# Building resilience through education:
## What our students need during and after Covid-19

While the risks of Covid-19 to young people are considered to be relatively low, research on natural disasters makes clear that children are more vulnerable than adults to the emotional impact of traumatic events that disrupt their daily lives.[1] Following a consultation with UK educators, this briefing calls upon national government and school policymakers to ensure schools and teachers, themselves operating under unprecedented strain, are able to dedicate time and resource to mental health and civic skills building.[2] These interventions are the most efficient way to strengthen students' sense of wellbeing, resilience, and empowerment - during lockdown, as educators prepare students to return to the classroom, and throughout the long transition back to 'normality'.[3]

Covid-19 is transforming our society and social relationships. School closures are already exacerbating inequality, particularly for children with special educational needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds.[4] The spread of misinformation and conspiracy is fuelling discrimination and polarisation.[5] The legacy of collective and individual grief that Covid-19 will leave behind has serious implications for schools, our communities, and the mental health and wellbeing of students, teachers, and families.[6] To meet these challenges, schools need to be given space and resources to prioritise joined-up educational responses that support young people to develop the emotional, social, and civic skills that will build resilience during and after the pandemic.
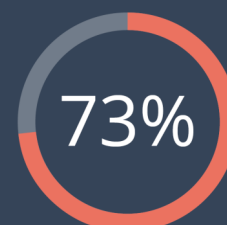
In April 2020, Protection Approaches asked teachers and head teachers what resources they needed to navigate the challenges posed by Covid-19 and its consequences:
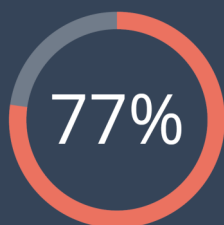
77%
want more resources to help young people play a role in building kind and resilient communities
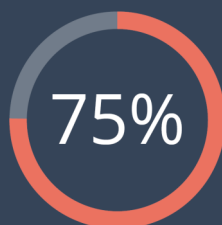
75%
want resources focussed on information consumption and how to recognise to fake news

73%
want training on whole-school approaches to building tolerance and resilience

*Survey of 111 educators in England and Wales conducted 28/03/2020 - 17/04/2020, full results here

Prioritise social and emotional learning to build collective resilience

Schools are as much safe spaces as they are sites of learning; the loss of routines and connectedness due to school closures has harmed teachers' and students' mental health and wellbeing. An emergency augmentation of curriculums to better prioritise social and emotional skills is essential to ensure young people are able to understand and manage their own emotions, build empathy for one another and those most in need, and to nurture stronger communities at a time of chronic national stress.[7] Moreover, social and emotional skills enable young people to transform anxiety into agency - even in normal times, these skills are the building blocks for the engaged, constructive citizenship vital to building sustainable, inclusive societies.

Develop media literacy tools that encourage positive debate

The Covid-19 pandemic has been accompanied by a disinfodemic with waves of dis- and misinformation, both organically and malevolently generated, instrumentalised for political, racist, xenophobic, and other reasons.[8] Young people are especially vulnerable to harmful online content, particularly during times of high stress - and increased screen time.[9] The need to prioritise online media literacy in schools is now urgent; this should include resources that help young people to recognise harmful content and think critically about information consumption.[10] Such solutions to online harms will only be effective together with offline responses that build interpersonal relationships and strengthen communities such as supporting teachers to facilitate positive debate and foster civic responsibility.[11]

Schools as communities: Supporting the return to in-person learning

Schools are themselves communities that can help young people play an active role in building kinder, more caring societies during and after the crisis. This is not the job of teachers alone; rather whole-school, joined-up approaches are the most efficient and cost-effective means of nurturing tolerance and resilience across the school culture, curriculum, and extracurricular activities. Whole-of-school approaches should involve senior leadership as well as a meaningful student voice and can be strengthened by external support from experts in trauma, social cohesion, media literacy, and positive debate. Understanding schools as communities prepares young people to live and participate in their local area and wider society, providing them with the emotional, social, and civic skills they need to navigate the short- and long-term consequences of the greatest crisis the country has faced since the Second World War.

Recommendations to Government & school policymakers

- Make emergency augmentation to school curriculums to make space for school senior leadership teams and teachers to prioritise Social and Emotional Learning as well as media literacy and civic skills

- Prepare guidance and toolkits for when schools return to in-person learning on implementing whole school approaches to wellbeing and civic engagement

- Establish easy-access, quick release funds to support experts in trauma, social cohesion, media literacy, and positive debate to work with schools and school policymakers

1. Disasters, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.
2. How can we support educators during and after the pandemic? Protection Approaches, May 2020
3. Social and Emotional Learning Impact, CASEL, n.d.
4. Considering inequalities in the school closure response to COVID-19, Laura B Nellums, The Lancet, 26 March 2020; Coronavirus: Ethnic minorities 'are a third' of patients, BBC, 12 April 2020
5. Covid-19 Disinformation Briefing No.1, ISD, 27 March 2020
6. Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting community resilience in the aftermath of disaster, Jack Saul, Routledge, 2014
7. Social and Emotional Learning: Skills for Life and Work, Early Intervention Foundation, 2015
8. Disinfodemic: Deciphering Covid-19 Disinformation, UNESCO, April 2020
9. How do we Build Community Cohesion when Hate Crime is on the Rise?, APPG Hate Crime, February 2019
10. Online Harms White Paper, Home Office, April 2019
11. Teaching Controversial Issues, Council of Europe, September 2015