

Written evidence submitted by PaJeS (Partnership for Jewish Schools)

**The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services**  
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PaJeS:

1. This submission is on behalf of PaJeS (Partnership for Jewish schools) provides services, support and strategy to over 120 Jewish schools across the UK. We work in 3 key areas – strategic development, teaching and learning and school services. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic we have increased our support for schools with a focus on the specific school stakeholders and general health and wellbeing.

Executive Summary:

2. Part of PaJeS' support for Jewish schools includes liaising with government. Throughout the pandemic, we have heard positive feedback from those we have updated about the support we have been providing. This submission is a good way to share best practice in the hope that some of the initiatives and concerns outlined below can be applied more broadly.
3. This submission will comment on:
4. Strategic Support: The impact of the pandemic on schools leaders and how keeping people connected in a productive and supportive manner can help retain school leaders.
5. Free School Meals: Challenges to providing support for families who should be accessing free school meal programmes as part of a package of support.
6. Examinations: The negative side to lengthening the academic year and challenges facing the current years 10 and 12.
7. Wellbeing: The wellbeing support PaJeS has been a key part of developing that can be made more widely available.
8. Educational Provision: The challenges to educational provision from a pedagogic and practical perspective.
9. Financial Implications: The need for more government support to ensure schools have the resources necessary for re-opening in this new climate.

Strategic Support:

10. In order to stay in touch with all of our schools we have increased our communication to stakeholders:
  - We now have around 14 active Whats App groups which include Heads, Chairs of Governors, Finance Governors, Informal Educators and Pastoral Leaders to name a few.
  - We have a weekly PaJeS column in the Jewish Chronicle giving tips and advice written by PaJeS staff and experts in various fields. This has enabled parents to see that a broad community response is being co-ordinated and that no school is acting in isolation. It has also created a platform for disseminating messages relating to all schools.
  - We have expanded our website to include more content and helpful features for schools ([https://www.pajes.org.uk/support\\_during\\_school\\_closures](https://www.pajes.org.uk/support_during_school_closures)). These include educational material, wellbeing support and ideas for parents engaged in home education.
  
11. Teachers and Head teachers are working around the clock, usually 6 or even 7 days a week to keep up with the ever-fluctuating demands and changes in guidance, and they are under immense pressure. The lack of clear and consistent messaging, and the issuing of last minute guidance often just before the weekend is adding to this pressure. The mental health and wellbeing of Head teachers need to be considered, as well as that of teachers, children and their families. It is impossible for schools to achieve consistency of messaging to families when they are not being provided with this themselves.
  
12. We therefore set up 3 working parties to address 3 specific areas to be able to provide the schools with relevant and updated information as needed:
  1. Medical Working party – comprised of Headteachers and leading paediatricians, GPs and Public Health doctors. They have been digesting the medical information emerging and applying it directly for the schools in a clear and concise manner. We held a meeting on May 14<sup>th</sup> attended by over 60 schools where this group walked Headteachers through the challenges and practical steps needed to return to school.
  2. Mental Health and Wellbeing working party – this group is led by the community wellbeing practitioners and the initiatives emerging from this group are outlined in the wellbeing section.
  3. Return to School working party – a group of Headteachers who have been working with Jewish schools looking at the logistics and practical side of returning to school. In time they will look at educational delivery. However they have been so overwhelmed with the practical side that the educational issues have been shelved initially. They have surveyed the schools to get an idea of how schools are planning to open and are sharing this with the larger group of Heads.
  
13. The impact of all this work has been to create a real sense of community for Heads and Governors despite the social distancing. The feedback we have received has demonstrated to us that our work has become a vital resource for the schools. One Head said, "I have to say that in all the doom and gloom this week, this group has not only been therapeutic but has also been an incredible resource..." Another commented, "No long speeches, just a really big thank you for all that you are doing. It really is appreciated."
  
14. We hope that these systems of support will continue to ensure that schools leaders remain school leaders throughout the pandemic and beyond. Despite this positive feedback about the work of PaJeS we are aware that a number of Headteachers are

reaching a breaking point and we need to consider the long term impact of how sustainable their work load is.

Free School Meals:

15. As we have raised with the Schools Minister in the past, Jewish schools have a below average uptake on FSM. We have heard from schools that families who would have benefitted from this support are continuing to struggle and have found this period of time to be increasingly difficult. The Jewish Leadership Council (of which we are a division) together with Work Avenue set up an emergency fund for community members and schools have been able to refer families to this fund to relieve immediate pressures. We would once again ask that more creative thinking is applied to how to remove the stigma of receiving FSM as we know that there will be a larger pool of families who could benefit from this.

Examinations:

16. There is increasing concern about plans for next year's Year 11 and 13 (current Year 10 and 12) and suggestions of extending this academic year and delaying next year's exams. The reality is that all students are disadvantaged by this lockdown and extending this Summer term is not going to benefit the students substantively. The exam boards mark on a curve and can easily adjust the results to mitigate the impact on their schooling. Delaying the exams could impact significantly on wellbeing of staff and students, adding unnecessary pressure and delaying results that are critical to students' future plans.

Wellbeing:

17. The Jewish community began to address the issue of children's mental health and wellbeing in 2018. Following extensive academic, expert and community research, a proactive and preventative three year pilot project is currently in nine primary and secondary schools nationally. The project is being monitored and evaluated by CORC, (The child outcome research consortium) part of the Anna Freud Centre. The programme is approaching its second year of the evaluation and initial findings are being collated alongside strategizing how to make this project sustainable in the future. The initiative is clinically governed and supported by Dr Mark Berelowitz, child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Royal Free hospital.
18. Since lockdown, the 5 wellbeing practitioners are sharing their positive approach to wellbeing across all Jewish schools through the PaJeS website, the Jewish press and directly with schools where there has been increased activity, interest and engagement. They have engaged online with students and through social media to share positive messaging and have been ensuring that those who may be vulnerable or experiencing particular difficulties during isolation, are contacted and encouraged to engage with wellbeing initiatives alongside their academic studies.
19. Our primary school emotional wellbeing programme, Heads Up Kids has developed and written, 'Back 2 School' in direct response to the current Covid 19 pandemic, to support children's wellbeing as they return to school and lockdown begins to ease. HUK Back 2 School is a teacher-led, universal programme to support the transition back to school and to provide an opportunity to reconnect, a forum to talk and share, and a means to look towards the future. We aim to build a secure and supportive environment as well as a sense of connectiveness for the school as a whole during a time of change and uncertainty. The programme is a group experience where children learn through games, drama, art and discussion. This programme can be used in the future to address times when some children may be in school and others isolating at home. Within 24 hours of it being placed onto our website, it was downloaded 100 times.

20. We would be happy for this resource to be shared more widely and it can be found online using this link: [https://www.pajes.org.uk/heads\\_up\\_kids](https://www.pajes.org.uk/heads_up_kids)

#### Educational Provision

21. Covid-19 is having and will continue to have a significant impact on educational delivery, presenting pedagogic, technical, staffing and financial challenges.
22. In addition to our work supporting head teachers, PaJeS staff are working with Jewish Studies and Modern Hebrew teachers and Heads of Department from primary and secondary schools.
23. Via Zoom, we are delivering regular training and support sessions. Initially these introduced teachers to a variety of digital tools which they were not familiar with, before moving on to focus on the pedagogy of remote teaching and learning, and issues around Mental health and wellbeing. Via our Whats App groups we have seen a real increase in anxiety of teaching professionals even though there is a real sense of community and mutual support, with teachers from a wide spectrum of schools willingly sharing ideas and resources on a daily basis.
24. We are also working with a small group of Early Career teachers as a part of a teacher retention initiative we are piloting. These teachers who have less experience overall in the teaching profession are at risk of dropping out due to the extra pressures they are under as a result of COVID-19.
25. Of course remote home learning presents a number of challenges, no matter how proficient teachers are becoming in delivering it. The imminent re-opening of schools is another significant pressure point, just as teaching staff were beginning to feel more confident with the variety of remote learning systems schools have put in place. They are faced with the reality of a hybrid system for the foreseeable future, with some children returning to school whilst others continue to learn at home. This is likely to continue into the next school year. There is the need to ensure that sufficient support is in place to allow for this.
26. Schools have had to consider the Impact on younger children and children with additional needs: separation anxiety on returning to school, possibility of being taught or supported by an unfamiliar adult, change to schedule, different classroom, unfamiliar physical space, lack of physical contact.
27. The return to school also presents specific staffing problems with both an educational and financial impact. In order to split classes within the new guidelines, two or more teachers are required per class. Where there are children with additional needs, or small classrooms, this may be more. In some schools, teachers from other year groups will be required to come in to teach classes that are not their own, (Reception, Yr 1 or Year 6), whilst still being expected to plan, deliver and mark remote learning for their own classes. There will also be some children in the returning classes who will be required to continue learning at home, due to their own or other family members' health. In some cases, close to 50% of teaching assistants and support staff have health issues, which will prevent them from returning to school within the next couple of months, meaning that there may not be sufficient staff to supervise the split classes and bubbles.
28. There is also uncertainty regarding ongoing provision for children of key workers and vulnerable children from other year groups, once certain year groups return to school. In some schools, there may be insufficient space and lack of staff to enable

this.

#### Financial Implications

- 29.** There is the financial implication of some schools possibly requiring additional teaching and support staff as well as additional equipment – e.g. more tables and chairs to enable social distancing, more toys and play equipment for younger years, some PPE equipment, more devices or IT related items - and cleaning, none of which has been budgeted for.
- 30.** The delivery to date of distanced learning programme, and the costs of a hybrid delivery once schools reopen must also be considered. Whilst the DfE has offered some very good provision to support learning schools require financial support to help meet these challenges.
- 31.** As a support organisation that relies on communal donations, Covid-19 had impacted us significantly. Despite a significant increase in our workload we have been forced to place staff on furlough. The benefits to schools of having a centralised support is considerable and should be recognised through some opportunities for governmental funding.

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