and quality to high-quality Wave 1 teaching and the graduated approach. Working through Local Authorities in this way means that we are able to offer clusters of identified schools a comprehensive support plan.
- All too often a lack of self-control leads to young people, already in difficulties, to make things worse for themselves. Be it in the community, with their peers, within families, sometimes with the police, emotional flare-ups and disproportionately aggressive and volatile behaviours result in situations escalating rapidly out of control. We now know from some of the latest brain research how early childhood experiences shape the developing brain, and how disproportionately aggressive and volatile behaviour has its roots in early childhood trauma: progress in school can be severely compromised even if “teaching” is judged outstanding: an anxious, frightened or angry mind will not learn. That is why AfA has developed an **Emotion Coaching** programme that not only has a high impact on the behaviours of troubled children; it also helps professionals deal with their anxieties and stress points, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and less ill-health absence.
- Our work with frontline **Youth Offending Teams** continues: through generous charitable funding from the Fishmongers' Philanthropy Fund, we have embarked on a three-year programme with a cluster of London Boroughs to secure better outcomes for children and young people with SEN in the youth justice system. The work will inform the development of a bespoke offer that can then be

efficiently and effectively rolled out across the country; to date, over fifty YOTs and their partner SEN Teams have achieved a Quality Standard from Achievement for All in acknowledgement of the sustained progress they have made- outcomes that reflect positively in area inspections.

### **Blended Learning**

- Schools, alternative providers and FE colleges need to look towards the development of blended learning approaches. These should be developed and embedded in schools as a way of working; it is too late when educational institutions are forced to close.

In a project that has run since the start of COVID-19 in South Korea, AfA partner Dwight School Seoul, the following points summarise key findings; these should be considered in future learning. At the centre of on-line curriculum delivery and wellbeing support, sustainability is the key:

- How online learning impacts on the lives of staff and students
- Use platforms that are already used – do not roll out new IT programmes
- Google hangout and Microsoft teams work well
- Parent and carer wellbeing, what part do they play in their child's learning?
- Do all students have a place to work, what is the learning environment at home?
- What other support is needed? (Safeguarding, Pupil Premium, English as an Additional Language, Education, Health and Care Plans)
- Good pedagogy and teacher fatigue, producing endless power points is not good pedagogy and causes teacher and learner fatigue
- How much time is healthy for students of all ages to be looking at a screen?
- Parents, carers, teachers, and students need fresh air
- There is no shortage of devices that can access learning
- High levels of enthusiasm for technology and learning needs to be maintained
- Parameters need to be in place, boundaries need to be set (GDPR, safeguarding rules).

### **Summer Schools**

- Evidence shows if pupils leave primary school behind, they are less likely to do well at GCSEs and beyond. To ensure better transition for some of the most vulnerable pupils **we would recommend July/August summer schools** to include both academic learning and enrichment activities.
- NQTs are going to need support- this year they will have spent less time in the classroom. We would recommend extra support for NQTs during July/August

May 2020