



School Staff Survey during School Closures for COVID19

Initial Analysis

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Dr Teresa Regan & Dr Paula Muir

Catalyst Psychology Community Interest Company
Address for correspondence: teresa@catalystpsych.co.uk

Additional data analysis undertaken by:

Naomi Boswell, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Manchester
Emma Forshaw, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Manchester
Sarah Lomax, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Manchester
Ruby Noble, Assistant Psychologist, Catalyst Psychology
Sarah Oates, Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Manchester
Lucy Thompson, Assistant Psychologist, Catalyst Psychology
Dr Rebecca Wright, Educational Psychologist, Catalyst Psychology

Introduction

This staff survey was undertaken primarily to inform the work of our organisation (Catalyst Psychology CIC) during the summer term 2020. We wanted to identify how school staff were feeling and what their priorities were in terms of the needs of staff and pupils during the COVID19 school closures. The level of engagement with the survey was surprising in terms of the speed and number of responses, the length and content of responses, and the apparent sense that school staff welcomed this opportunity to explain how they felt: *“Thank you for this opportunity to share thoughts and concerns”*. This initial report is based on analysis of 78 responses received within the first 72 hours of circulation of the survey.

Methodology

The survey was designed by the second author, piloted with an opportunity sample of (3) teachers and adjusted in the light of the pilot responses. Adjustments were made to the wording of questions for clarity and to the scoring system of the Likert scale.

The survey was distributed to school contacts (Headteacher and SENCO) in 50 schools, all within the City of Manchester, who commission services from Catalyst via annual contracts. The survey was included in a newsletter sent to schools on the first day of the school term, just after the Easter holidays (Monday 20th April). School contacts were encouraged to circulate the questionnaire to their school teams: *“If you can encourage wide completion it will help inform our future planning.”* A letter was attached for school staff with a link to the survey, provided as a Google Form (see Appendix).

Staff completed the survey online through the link to the Google Form. Responses received within the first 72 hours were saved into a spreadsheet. The first author coded the staff roles to indicate: Teacher (T); Support/Teaching Assistant (SA); Leadership role (L) and Other role (OR). The leadership code was assigned to any role that implied leadership responsibilities in relation to teaching staff, e.g. SENCO/Phase Leader/Inclusion Lead. Other roles (OR) included Business manager/Admin manager/Catering manager.

Responses came from 18 primary schools, 3 secondary schools and 2 other educational settings.

Initial data analysis was undertaken over 2 days by 8 volunteers, comprising Catalyst team members plus trainee educational psychologists (TEPs) from the University of Manchester. As most responses involved qualitative data, coding involved thematic analysis of responses. Research tasks were undertaken on a voluntary basis as this was in addition to normal duties for Catalyst team members and in addition to university/placement requirements for TEPs. The researchers worked in pairs. Each pair was asked to code the responses to two linked questions (e.g. how did you feel when schools closed/how do you feel now). Researchers were asked to identify and record themes that met the following criteria: A Themes (significant to at least 8 out of 10 responses); B Themes (significant to at least 5 out of 10 responses); C Themes (relevant to at least 3 out of 10 responses).

Each question was coded separately by each researcher in the pair, then the paired researchers ‘met’ virtually to compare responses and agree on an overall set of themes for their questions. Responses for each question were entered into a standard table template and returned to the first author.

As we lacked the research capacity to undertake analysis of all data at this point, the questions that gained the most responses and those considered most relevant to informing actions at this stage were selected. On this basis, the following questions were not included in the initial data analysis: Q. 3,4,7,9,12,14 and 15.

Question 1 and Question 2

Q1: How did you feel when you heard schools were closing on March 20th?
Answers on a 1 – 5 scale (1 = very happy, 5 = very unhappy)

Can you think of any words to describe how this felt and why?

Q2: How do you feel now?

Answers on a 1 – 5 scale (1 = very happy, 5 = very unhappy)

If you can, please tell us why you feel like this

Total Number of respondents:	78			
Segmented:	L: 27	T: 21	SA: 25	OR: 5

Scaling

	1 (very happy)	2	3	4	5 (very unhappy)
Q1	1	3	27	25	22
Q2	1	16	36	16	8

Themes (Q1 & Q2)

The researchers did not find any themes that met the threshold for 8/10 or 5/10 responses. One theme (“uncertainty”) met the threshold for at least 3/10 of responses to Q1.

Theme	n.	examples
Uncertainty	Q1 n=26	<i>“Confused, anxious and uncertain, because I was unsure and still am, about how long schools would be closed.”</i>
	Q2 n=13	<i>“There is still a lot of uncertainty as to when lockdown will end so I'm finding that hard. There is also a cloud of dread hanging over my head for the return as it will be a big uphill climb to reintroduce routines, structure and plug gaps in learning”</i>
Worry about pupils	Q1 n=19	<i>“I was mostly worried about the children and (how) scared they must have been about it all.”</i>

	Q2 n=9	<i>"I still feel anxious about what will happen and children who are not in school."</i>
Relationships (disrupted)	Q1 n=13	<i>"I also felt a lot of sadness as there is a distinct possibility that I won't be teaching my class again and thinking about how lonely some of our staff and children may feel during lockdown."</i>
	Q2 n=10	<i>"Also I really miss my class and want to see them again soon."</i>
Relief	Q1 n=12	<i>"Relieved love my job but felt at risk"</i>
	Q2 n=3	<i>"feel safer"</i>
Conflicting feelings	Q1 n=10	<i>"I felt sad and upset because the feeling of uncertain, in the mean time, I also felt happy because it seems a right decision to avoid the risk for students and staff."</i>
	Q2 n=5	<i>"Glad schools aren't open due to safety but also concerned for pupils, their learning and environment at home"</i>
Acceptance	Q1 n=8	<i>"Was expecting it to happen with everything that was going on"</i>
	Q2 n=7	<i>"Still feel concerned for some of the families and children but having seen the figures relating to Covid-19 understand why the government have put the measures in place."</i>
Change in role/identity	Q1 n=4	<i>The change from being a busy, purposeful school to one where staff and children were now working remotely was stressful.</i>
	Q2 n=13	<i>Fear of not completing all work tasks set for home. So much to complete and not very confident with ICT skills.</i>

Question 5

While school is closed what are your main concerns for your pupils?

Total Number of respondents:	76			
Segmented:	L: 27	T:21	SA: 24	OR:4
A Themes	Emotional wellbeing	<i>'Their wellbeing first and their education second'</i> <i>'Children picking up on adult conversations concerning the environment'</i>		
	Learning/education entitlement	<i>'Those children who are regularly working and those who are not. The ability gap getting wider'.</i>		

		<i>'Lack of mental stimulation and routine, lack of learning or 'too much' rote or sit down learning'</i>
	Health and Safety (Safeguarding)	<i>'Some children may be having a hard time at home, particularly the vulnerable ones'</i> <i>'The safety of some in their home environment'</i> <i>'being in abusive households, not being given structure and routine'</i>
	Care and child welfare	<i>'Are they happy, safe and supported'</i> <i>'Staying safe, well, healthy, emotionally stable, feeling safe'</i>
B Themes	Physical Health	<i>Access to healthy food for pupils</i> <i>I worry about children not getting enough food, exercise and general stimulation. I feel sorry for the children who don't have a garden</i>
	Social Connections	<i>'that they are isolated from their friends and not stimulated enough'</i> <i>'they are missing their friends and may be anxious because of the situation'</i>
C Themes	Transitions	<i>'how they will find transitioning back to school once we open after a long break'</i> <i>'Year 6 students are missing out on their transition to high school and support that usually takes place in primary school around this time'</i>
	Adherence to government advice	<i>'Ensuring that they stay safe, follow the isolation rules and access some education'</i>
	Communication (dojo's)*	<i>'Only a few have been in contact via Dojo'.</i>

Summary of staff concerns for pupils whilst schools are closed (Q5)

Many respondents referred to multiple concerns within their response to question 5.

Within the data, emotional wellbeing and learning/education entitlement emerged as the most significant themes with 43% of respondents referring to these. There was consideration of factors which can impact on this such as lack of routine, exercise, social interaction. One participant referred to children overhearing adult conversations.

The concerns about education referred to missed education; a few members of staff on senior leadership teams did express a concern about the type of learning activities children were engaging, for example concerns about too much rote learning taking place.

Health/safety and child welfare also emerged as a significant theme. This referred predominately to children’s general wellbeing and happiness. Within this, some staff expressed safeguarding concerns for children who are vulnerable to abuse.

Respondents also expressed concerns about children’s social interactions, the impact of social isolation and the importance of maintaining social connections with their friends.

There was an expressed concern that children from vulnerable families would not have their basic needs being met; this is reflected in concerns around children having access to outdoor spaces in which they can exercise and healthy meals.

Although only one respondent referred to communication with home, it was felt to be significant to capture and record this.

Question 6

While school is closed what are your main concerns for parents and families of your pupils?

Total Number of respondents:	73			
Segmented:	L: 26	T:22	SA: 22	OR:4
B Themes (significant to at least 5 out of 10 responses)	The impact of Covid-19 on families’ wellbeing and mental health		<i>‘...mental health, bereavement and loss’</i> <i>“They will find it overwhelming and won't be able to manage everything.”</i> <i>‘Parents with known mental health needs are a particular concern’</i>	
C Themes (relevant to at least 3 out of 10 responses)	Managing home schooling with other responsibilities (e.g. care and work)		<i>‘I hope parents are able to juggle learning at home and working from home’</i>	

		<i>'How they are managing to work from home, look after young children, and do home schooling'</i>
	Financial impact (including providing food)	<i>"Less/no income to feed children" "Loss of jobs and financial pressure" "Struggle to consistently provide balance meals"</i>

Summary (Q6)

Across all roles the main theme was concern over the impact of COVID-19 on families' wellbeing and mental health. This theme linked to the further C themes (managing home schooling with other responsibilities, and financial impact).

Participants that gave further information about their thoughts on how mental health might be impacted gave reasons such as financial worry, managing home learning, and the strain of isolation on relationships within the home. A small number of participants raised increased concerns over safeguarding and domestic violence.

Participants highlighted concerns over how families would manage home schooling, with concerns that parents may not have the time, resources or abilities to support learning at home. Many posited that parents would find it difficult to manage if they are working from home and caring for other children. One participant stated that home schooling should not be a priority for parents and that taking care of their children's and their own wellbeing was more important.

Participants expressed concerns over the financial impact of the outbreak. Concerns over unemployment and financial difficulties were linked to a reduced capacity to provide children with meals.

A number of participants (11) raised concerns over a lack of access to support, including for children with SEND during the crisis.

Question 8

While school is closed what are your main concerns for your staff?
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Total Number of respondents:	64			
Segmented:	L: 27	T:16	SA:17	OR: 4
A Themes (significant to at least 8 out of 10 responses)	Physical and mental health and wellbeing		<i>"Remaining healthy both mentally and physically", "Staff mental health and wellbeing"</i>	

Summary (Q8)

From the data we were able to identify one significant theme in relation to concerns for staff, 'Physical and mental health and wellbeing'. Staff members across all roles identified this as a primary concern and stated that they were worried others would struggle to remain healthy. They also expressed particular concern over individual staff members that might be self-isolating or lived alone and how this may impact upon their mental wellbeing.

There were also four other themes shown in the data; 'Keeping safe', 'Working from home whilst having caring responsibilities', 'Safety when travelling to and working in school' and 'The impact of COVID-19 on families', however these themes were not relevant to enough respondents to meet the required thresholds.

Question 10

Preparing for schools to open again, what are your main concerns for your pupils and what do you think could help?

Total Number of respondents:	75			
Segmented:	L: 27	T:21	SA: 22	OR:5
A Themes	Readjusting/re-integrating into school (47%)	<i>Transitioning pupils back into school and strategies for helping them cope with school again.</i>		
	Emotional wellbeing (particularly anxiety) 23%	<i>I am worried about any anxiety they may feel.</i>		
	Learning (catching up, regression and filling in gaps) 23%	<i>learning - what have they remembered i.e. what has stuck in their long term memory and where do staff start teaching from.</i>		
B Themes	Implementing physical distancing (pupils maintaining)17%	<i>Getting children back into a good routine</i>		
	Interventions (support for children curriculum adaptations) 17%	<i>I feel there will need to be focus initially on planning some reflection activities, growth mind set activities, raising confidence. Interventions will need to be planned for identified children.</i>		
	Logistics and operational (17%)	<i>Large numbers of children in small classrooms. Maybe a few families at a time gradually</i>		
	Safety and hygiene 13%	<i>My main concerns are making sure it is safe to go back</i>		
C Themes	Resilience 8%	<i>... and strategies for helping them cope with school again.</i>		

	Friendships/Relationships 8%	<i>Socialising again after so long.</i>
	Transition 8%	<i>Transition arrangements for children moving to high school as it is likely that there will not be a length period of preparation.</i>
	Timing/preparation 9%	<i>A specific date to give us time to get the classrooms ready and lessons planned</i>

Summary of staff concerns for pupils when schools reopen (Q10)

The majority of school staff were concerned about children re-adjusting to the school expectations, routines and structure after the prolonged period away from school. There were reported concerns about emotional wellbeing, particularly children's anxiety about catching COVID19. In relation to learning, staff raised concerns about children catching up with the curriculum but also the regression of children's attainment. Staff are concerned about "filling in these gaps".

Middle themes included concerns regarding children being able to maintain physical distancing. Furthermore, interventions were seen as a priority to support SEN children but also in learning, social skills and emotional wellbeing. Ensuring that the logistical and operational matters were the main concerns expressed by teachers. They were considering the best way schools could operate in the current climate such as half days, phased returns into school and splitting up cohorts. In addition, staff want to ensure the safety of pupils by maintaining effective hygiene for good health.

Themes which were reported the least include building children's resilience to cope with what is happening in and out of school, supporting children in re-establishing friendships, supporting High School transition and transition for SEN children (e.g. ASD students), as well as staff having time to prepare for the children's return. At the same time, staff felt that it is important that schools do not re-open too early.

Question 11

Preparing for schools to open again what are your main concerns for parents and families and what do you think could help?

Total Number of respondents:	64			
Segmented:	L: 24	T:19	SA:17	OR: 4
B Themes (significant to at least 5 out of 10 responses)	Fears and anxiety about returning to school			
C Themes (relevant to at least 3 out of 10 responses)	Health and safety concerns and managing risk of Covid-19 in school		"Their fear of sending children back whilst this virus is still killing hundreds"	

		"Parents worried about the spread of Covid 19 and still keeping their children off school"
	Transition planning	"Settling back in to school and adapting" "Being behind in their learning". "Big gaps that need to be filled in regarding education."
	What would help: Providing parents with information & advice about how to support their child with the return to school	"Parents need to be given lots of information before school opens up again to feel comfortable with the process".
	Offering reassurance and opening support channels	"Reassuring parents that their children are safe and not to worry." "Clear information and availability to chat."

Summary (Q11)

For this question, the main theme was fear regarding infection with Covid-19. Many participants (>20) expressed concerns that parents would not feel it was safe for their children to return to school as maintaining social distancing would not be possible. However, the majority of these participants also said they could provide reassurance to parents that it was safe, and school would ensure safe practices such as handwashing were maintained.

Another concern that was expressed by approximately ¼ of staff was the change of routine that would be required when schools open again. Some staff expressed concerns that children may have had little routine at home and would therefore struggle to get back into the structure of school again. Others mentioned concerns around attachment and separation anxiety as children had become used to being at home with parents all the time. Some staff were worried about children being unable to follow school rules and expectations after a long period out of school. Concerns about missed learning and where to start with the curriculum when schools open again were expressed by about 7 participants, mostly teachers.

Suggestions for how schools could help included the following:

1. Providing information to parents around how to support their children with the return to school (e.g. in a published booklet)
2. Having a phased return to school, for example with pupils coming back part-time in the first instance. Also giving plenty of notice to parents when schools would re-open again.
3. Providing reassurance to parents regarding the safety of their children and the hygiene practices that schools would be following.

4. Providing support channels so that parents could access help and advice, for example a space to be listened to.

Question 13

Preparing for schools to open again what are your main concerns for your staff and what do you think could help?

Total Number of respondents:	58			
Segmented:	L: 25	T: 15	SA: 14	OR: 4
B Themes (significant to at least 5 out of 10 responses)	Safety concerns (62% of respondents mentioned this).		<p><i>“Worried about the spread of the virus. We need PPE and tests.”</i></p> <p><i>“Social distancing. Suddenly having 30 children in very close proximity to you.”</i></p> <p><i>“My concern would probably relate to difficulties if some staff as still considered at risk and advised to avoid contact at the time of returning and how this would be handled in school.”</i></p>	

Summary

The main concern that respondents had for their staff when preparing to return to work was their safety; 62% of respondents spoke about worries relating to being in close proximity to pupils following the current period of physical distancing and the potential health implications that this could have, including concerns around knowing whether it was safe to reopen schools and the potential to continue to spread the virus. Other common concerns were: readjustment to working life (28%); the pressure to reduce gaps in pupils’ learning following home learning (19%); reduced numbers of staff and redeployment in the school to cover absent staff (10%); and providing support for those who have experienced bereavement (9%).

Regarding what staff felt may help when returning to school, a number of supportive factors were suggested including:

- providing wellbeing support for the school community (26%);
- taking ongoing safety precautions to protect staff (12%);
- allow staff time to readjust to returning to work in schools (10%);
- give staff extra preparation time (9%); and

- effective communication (5%).

Conclusions and recommendations

This report represents a rapid initial analysis of a large body of qualitative data. Nevertheless, a number of clear themes have emerged for further consideration.

It is clear that the majority of school staff felt a high level of 'unhappiness' at the point at which schools closed, with the predominant feeling described as 'uncertainty'. The level of 'unhappiness' has decreased markedly in the intervening weeks. However, the level of uncertainty remains a concern for staff, who are also worried about the impact on pupils, and struggling to get used to the change in their role. A number of staff mentioned missing their pupils.

Staff are concerned about their pupils, with concerns about well-being mentioned as a main concern, followed by concerns about access to learning. Asked about staff concerns for families of pupils, concerns for well-being and mental health of parents were mentioned most frequently.

Asked about what they were concerned about in relation to their own staff, the issue of mental health and well-being was overwhelmingly the most common concern.

Thinking about the return to school, staff were particularly concerned about pupils readjusting to school routines and expectations. Making up gaps in learning is also an area of concern. Staff are also worried about how to maintain physical distancing.

The issue of physical safety in relation to COVID19 when schools re-open is the predominant area of concern in relation to the perceptions of parents and for school staff. However, school staff are able to generate potential solutions to all these concerns. It would seem to be important, therefore, that school staff are actively engaged in preparing for the re-opening of schools and that clear guidance is provided in relation to health and safety recommendations. After health and safety, the next concern is in relation to missed learning and 'plugging' the gaps. Given the expressed concerns about the emotional well-being of children, their families, and school staff themselves, it would be helpful if a period of adjustment could be built into any return to school, with guidance about curriculum-based expectations that take account of this period of disruption and change.

27th April 2020

APPENDIX: Letter for school staff

School staff survey during the COVID19 school closure

You will need around 20 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScw159JbE_AyUBOiUYsnVIRVW4GI3kLH92uPmPgMgbxzq3ZA/viewform

At Catalyst Psychology we are looking to the future and ways of supporting children, schools and families during this unique and challenging set of circumstances. Since the partial closure of schools on 20th March, we know that staff have had to adapt their roles, develop skills and work flexibly to care for children of key workers and those at risk of harm, whilst becoming distributors of food and providers of essential social care support for some families. All this in addition to offering academic advice and guidance via virtual systems where possible. The cancellation of SATS tests and public exams has affected whole cohorts of children and young people, many of whom have missed traditional rites of passage or preparations for key transitions. These circumstances could affect a pupil's readiness to return to education in the future.

Sadly, by the time that schools return to full-time attendance, it is likely that members of your communities, including staff and families will have been personally affected by the Covid 19 virus, experiencing loss either directly or indirectly, or changes in housing or employment circumstances. We want to reassure you that we are working proactively at this time, developing our services so that we are ready to address newly emerging needs as well as continuing to support children and families that we are already working with. We are asking all of our schools to tell us a little bit more about their current situation. We would be grateful if you could spare the time to answer this short questionnaire to help us to tailor our response to this situation during the coming months. Please share with all relevant staff in your school or setting.

Data is stored on a secure server, accessible to members of the Catalyst team only. Responses will remain anonymous and will be used to help to us gain a clearer understanding of people's experiences and to develop support and interventions for school staff and young people. Anonymous data may be used in research reports to inform future support. Only the first 3 questions are required responses. All other questions are optional. Please provide as much detail as you can. Thank you.