

CONSOLATION AND HOPE IN A TIME OF CRISIS:
BRINGING CHAPLAINS TOGETHER TO CULTIVATE
HUMAN FLOURISHING AND SPIRITUAL
RESILIENCE IN RESPONSE TO COVID-RELATED
LOSSES FOR YEAR 7 PUPILS



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IDENTIFYING KEY ISSUES FOR INDUCTION 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Each year the process of transition and induction from primary to secondary school raises a plethora of emotions connected with change and a sense of the unknown. While some children thrive on the sense of adventure this experience can provoke, others consider it a stressful time causing much angst. Regardless of how children encounter this change, it is a momentous rite of passage. Establishing a foundation for success throughout this process involves a network of support and guidance from various stakeholders. A smooth transition process is critical for students' wellbeing, sense of connectedness and progression.

Two in five children fail to reach expected progress following transition but a sense of belonging has a positive impact on achievement and how well a child transitions.

(Anna Freud, 2020)

The system around children and young people is going to be more critical than ever if we are to help the next generation not just adapt to a new post-crisis reality, but to thrive.

(Barnardo's, 2020)

WHAT WE KNOW

- Before the Covid-19 crisis, the initial stage of the school induction process was served by established and cohesive procedures that allowed children the experience of visits to their prospective schools. Disadvantaged children were usually afforded additional visits and meetings. Strategies to alleviate anxiety and instil confidence were carefully planned and implemented.

Guidance issued by the DfE (May 2020) acknowledged that year 6 students were unlikely to experience the usual *end of term traditions*. For these students they encountered *endings without the usual social support systems of schools and activities*.

- As a result of the pandemic, the encounter with loss on various levels has impacted the lives of young people on a vast scale.
- Any change in life evokes a sense of loss that can manifest through a variety of emotions and behaviours.
- Some children may have encountered the death of close family members and may not have been able to mourn fully due to lockdown restrictions.

For children entering the induction phase of school, it may be that they arrive at their new school with, COVID- related issues of separation anxiety, grief, fear of infection and other concerns.

(David, 2020)

- Coupled with common anxieties associated with this transitional stage of life, it is crucial that children encounter a sense of belonging and connectedness to their new community through the induction process.
- Chaplains have a crucial role in helping students with induction into their new school. They can epitomise for students through such work, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35).

Qualities such as this help nurture spiritual resilience in others, where individuals can maintain their sense of self, despite life's challenges.

- Children's resilience is characterised among other factors by faith, hope and a sense of meaning in life as well as through bonds to effective schools (Masten 2010).

Students value chaplains who are 'approachable'; 'friendly'; 'warm'; 'visible'; 'a presence'; 'available'; 'non-judgemental';
(Aune et al, 2019)

Failing to nurture the spiritual identity of the child, whether within a religious tradition or outside of it, may in fact be the more damaging course of action. The spiritual nature of the child is shaped by the spiritual nurture it receives.

(Mark, 2016)

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED THE VULNERABLE AND DIS-ADVANTAGED?

When it comes to this pandemic, we are all in the same storm, but we are not in the same boat.

(Barnardo's Chief Executive Javed Khan, Barnardo's, 2020a)

- The most vulnerable in society have been disproportionately affected by the impact of Covid-19 magnifying current inequalities.
- Khan points out that on their return to school, children should have access to resources that will "help overcome not just the 'attainment gap' but also the 'trauma gap' faced by vulnerable pupils." (Barnardo's 2020a).

The Children's Commissioner Report (2020) reveals how Covid-19 has affected the most vulnerable children, including:

- Children who are under the care of or who care for parents suffering from poor mental health.
- Those living in a poor housing environment with overcrowding.
- Children living in poverty, including digital poverty.
- Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, (SEND).
- Children at risk of suffering abuse and harm.

It is important to note that some children will have faced poverty or different forms of abuse for the first time (Barnardo's 2020).

Schools with the most diverse, vulnerable, and disadvantaged pupil populations are likely to experience higher numbers of children returning having experienced complex trauma, adversity loss and bereavement.

(Barnardo's, 2020)

- Barnardo's (2020) raise concerns about the impact Covid- 19 has had on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.

Black people are 4.2 times more likely to die of the virus, due partly to existing health and social inequalities.

(Barnardo's, 2020)

*The Office of National Statistics states that **children from these communities will be more at risk of suffering bereavement, being young carers or having increased anxiety around catching the virus.***

(Barnardo's, 2020)

CONSOLATION AND HOPE IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS

- Dr Leaton Gray et al. (2021) argue that to assume all children have encountered the pandemic with fear and trepidation is a mistake. Some children have enjoyed home-schooling more than the school environment, and some vulnerable children attending school during lockdown have benefitted from small group and 1:1 teaching. (Leaton Gray et al. 2021).

Disruption to education does not only present challenges but can offer new windows of opportunity.

(Leaton et al, 2016)

- Masten (2010) notes that resilience is all around us. Certain factors, including positive, nurturing relationships with key adults and faith, hope and a sense of meaning in life, contribute to young people facing life's experiences with a resilient outlook.

We cannot simply return to the way things worked prior to this crisis... We believe the system around children and young people has a once in a generation opportunity to build back better and put wellbeing at the heart of the learning environment when children return to school.

(Barnardo's, 2016)

REFLECTIONS

1. Does anything in the literature above resonate with your own experiences of student induction during 2020-21?
 - Are there further implications relating to induction 2021 that are significant and have not been raised?
2. What do you perceive to have been the main challenges for year 7 induction 2020-21?
 - How has the pandemic impacted the most vulnerable and ethnic minority groups in your context?
3. Have you identified evidence of spiritual resilience and hope in your current year 7 cohort?
 - What positives do you think new structures have brought to the induction experience for year 7?

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