

## Quick Information Guides for Parents

### **SNAPshot No 14**

### **Learning During and After Lockdown**

## A Global Pandemic

The global pandemic caused considerable disruption to education across the globe. Data released by UNICEF in March 2021 suggested that some schools have been closed for a year due to COVID-19 lockdowns and as such 168 million children globally had been out of school. While schools in Scotland were not closed for a year, young people did find themselves at home for considerable periods of time between March 2020 and April 2021. This situation caused challenges for young people, teachers, and parents alike.

## Learning At Home

### Young People

Schools are places where young people meet and socialise as well as learn. For some they offer a place of stability and security in an otherwise chaotic life. Being unable to attend school meant that for many young people they felt isolated and alone. We interviewed highly able young people, all of whom were at primary school, and asked them about their experiences of lockdown learning. The young people we spoke to overwhelmingly agreed that the thing they had missed most was their friends. Some of the young people had met their friends via platforms such as Zoom, and this had helped them to maintain some kind of friendship, but others reported only speaking with their relatives. They described their happiness at being able to return to school and meet up in person even although schools were operating a “bubble system” because of ongoing restrictions.

When asked about learning they often recounted a range of activities they had engaged in, some activities had been set by the school and others had been sourced by their parents. They reported enjoying some of the project and activity work that had been set and some were keen to show us the additional work they had done having used the school activity as a springboard. They generally reported the work as being quite straightforward and none reported finding the work particularly challenging.

## Teachers

Teachers found themselves having to pivot to online learning in a very short space of time. While schools had lesson plans in place for face-to-face teaching, translating that into an online environment was not straightforward. Issues of IT competency and access to equipment had to be negotiated. Other issues for some staff included having to adjust to working from home and to support family members with lockdown learning.

Notwithstanding these issues, significant work was developed across the two periods of lockdown with lessons from the first lockdown informing planning and provision during the second lockdown.

The teachers we spoke to recounted their concern for the young people in their care. This concern centred around three areas:

1. The health and well-being and general welfare of learners
2. How to take account of the learning that had occurred outside of the planned learning by the school once young people returned to school
3. How to ensure a focus on learning and progression in learning whilst addressing the gap in learning that had occurred for some.

## Parents

The parents of the highly able learners that we spoke to all found home learning to be a challenge. Challenges included:

- \* disruption by other family members
- \* lack of physical space
- \* supporting their child/children whilst keeping their own work on track
- \* finding suitably challenging learning experiences, particularly when the activities provided by school were “not enough”

The parents were very sympathetic to staff and acknowledged the challenges that schools had faced in moving learning online. They found the catch-up sessions the young people with teachers very helpful in keeping contact with the class and in supporting their emotional well-being. They appreciated the various home/school communication links that were developed and that allowed the parents to feed back their experiences and thoughts to the school. Parents said that the periods of home learning had allowed them to see the kinds of things that their children were learning in school. This insight also allowed them to identify mismatches between what they knew their child could do and what was on offer from the school. Some parents reported spending considerable time and, sometimes, money on supplementing the learning on offer. Some developed alternative curriculums and others registered their child and joined activities online.

## Moving Forward

As with governments and international organisations across the world, the Scottish Government is rightly concerned about young people who missed out on learning and could be deemed to have “fallen behind”. Schools are prioritising literacy, numeracy and health and well-being in an endeavour to address this “gap”. However, for the group of learners

discussed in this leaflet questions arise in relation to this approach. With whom are the young people catching up? For those young people returning to school whose learning has gone beyond that expected by the school, are they to “tread water” until the others “catch up”? For the learners who were already “ahead” at the start of lockdown, are they to spend further time repeating work instead of moving onto new concepts? We have to acknowledge that some highly able learners thrived because they were not at school. They will return to the classroom with an even greater gap between them and their peers.

The current Education Secretary announced additional funding for the Scottish Attainment Challenge to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. She said,

*“Our priority is to ensure that all our children and young people have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential in school and beyond”.*

Thinking about highly able learners has to be an integral part of the planning that schools put in place in response to this funding and to recovery from COVID-19.

While there are undoubtedly particular issues related to poverty, there are wider issues that go beyond this and challenge schools to consider how they support their highly able learners.

Schools should consider:

- ✿ finding out what young people already know so as to avoid over-learning or re-teaching knowledge
- ✿ having undertaken the pre-assessment task above, making provision for those highly able learners who require new content which offers opportunities for in-depth exploration. Remember that this might include opportunities to learn with intellectual peers who may be chronologically older than them

- ✿ those highly able learners who may require additional social and emotional support due to heightened sensitivities. Not all highly able learners will have thrived during lockdown
- ✿ using the return to school as an opportunity to develop and strengthen home/school partnerships. Sharing information in both directions will be important if young people are to receive appropriate support