***POST-PANDEMIC PONDERINGS: TESTING OR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS? LEADERSHIP LEARNING FROM THE 2020 CORONAVIRUS CRISIS***

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**Abstract**

**keywords: relationships, coronavirus, transformative, leadership, future, case study, rhizomatic theory, networks, complexity, values**

**Abstract**

In this chapter, Precey and Fisher provide a critical analysis of the transformative leadership actions taken by the leaders of a federation of primary schools in a deprived area of London, during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Using Precey’s (2015) framework for effective transformative leadership, the authors analyse the values-based leadership decisions and actions taken to minimise any widening of the attainment gap between the most vulnerable pupils and their peers, as a direct consequence of lockdown.

The authors examine the gap between the directives from central government and their implementation in the local community.  They explore three key facets of transformative leadership: Firstly, the type of values-driven leadership that is most likely to be effective, both now and in the future. Secondly, they consider the importance of learning at all levels of the institution, for leaders, teachers and pupils. Thirdly, drawing on rhizomatic theory as an illustration of the complexity of the coronavirus crisis, they propose the attributes required for leaders to be even more effective: Principals with principles.

The authors conclude that the shock of the pandemic is a clarion call to transform education, arguing that school leaders need better preparation to lead through relationships in complex, sometimes ambiguous circumstances. The authors advocate a more community-minded approach to school leadership, along responsible, rather than responsive lines. They call for the prioritisation of training, for both current and future leaders, in transformative approaches, so that they can prepare children for life in the post-pandemic “new normal” and beyond.

**1: INTRODUCTION**

2020 saw a, hopefully, highly unusual event when human activity across the world went into lockdown. It was a time of testing for everyone especially leaders - leaders in all spheres: politics, health, social care, business and also education. The deadly Covid-19 virus is believed to have started in China and it spread around the globe at an alarming pace. The first United Kingdom death of a person tested positive for Coronavirus occurred on 5th March. By Friday 13th March UK **c**ases of coronavirus rose by over 200 in a day. Premier League fixtures were suspended and the London Marathon was postponed.

On Wednesday 18th March the Conservative government announced that all schools were to close with effect from Monday 23rd March. On Thursday 19th March it was announced that schools should remain open only for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers, although at this time the definition of ‘vulnerable child’ and ‘key worker’ were not made explicit. This soon became clearer (those deemed to be vulnerable, or with Education Health Care Plans or children of Key worker - those who have to work to keep essential services running e.g. health care workers) but many of these parents/carers chose not to send their children to school because they were fearful of contagion at school. This lock down lasted until June 1st for Years 1 (aged 5-6) and 6 (aged 10-11 years) and Year 10 (aged 14-15). It was not until July 4th when schools slowly started to have a voluntary phased return for other students after an unprecedented 15 weeks of school closure for the vast majority of students.

Although there was central and local government guidance during this time it was up to individual school leaders and their governing bodies to manage the closure.

**2: HOW DID SCHOOL LEADERS RISE TO THE TEST?**

Albert Camus, the French-Algerian novelist and philosopher, wrote *“La Peste” (*The Plague) in 1947, ostensibly about the plague sweeping across the Algerian city Oran of but also in part as an allegory of the Nazi occupation of France during the war *(“la peste brune”).* Sales across the world rose dramatically in 2020 (in UK by 3,000%). He also wrote “*An Appeal to Doctors Fighting the Plague*” as a precursor to “La Peste”. Although school leaders are not doctors of medicine, much of Camus’ straightforward and succinct advice and observations about human nature in all its absurdity and heroism still resonate 73 years later.

*“You must become your own masters. And, for example, know how to respect the laws ….like the ones pertaining to blockades and quarantine. …but you mustn’t forget what is for the general good either”*

**A CASE STORY OF OUSTANDING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DURING THE PANDEMIC**

Many schools in England displayed outstanding leadership during the pandemic. This chapter focuses on one particularly good example.

Federation X consists of 2 primary schools (A and B) with children aged 4-11 in an inner city area. Both serve areas of high deprivation where circumstances conspire to limit the pre-school academic and social development opportunities of students. Roughly half of the students receive free school meals, over 90% are from ethnic minorities and 80% speak English as an additional language

The way the Executive Headteacher and Head of School dealt with the crisis gives illuminating insights into how outstanding senior leaders with staff (teaching, support, support agencies, local authorities) and governors operate. They had to balance 2 seemingly competing values:

* a passionate belief in the value of education and children being educated in school particularly since many have challenging home situations
* a desire for children and families to be safe during the pandemic

Appendices 1, 2 and 3 are the running notes from the Executive Headteacher during the crisis up to early July 2020. They are a running account of the issues that needed to be managed and the running story gives an unusually deep understanding of leading in an unforeseen and unprecedented crisis. Decisions had to be made even before Government closed the school (see **Appendix 1).** Having made that decision, preparations had to be made to close the schools (**Appendix 2**) - a complex process. Next, the education of children and support for families had to be planned, put in place and monitored (see **Appendix 3*)***.

Initially central Government closed the schools involving some essential, functional systems to be put in place (see Appendix 1). After that it was left to schools to interpret central and local government guidance (and lack of it) within their own context and resources. How did the leadership of this Federation respond? Precey wrote an article in 2015 (“T*he Future is not what it used to be: School Leadership Today for Tomorrow’s World (Part 1)* that examines the type of transformative leadership that is likely to be most effective now and increasingly so in the future. This will form the framework to examine the leadership during the Coronavirus crisis.

1. **Why do this leadership job? The need for constant values in changing times. Principals need principles**

It is values that provide the rudder when the storms threaten to blow an organisation off course. Much is written about the need for a values-based approach to school leadership (Fullan 2003, Hammersley-Fletcher 2015) Less has been written about how in practice leaders can think more deeply about their moral purpose and their values. Robbins & Trabichet (2009) helpfully explore ethical decision-making by educational leaders and Rayner (2014) describes headteachers’ values being tested by changing policy context. Interestingly, there is far more literature on values on the business world from which educational leaders may learn such as Audi, R. (2012), Caldwell, C., Truong, D, Linh, P. and Tuan, A. (2011) Leaders in education need to go deeper and explore the way in which ethics affects every aspect of their lives as they seek to model, monitor and engage others in dialogue (Southworth 2008). Take for example the elusive yet fundamental concepts of “equality” and “*equity*” (Espinosa 2007). Are these fully understood by school leaders and how can they be applied in schools? Do school leaders understand the concept leadership for public value? (Leadbetter and Mongon 2012). Educational leadership is essentially a moral calling and profession.So twentieth century leaders needthought-through values that enable ethical decision-making that keeps the organisation on course with a sharp focus. This has always been the case, but is the more so now as the future waters of education become more turbulent.

In the case of the Federation there was a clear focus of the leaders on values and moral purpose not just for the children’s’ sake but also the families as they are one and the same. This involved transformative leadership with equity and relationships as the focus. The leaders were concentrated on their students in the context of their home and communities (where for many adults English is a second language) as most students were at home. They prioritised safeguarding the mental health and well-being of families as well as the staff of the 2 schools. For example, in Appendix 2, the production of a list of pupils considered eligible to continue to attend school in line with Government guidance was quickly produced. It is apparent that in Appendix 3 procuring and distributing reliable food supplies to those in need and effective communication were priorities. Teachers regularly checking on students well-being was vital. Staff of *Place 2 Be* (the counselling services)made phone calls to families already known to the service and, where appropriate, some who displayed anxiety during staff contact. All staff were contacted fortnightly by the Deputy Headteacher or senior leaders/line managers and contact information was recorded on a spreadsheet.

1. **What is this education leadership job all about? It’s learning, learning, learning.**

Most important in such complex situations is that the leader has a sharp focus on the school’s core purpose and in particular student learning. The learning of students in the school is paramount. This may well be infused with other fundamental values such as liberation, democracy, equity and justice depending on context (Shields 2010). To enable this, staff need to be active, effective learners in order to reinforce and model its significance. In the case study, in addition to well-being, academic learning was deemed to be important to avoid a widening of the attainment gap between children (Appendix 3). This would be a major problem in terms of on-going student motivation and more work for teachers on return to “real” school. Staff in one of the schools who had experience of using the Purple Mash programme trained those in the other school. Parents/carers could be involved in their child’s learning at home. Teachers tried to address the issue of lack of engagement of students, which may have originated with the child or the parent/ carer, in their phone calls. Where the issue might have signalled an emotional concern, this was communicated to the Inclusion Team. The school’s Speech and language therapist initially offered online sessions for her case children. A ‘social-distance library’ was been set up where children could come one at a time and choose age-appropriate books. This gained in popularity.

The monitoring of students’ engagement and learning was aided by establishing a *GoogleDocs* spreadsheet at each school to record all contact made with students. This was called the ‘Strategy List’. It included a page for each class which included student-level information on each contact, listing the date, type of contact (telephone, email, face-to-face etc.) and any relevant information gathered. An ‘etiquette’ was devised in the use of this (see Appendix 3). Staff were asked to complete an entry on the appropriate page each time they made contact with a student. This Strategy Lists were discussed in the respective Senior Leadership Team meetings and this evolved so that concerns were dealt with by the school inclusion teams.

1. **How can leaders do a better job in the future? Smart, fit principals with attitude.**
2. **Attitude**

The attitude that leaders take and develop in their roles is critical to their success. In more uncertain times ahead in this world, attitude becomes even more significant. This was especially so in this crisis and these included:

* **Bravery and courage.** This means leaders who are hard-headed, with a focus on making a positive difference regardless of unreasonable opposition and challenging circumstances. Shields (2010***)*** makes the point thatleaders have to demonstrate moral courage and to effect deep and equitable changes. Karsath (2004), a Norwegian writer,uses the term ***“***Robust” in that they can tackle challenges in a climate of uncertainty and a spirit of critique. Making a positive difference is being pre-occupied with the care of other human beings, long term transformational change and a co-operation and emulation rather than competition and denigration. The bravery and courage displayed by the case study leaders in dealing with a myriad of new strategic and procedural decisions was clearly evidenced in the appendices. When many schools were closing down to their communities, they were opening up.
* **Passion**. Without passion we will not easily sustain our commitment or convey our enthusiasm and commitment to others**.** Davies & Brighouse (2010) claim that passionate leadership is about energy, commitment, a belief that every child can learn and will learn, a concern with social justice and the optimism that we can make a difference. Such leaders, they say, articulate the vision, share their values, set examples and standards, are committed to the long term and they care and celebrate. A passion for the children and their communities runs through the actions of the leaders in this case study and is evidenced in the Appendices.
* **Hope.** Wrigley claims that teaching is a profession of hope and this is even more so leadership. *“The desire* *to improve education arises naturally from an engagement with the future”* (2003 p1). Throughout the months of the crisis the leaders displayed behaviours and competencies especially in the existing communication strategies that were built on and developed afresh. These were reassuring to teachers and families offering hope at a time of potential hopelessness.
* **Humility.** School leaders are public servants but not servile. Humble leaders are committed to positive change to manage the crisis but always remember that it is not about them. It is about the school community. The leadership revealed in the Appendices was not autocratic but was humble enough to draw on the expertise and local knowledge of Place 2 be, Family Liaison staff, the SENCO and local community groups. The experience has also been useful in highlighting the effectiveness of staff at all levels. For the leaders, these conditions exaggerated the competence and attitude of staff for good and for bad.
* **Persistence and Determination.** Transformative leaders need dogged determination. The leaders in the case study were, for example, intent on ensuring the basic need of food was there where it might not be left to market forces. In Appendix 3, the provision of food during school closure had been restricted to those families entitled to benefits-based free school meals. Unfortunately, this precluded those families recently impoverished directly or indirectly as a result of coronavirus or the lockdown. Both schools received regular deliveries of food from a charity called Magic Breakfast. School A has also had weekly deliveries from a grocer and the Felix Project. Additional supplies were organised by Café Spice Namaste, through whom, for example School A were given four 10kg bags of rice from Tilda. The leaders negotiated so that both schools received 15 meal packs a day from the Seafood School at Billingsgate Market. Both schools distributed food packages to those families deemed most in need. At School A this happened weekly; typically, 25 to 40 packs were collected from the school.

1. **Smartness**

Transformative leaders need to be smart in a number of ways. As the world becomes more complex there is need for leaders to:

* **understand and learn to lead in complexity, be comfortable with ambiguity and develop networking and connectivity**. Transformative leaders are aware of the complexity of their networks and how to use them successfully. Rhizomatic theory is a philosophical concept based on the multiplicities of the botanical rhizome. It is a helpful and interesting way to visualise the networks, some almost hidden, that were developed during the crisis by the case study leaders based in some cases on existing relationship and networks. The rhizome can be used as a metaphor to explain the ever-extending roots just under the surface that weave together in complex ways. (Deleuze G and Guattari F (2019) Sometimes the leaders engineer and facilitate these. Sometimes they develop on their own. We handle complexity all the time in intuitive ways and often fall foul to its consequences. For leaders, including those working in highly complex systems such as schools, much is not knowable. But we can be smarter. To be so, leaders (and managers) need to try to recognise and respond appropriately to the essential elements of complexity theory. This is a way of thinking and understanding the reality of our world. Leaders need to be able to deal with real life and all its rich complexity. Fullan (2004 p55) states that “leaders must resist the temptation to try “*to control; the uncontrollable*”. Scharmer (2007) maintains that this requires repetitionto be able to understand and work in situations of emerging complexity where:

• The solution to the problem may well be unknown

• The problem itself is frequently still unfolding and

• The key stakeholders are often not clear

Radford (2008)writes about a growing need to be comfortable with complexity and its resultant ambiguity and uncertainty and sees schools as places that by their nature verge on the edge of chaos. Smart leaders, who thrive in increasing complexity, have their fingers all over the political, economic, social and psychological pulses. They scan the horizon looking for the elements of complexity – points of bifurcation, connectivity, feedback, evidence for self-organisation and emergence, attractors and recursive symmetries, lock-in, feedback and post-event rationalisation. They exploit their benefits and try to reduce their dangers. In Appendix 3 there is evidence from the case study schools that the leaders were able to work comfortably with complexity to develop networks to help students and their families. For example, where the learning problem was about pupil access to devices, the schools had limited capacity to loan school equipment to pupils, but took steps to do so. This process took some time to implement. It involved identifying suitable equipment (it was found that School A had 7 devices available and School B had 14), reconfiguring the equipment to work off-premises, agreeing a rubric for recipients, writing a loan agreement application form and adapting an acceptable use policy, identifying appropriate recipients and arranging collection of the devices and signing of agreements. Financial support was also gained from a former school governor. The substance of the weekly zoom meetings between the leaders and Chair and vice-chair of Governors was relayed by the Chair to all Governors each week so that they were fully informed of key emerging issues.

* **be self-reflective and be adaptable to learn fast**. Twentieth century leaders need to be self-reflective. Scharmer (2007) suggests that leaders of organisations need to provide space for and facilitate a shared seeing and sense-making of the newly emerging patterns. He calls this “*co-sensing*”. This requires leaders at all levels to establish places of deep reflection (“*co-presencing*”). This is difficult in the busy life of school leaders but, he would maintain, essential. He also suggests that we need places and infrastructures for hands-on prototyping of new forms of operating in order to explore the future by *“co-creating*”. In an increasingly complex world leaders need to create opportunities for shared observation and reflection to which one might add experimentation. Without this, Scharmer argues, we will continue to have schools that prevent our children from unfolding their capacity for deeper learning as we will be relying on past experiences to solve new, previously inexperienced problems. His views became even more true in the crisis and the fact that the senior leaders in the case study were in regular frequent contact with the whole community and especially with each other. Importantly this included challenging each other’s decisions leading to better decisions. A weekly Zoom meeting with the Chair and vice-chair of Governors designed to support and challenge aided this reflection and adaptability. Moreover, although it is one Federation, it is 2 schools, so policies had to be tailored to suit local circumstances
* **be critical and cultivate a culture of healthy scepticism**Leaders who can work with complexity and ambiguity do not unquestioningly accept the status quo but are ever watchful.Wheatley (2007) explains that such watchfulness is accomplished by developing a set of questions that leaders ask regularly and with discipline. Quantz, Rogers and Dantley (1991) argue that transformative leadership “*requires a language of critique and possibility*” (p105) and “*a transformative leader must introduce the mechanisms necessary for various groups to begin conversations around issues of emancipation and domination*” p112). In the same vein, Shields (2010 p 58) maintains that transformative leaders, “*in addition to the more traditional aspects of their work (creating budgets, overseeing instruction, achieving accountability etc.) need to balance both critique and promise and challenge inappropriate uses of power and privilege”.* Karsath (2004) calls this*Reflekterende where s*uch leaders encourage critique and scepticism. The central and local government, although well intentioned, were, at times, unhelpful in their decision-making and advice. The leaders in the Federation had to cope with this in a constantly changing political and policy landscape maintaining a clear sighting on their purpose- great education for all children supported by teachers, parents and the community.
* **be realistic and not naive e.g. about power.** The crisis was a high-risk situation and the leaders in the Federation understood their liabilities in legal terms. They had to comply with new laws but where there was discretion, e.g. on who and how children returned to school, then they were able to skilfully and creatively manage the situation to give maximum benefit to children and their families.

1. **Fitness for Purpose**

In this turbulent education pandemic sea, leaders needed to ensure they were fit in all senses of the word.Leadership is often physically, emotionally and intellectually exhausting as a result.

* **proper selfishness**. To be effective in the real world of school complexity requires leaders to place the oxygen mask over their own faces before applying them to others on the education flight. Handy (1997) calls this “*proper selfishness*”. In the Federation the leaders state that the co-leadership model of the Executive and School Leaders working in a genuinely shared way meant there was strong mutual support. They were able to support each other through the highs and the lows and apply the oxygen mask to each other. A burnt out leader is not just of no use but is also potentially damaging to others. If the pilot runs out of oxygen, then the plane will crash.
* **well-being.** Well-being and achieving a balance between the professional and personal entail a deliberate personal strategy to ensure that all aspects of a fulfilling life are met. It is essential that leaders invest time in their own personal development and growth. *“. . . high levels of wellbeing mean that we are more able to respond to difficult circumstances, to innovate and constructively engage with other people and the world around us. As well as representing a highly effective way of bringing about good outcomes in many different areas of our lives, there is also a strong case for regarding wellbeing as an ultimate goal of human endeavour.”* (www.nationalaccountsofwellbeing.org p1). The well-being of leaders so that they can maintain a sense of proportion and balance is imperative when they are dealing with others for whom mental health concerns were growing. The weekly zoom meetings with the Chair and vice-chair of Governors were felt to be valuable by the leaders to gain a sense of proportion. The close working relationship between the two leaders was felt to be of paramount importance in relation to each of their well- being.

* **developing resilience and an inner strength.** Resilience is increasingly seen as a key part of an effective leader’s make-up in the twenty first century (Arond Thomas 2004). Resilience is strength of character, adaptability, buoyancy, flexibility and the ability to bounce back.It is very much linked with the former point about learning quickly from poor decisions. Through the trials and tribulations of leadership resilience can be developed(Ackermann al 2002).The journey can make one a better leader (Campbell 2008). Resilient leaders have realistic goals in their lives. They are thoughtful rather than impulsive and they are good communicators. They feel positive about themselves and others for whom they care. They are energetic optimists. They take control of their own minds and lives. They develop effective support networks which they use and contribute to. They have a sense of humour. An important issue in the crisis was ‘*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?’* - who cares for the carers? Legally that is the role of governors in English education and the weekly Zoom meetings also played some part in this.

Albert Camus’s advice in “*An Appeal to Doctors Fighting the Plague*” is perhaps none more fitting for some school leaders and teachers than “*There is nothing better than to drink a reasonable amount of wine to lessen, somewhat, the dismay that will engulf you when facing the city in the grips of the plague”*. It is not suggested as a sure-fire recipe to ensure fitness for purpose in a crisis.

Figure 1 shows the main strategic areas developed by the leaders during the pandemic crisis.

**Figure 1: TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP IN CASE STUDY SCHOOL FEDERATION**

**3:CONCLUSION**

Many other schools displayed outstanding leadership during the Covid-19 crisis, though not all. And it is not over yet (at the time of writing July 2020) as until a vaccine is found, further local or national infections may occur.

So what has been learnt from the crisis thus far? It is possible to identify three big potential areas of learning all of which raise issues about the scale and quality of relationships.

Jason Cowley, the editor of the *New Statesman*, wrote 3 April 2020 that at a macro level it will accelerate trends already in play (economic, psychological, health, state)

1. the fragmentation of globalisation
2. the return of the protective state
3. the hardening of national borders and restrictions of free movement
4. the necessity of more resilient supply lines
5. the need for greater investment in public services and the public realm.

If so, these will, and should, all profoundly shape education now and in the future. In the analogy of when a frog is dropped into cold water and heated up slowly it will cook to death. When thrown into boiling water it will jump out and survive. (readers please do not try this at home)

**1 The shock of the pandemic should spur us all into action to develop a more effective education system for children to equip them for a very different future.** The future truly is not what it used to be. Or will we, like the frog, just be content to boil?

**2 The pandemic experience should challenge and change our accepted wisdom of leadership and move us to a more transformative community-minded approach as outlined in this article and in this case stud.** Biesta (2013) helpfully distinguishes between the current responsive management and the need for responsible in a global networked society. A responsive approach is where education simply adapts to the demands of a global networked society. A responsible approach demands a more critical position *“vis-a-vis the different manifestations and demands of such a society” (*p733). He argues for the latter from school leaders on the grounds that education should always be understood as more than just a function of existing social and societal orders because it comes with a duty to resist. This is inherently both educational and democratic.

**3 We must prioritise the training of current and future school leaders to be effective in the “new normal” and beyond.** We know a great deal about how adults and especially leaders learn. We need to insist that leaders are properly trained to lead transformatively. Using the criteria in this chapter would be one way. (Precey R (2015): “*Preparing School Leaders for this: Developing Twenty First Century Leaders“*)

Values awareness, with moral purpose, pedagogical focus, attitude, smartness and fitness for purpose are then some the main elements of successful leadership in the twenty first century. Leadership matters. Leadership that values people matters. As the twentiy-first century rolls on with its uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity, the development of leaders who value people matters. Such leaders must be supported to develop to be prepared and able to stride into the twenty-first century mist with integrity, intelligence, passion, bravery, hope and humility. In this way they can try their best to ensure that a child born today can have a bright future, as a result of the education they will provide. The pandemic has accelerated the need to change and this case study reveals and honours exceptional leadership.

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**APPENDICES: ON-GOING NOTES FROM EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER**

**Appendix 1: Measure taken prior to the decision to close schools**

* Off-site trips using public transport cancelled or postponed
* External visitors to school, such as reading partners cancelled or postponed.
* Children instructed on the importance of washing their hands and sneezing into their elbows.
* Children asked to bring in personal water bottles.
* Boxes of tissues put in classrooms.
* Rigorous hand-washing regime before and after lunch.
* Additional cleaning of door handles and push plates.
* Premises staff instructed to check and fill soap dispensers regularly.

**Appendix 2: Preparations for school closure**

* The Strategy spreadsheet to monitor pupil wellbeing and engagement was created.
* Purple Mash was set up. This is a cross-curricular website for nursery and primary school children. It enables teachers to set work remotely and children to complete it at home. Teachers can leave verbal and written instructions and comments, which children can reply to, allowing a dialogue between pupil and teacher. Purple Mash contains over 25 open-ended tools and educational games that let teachers deliver lessons, no matter what subject. There is everything from painting and game design to mind-mapping and spreadsheets. There are hundreds of scaffolded writing templates, on subjects from English and history to art and science.
* Creation of ‘parents@’ email addresses
* Updating of parent contact details (mobile and email addresses)
* Production of list of pupils considered eligible to continue to attend school in line with Government guidance (those deemed to be vulnerable, or with Education Health Care Plans or children of Key worker - those who have to work to keep essential services running e.g. health care workers)
* Friday assembly set out coronavirus social story (with prayer and blessing by priest linked to the Federation).
* School Business Continuity Plans updated. Contingency plans for parents and staff produced.
* Meeting with all staff to inform them of the situation. Staff were expected to be available for work unless, due to their own or a close family member’s high risk, they felt that they should not be included.
* Staff rota drawn up and shared.

**Appendix 3: School Closure**

**1. Learning**

*1.1 In school Learning*

Both schools opened on Monday 23rd March. Initially, School A had two children, brothers and School B had four children.

Government guidance included no expectations around educational provision, instead referring to ‘childcare’. Provision at school included fitness, art, computing, games and an opportunity to work on Purple Mash.

Government guidance stated that, where possible, children should be safely cared for at home to limit the chance of the virus spreading. Therefore, the Executive Headteacher (EHT) spoke to the mother of the two brothers at School A who agreed to keep them at home. School A was then closed. Families of children on the vulnerable list at both schools were contacted again on 14th April and 8th May to enquire whether they now required a place at school.

School B has remained open throughout. Attendance has varied on a daily basis, but gradually built up in both schools until school closed for the summer holidays especially after July 4th.

*1.2 Online Learning*

School B was already using the Purple Mash online learning package which enabled work to be set by curriculum subject and by year group. It also allowed teacher-pupil communication School A’s teachers had attended training on this, at School B, earlier in the year and so the decision was taken to set up an account for School X too. Staff were given a quick refresher of the system on Thursday 19th March. It was estimated that, at first, the participation rate was about 50 to 60%. This slowly crept up after phone calls and follow ups, but dipped again over the Easter holiday.

The main barriers to learning fell into two categories:

1. technology – this might have been a lack of appropriate devices (laptops, tablets etc.) or household connectivity problems.

One solution was for teachers to provide hard copy packs of worksheets.

Where the problem was about pupil access to devices, the schools had limited capacity to loan school equipment to pupils, but took steps to do so. This process took some time to implement. It involved identifying suitable equipment (it was found that School A had 7 devices available and School B had 14), reconfiguring the equipment to work off-premises, agreeing a rubric for recipients, writing a loan agreement application form and adapting an acceptable use policy, identifying appropriate recipients and arranging collection of the devices and signing of agreements.

1. lack of engagement – this may have originated with the child or the parent/ carer. Teachers tried to address this in their phone calls. Where the issue might have signalled an emotional concern, this was communicated to the Inclusion Team

The school’s Speech and language therapist initially offered online sessions for her case children. However, due to the safeguarding requirements for remote teaching this had to ne ceased.

*1.3 Offline Learning*

Offline learning, in the form of worksheets that can be completed away from an electronic device, were provided by teachers for, those who cannot access online learning and for some lower achievers/ Special Education Needs pupils, who cannot access the level work set. Sensory equipment was provided for some ASD pupils.

In addition, teachers set weekly ‘challenges’ for all children that get them away from screens.

*1.4 Other*

At ‘social-distance library’ has been set up where children could come one at a time and choose age-appropriate books. This gained in popularity.

**2. Communication**

A variety of different instruments have enabled the school to communicate with its stakeholders to a significant extent.

*2.1 Text*

This was usually used to signpost families and or staff to an incoming email or YouTube video. Texts were sent in bulk, up to 160 characters, using the ‘Teachers2parents’ system. This facility had been used regularly prior to the school closure.

*2.2 Email*

2.2i. Teachers2parents also has an email facility. Prior to the shutdown, the administrative staff took steps to update and verify the parental email database, which had been incomplete. This email system allowed documents, such as the newsletter, to be attached for distribution.

2.2ii. The school uses London Grid for Learning (LGfL) ‘Staffmail’ for all staff. This is managed through Outlook with groups set up for SLT, Governors and other significant groups.

2.2iii. A dedicated email address was established specifically for parents/ carers to contact the school (parents@...). Parents were encouraged to use this as their first point of communication as the school phone lines were unlikely to be monitored regularly and staff needed to ring fence their individual mail addresses for ‘normal’ business. The parents@ email address could be accessed by Senior Leadership Team and administrative staff.

Two measures were introduced to manage this facility:

* parents/ carers were asked to use the subject line to define the content, e.g. free school meals vouchers, or to provide the name of a specific member of staff to whom the email is addressed.
* Inbox subfolders were created to differentiate between subject categories

The parents@ account was used extensively for questions about Free School Meals vouchers, help with technological problems, general enquiries and to submit work to teachers.

*2.3 Telephone*

Administrative staff were not expected to attend school each day therefore the school phone lines were not prioritised. However, ‘phone calls did feature in a number of ways:

* Fortnightly phone calls were made to all pupils by teachers.
* Wellbeing check-ups by Place2be (P2B - a counselling service bought in by the Federation), School project manager, Deputy Headteacher & Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO)
* Calls to Special Education Needs families by SENCo

To avoid sharing private numbers, staff were advised to either come into school to use the school phone or use the 1471 facility to hide their number.

The EHT/ Executive head of schools (EHoS) advised staff who used their own phone, that the school would reimburse any costs incurred.

*2.4 YouTube*

The schools set up YouTube channels to provide content for pupils and families to feel connected with the school. This facility was primarily used for school assemblies, but additional content also made its way onto the YouTube channels.

*2.5 Newsletter*

School B continued to provide fortnightly newsletters. School A, where newsletters were previously provided half termly, moved to a fortnightly distribution. The newsletters focused on news about children’s work, ideas for online and offline learning, wellbeing advice from P2B and information on where to get support from the local authority and other agencies.

*2.6 Twitter*

The schools’ Twitter feeds continued to provide school news along with retweets of children’s activities at home.

*2.7 Website*

The schools’ websites had been due to be upgraded, with the previous hosting company withdrawing support. This change was beset by delays from the new host company. The schools tried to keep their information provided up to date. The new websites went live before the end of May.

*2.8 Other*

Purple Mash – teachers were able to send personalised messages to pupils and pupils are able to respond.

Zoom – this software was used to facilitate SLT meetings, staff meetings and will be used for the governing body meeting on Thursday 14th. The SENCo arranged staff training, from the local authority language support team via Zoom, although the well-publicised security concerns around Zoom were raised by a member of staff. By setting up its own password-controlled account, these concerns were minimised, but not eliminated. Where practicable, the EHT/ EHoS allowed staff to use the school’s equipment for this purpose so that there was no risk to their personal devices.

WhatsApp – Initially Zoom was blocked on the school web filter system. Therefore, the EHT and EHoS’s meetings with the Chair and Vice-chair of Governors were held on WhatsApp.

**3. Food**

The provision of food during school closure has been restricted to those families entitled to benefits-based free school meals. Unfortunately, precluded those families recently impoverished, including directly or indirectly as a result of coronavirus or the lockdown.

*3.1. Local authority (LA)*

The LA, who provide our school meals service were quick to act instructing their staff to attend school to provide meals for those children in school.

When School A closed, the LA offered to provide food packs or the FSM children. This offer was taken up and the food was packaged and distributed by school staff.

*3.2. Government – food vouchers*

A number of schools were already offering their own vouchers, which they had purchased from stores. Some parents were asking the schools A and B for vouchers. Therefore, when the scheme was announced, using a company the schools had registered, both schools immediately and our admin team began the process of uploading eligible parent details.

The system was beset by problems, some due to incorrect email addresses provided to the schools, but mostly of as technological nature because the company’s system was clearly unable to cope with the volume of traffic. Visitors to the site could be waiting for several hours for data to upload or to register a query. The site was closed down over the first weekend which led to some improvement. The system still caused problems but most families were eventually able to access and spend their vouchers.

3.3. Other

Both schools received regular deliveries of food from a charity called Magic Breakfast.

School A has also had weekly deliveries from a Grocer and the Felix Project supplemented at times by Café Spice Namaste, through whom, for example School A were given four 10kg bags of rice from Tilda.

Both schools received 15 meal packs a day from the Seafood School at Billingsgate Market.

Both schools distributed food packages to those families deemed most in need. At School A this happened weekly; typically, 25 to 40 packs were collected from the school. Where possible food was also given to families not registered as FSM, but known to be in need. School A had a food drop day on certain days inviting FSM families in to collect food boxes and books.

**4. Monitoring**

A GoogleDocs spreadsheet was created at each school to record all contact made with pupils. This was called the ‘Strategy List’. This included a page for each class which included pupil-level information on each contact, listing the date, type of contact (telephone, email, face-to-face etc.) and any relevant information gathered. The following ‘etiquette’ was devised:

1. Always **insert a new row** for any new information, e.g. if two phone calls had been made these should appear on separate rows. Therefore, the number of rows next to a child's name should indicate the number of contacts we have had with that child.
2. There should be just **one Red-Amber-Green (RAG) rating** for each child. This should appear on the line beside their name and represents their current status. Subsequent rows should not contain any RAG ratings.
3. RAG ratings are as follows:
   1. Green = All seems to be OK – no immediate action
   2. Amber = possible risk – monitor (e.g., call back in a week)
   3. Red = Concern – requires action (e.g., P2B, SEN, safeguarding)
4. Mark as **'red'** any child who had not yet been contacted.
5. Mark as **'amber'** any child who was not using Purple Mash - unless the teacher was satisfied that they were completing an appropriate programme of work (mention what this is in comments).
6. If a child was not completing work, teachers should try to get an explanation for this, e.g. lack of devices, lack of connectivity, other etc.

Staff were asked to complete an entry on the appropriate page each time they made contact with a pupil.

The Strategy Lists were discussed in the respective SLT meetings; this evolved so that concerns were dealt with by the school inclusion teams.

**5. Wellbeing**

*5. 1 Pupils*

Initially teachers were asked to check on student’s wellbeing in their fortnightly calls. On review it was felt that, where there were concerns about pupil wellbeing, this be separated from the general catch-up conversation and referred to the inclusion team for follow up.

*5.2 Parents/ Carers*

P2B SPMs made phone calls to families already known to the service and, where appropriate, some who displayed anxiety during staff contact. These families might have been referred directly by a member of staff or through the Inclusion team’s audit of the Strategy List.

*5.3 Staff*

All staff were contacted fortnightly by the DHT or senior leaders/ line managers. Contact information was recorded on a spreadsheet.

School B had its first virtual staff meeting on Friday 8th May. School A had theirs scheduled for Friday 15th.

Those School B staff not isolating had occasional face-to-face contact when on duty at school. Some School A staff had face-to-face contact when organising food distribution. We were aware that staff had also been in contact with each other.

Staff on duty in school were provided with a hot meal and were able to leave when the last child has been collected at 3:30 pm.

**5. Government announcement**

On 11th May, the government announced that schools could reopen on 1st June for pupils in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. Government guidance was published; SLTs will worked through this and union advice to produce a plan for the return to school.

**6. Safeguarding**

An annex to Safeguarding Policy was written and received governor approval via email.

Advice on online safety at home was shared with parents/ carers through the school newsletters.

**7. GDPR (General Data Protection)**

The school received advice on GDPR issues from its Data Protection Officer and the LDBS Head of Data protection. LDBS is the **London Diocesan Board for Schools**. It is a Christian organisation committed to supporting and nurturing 156 Church of England Schools in London. Schools A and B are both Church of England schools.