



**Education Services:**  
Glasgow Stories of Recovery,  
Resilience and Re-connection  
July 2020



GLASGOW: Nurturing City





# GLASGOW STORIES OF RECOVERY, RESILIENCE AND RE-CONNECTION



Schools and nurseries closed on 23rd March

## 1. WHAT WENT WELL DURING LOCKDOWN?

Schools and nurseries stayed connected with pupils and families through phone calls, video chats, social media and socially distanced visits

The nurturing principles were used to enhance the wellbeing of staff, parents and pupils

Schools and nurseries worked closely with partners (including Health, Social Work, third sector and charity organisations) to make sure no family was left behind



## 2. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES?

Schools had to act fast leading up to the lockdown and didn't have much time to prepare

Online learning could not meet the needs of all families (such as those without the technology or those with additional support needs)



## 3. WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Glasgow's teachers learned new skills and developed many new ways of delivering learning and maintaining connection

Glasgow has proved to be a Nurturing City with strong relationships, compassion and adaptive leadership at its core



## 4. NEXT STEPS

Lessons learned during this time will be used to enhance children and young people's learning experiences as they return to our schools and nurseries





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The photos in the publication were not all taken during the lockdown period.



## Introduction from the Executive Director



I am delighted to be introducing this first in a series of papers where we will look at aspects of education in Glasgow and consider the impact of the pandemic on the lives of staff, children and their families. This will enable us to gain a wider sense of the education experiences of those involved in the process of recovery throughout the pandemic. We will gather the views of a range of stakeholders within Glasgow to tell their stories to help us on our continued journey of improvement.

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) a global pandemic.

Schools and nurseries in Glasgow closed on 23rd March with the exception of those which remained open to operate as hubs for children of key workers and vulnerable children including those on the child protection register.

The key priority for Glasgow's education establishments was to ensure that all staff, children and young people (68,500 across Primary and Secondary schools and 12,000 across the Early Years sector) and families remained connected with a focus on wellbeing, compassion and care as well as learning. Schools and nurseries continued to work with their families during the closures, offering support and advice, learning plans and resources for learning at home. Glasgow remained committed to ensuring that all children and young people continued to improve and achieve their potential regardless of their circumstances.

One of the many challenges the schools and nurseries faced was the pace of decision-making which limited their ability to prepare home-learning tasks for children and young people prior to lockdown.

As part of the process of recovery a range of stakeholders were consulted to capture their education experiences throughout the pandemic and in doing so find out what has worked well, what has been learned from this, and their hopes for the future.

This report contains stories of creative and innovative practices and lessons learned by staff. The aim is to offer an insight into how schools and nurseries managed to continue to deliver learning and support families during a time of dramatic change and also to consider the positives so that we take what we have learnt to continue to enhance children and young people's learning.

I am forever grateful to the high standards of professionalism and commitment shown by our education staff throughout this extraordinary period. It has been challenging but we will be stronger as a result of our experiences and it is clear that our commitment to being a Nurturing City has supported us all.

**Maureen McKenna**  
July 2020





Focus group participants were identified by Education Services based on knowledge of the work schools were doing to support their families. Prior to the focus groups participants were asked to submit a short written piece on what they had been most proud of during this period. 16 Heads from nurseries, primary and secondary schools across the city and a Lead Officer took part in the discussions.

Some key themes emerged from both the written submissions and the focus group discussions. For the purposes of this analysis responses have been grouped under the broad theme headings below:

- Connecting with families and pupils
- Nurture and wellbeing
- Working with partners

Each theme will be discussed in terms of what has gone well, the challenges that presented and what we have learned. The report will conclude by considering hopes for the future.



## Connecting with families and pupils



### What has gone well?

Heads stressed the importance of building and maintaining positive connections with their children and families, with those connections being tailored by staff to suit families' particular needs. Schools and nurseries connected with their families through regular telephone calls, often on a weekly basis to some if not all of their parents, to check in with them, offer support, a friendly ear and advice where needed.

*"Something as simple as a phone call brightens a day and encourages positivity."*

Telephone calls were also made directly to children to ask, "How are you?" and "What are you most looking forward to when we get back to school?"

Connections with families were maintained through various online services and platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, SeeSaw, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Twinkl, Groupcall, email and school websites. Uses of Twitter and YouTube included greeting children in the morning, communicating key messages to families, suggesting home learning activities,

praising children's commitment and positivity and signposting parents to updates on the school website.

Services and platforms such as Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams enabled teachers to interact with children online to distribute learning as well as to mark and give feedback. One Headteacher spoke of online French lessons delivered by a member of her staff being viewed by nearly four hundred schools.

A nursery Head talked about striving to promote positivity and laughter with their families by posting challenges on Facebook that were requested by parents.

*"Laughter is good for the soul"*

Where possible, schools continued to mark significant events online such as Primary 7 leavers' assemblies and the yearly school talent show.

Videos of worked examples and supportive learning strategies were used by teachers to connect with children. Videos also allowed staff to connect with families through staff story videos, learning activities, and 'missing you' movies. One establishment whose children have additional learning needs found that videos along with their school blog gave children much loved visual

access to the familiar faces of teachers and other pupils.

Staff/parent connections have often been warm and reciprocal. One parent created a website with activities to suit different age groups and shared this with the school. Another school that made a film from all the staff to families then in turn received a film made by families for staff. Engagement with Parent Councils has been maintained over lockdown through virtual meetings.

Heads discussed the importance of face-to-face communication with children and families, often through the distribution of learning packs either collected from establishments or personally delivered by staff to homes.

Hubs, which accommodated children of key workers and those that are vulnerable, were also important for building family connections.

*"Seeing vulnerable children in the hub every week has helped us build relationships with them and given us a better understanding of how they and their families are getting on."*





One nursery offered parents (with their children if they wished) individual socially distanced meetings in the nursery garden to catch up on their child's progress and provide advice around home learning experiences.

## Challenges

Heads acknowledged that a number of their families had difficulty accessing online content as they either had no internet at home and/or they did not have the devices they need. Even for families who had the appropriate devices with internet access, some expressed difficulties in logging on to the various forums. This posed an ongoing challenge as those without access to the internet/devices missed out on the online activities and experiences taking place across the city.

The provision of physical learning packs mitigated this challenge to some extent. Packs contained items such as stationery, daily routines, practical family activities, learning resources, food, social stories, visual timetables, online education log-in passwords and personal touches such as post-its saying 'Missing You!' Home visits while delivering packs were useful in reaching families who were harder to engage.

*"Delivering (learning packs) to doors has been invaluable. I feel there is an increased sense of trust from harder to reach families because some of the barriers have been, metaphorically, broken down during this pandemic."*

Heads acknowledged the limitations of online learning, particularly for the specialist sector where not all parents and carers have the requisite skills for effective home learning. Furthermore, many children with additional learning needs were not able to learn in the home environment as their learning was situational. Support for parents of children with additional support needs was crucial and schools phoned families of those children regularly to offer support and guidance.

Heads discussed the challenges around supporting families where English is an Additional Language (EAL) as they did not have access to their usual network of translators. This led to delays in sending out communications to those families. However, the use of Groupcall and Google Translate was discussed as a solution for translations, along with considering the involvement of other trusted parents to help with this. Schools were cognisant of the challenges EAL families have faced.

*"We have a large number of Middle Eastern families so the school has acted as a surrogate family for them in some ways."*

Head Teachers also felt this time had given them a good opportunity to get to know their EAL families better.

The challenges facing the Secondary sector around the volume of work that has had to be produced due to the number of subject teachers (up to 16 in S1) was also discussed. This, along with the wide range of platforms being used to distribute the learning, was overwhelming for some pupils and their families. Subsequently the staff cut back on the work issued and limited the number of platforms used to distribute the work.

A concern was raised with regards to pupils' own propensity to undertake learning in their home environment. Pupil motivation was highlighted as a potential challenge and there was a worry that some may have viewed their time at home as a holiday.

## What have we learned?

With respect to making and maintaining connections, Heads reflected on their engagement with families

*"I have learned that communication is vital and not to make assumptions."*

Some Heads spoke of the need to contact all families throughout lockdown and not just those whose children are perceived as vulnerable. One Headteacher said families who had not initially been contacted at the beginning of lockdown expressed that they felt left out. This underscored the importance of ensuring all families felt included within the school community.

Heads spoke of the satisfaction of learning new digital skills in relation to home learning and family engagement, for example, the use of Microsoft Teams and Google Translate.





### What has gone well?

All schools and nurseries who were part of the focus groups used the nurturing principles as their guiding framework to negotiate the crisis. Strong relationships have been at the core of this approach. These principles informed their approach to families, children and staff. Schools and nurseries were keen that parents did not feel alone and highlighted the importance of parental and child wellbeing over a focus purely on learning.

*"In all contact with families we are emphasising that wellbeing is paramount"*

Staff wellbeing has been supported through various initiatives to ensure good communication and understanding of their needs including 'check-ins', team meetings and the use of more informal approaches. This has allowed a clear understanding of staff needs and how best to support these.

*"Headteachers have all treated their staff with kindness, care and concern. Leaders strive to allay fears and maintain an environment adults feel safe to work in."*

It is clear that staff have been dedicated and many have shown outstanding commitment during this time. They have worked flexibly and adapted to the changing context. This has involved a high level of collaboration across schools and sectors. Senior leaders have shown adaptive leadership in supporting staff to face these challenges.

*"The sense of unity in our staff team has never been stronger"*



The wellbeing of children and young people has remained paramount throughout the crisis and in the planning for schools and nurseries re-opening. The nurturing principle of the importance of transitions has been given due consideration by establishments as they have developed resources, such as virtual school tours and videos to meet new staff, in order to support the transition process. Staff are keen to develop an understanding of the pupils' experiences during lockdown and how to support their needs when the schools re-open.

*"We're taking the approach that all behaviour is communication as we prepare our schools for pupils returning"*

In the midst of the pandemic, staff have remained solution-focused and positive. They have revisited their core values and the key priority of being a Nurturing City.

*"Nothing is more important at this time than positivity, connectedness and relationships. It has only made us ever more passionate and committed to the job we were chosen to do"*

*"We are very proud that our core values of compassion, love and care is what really matters at this time"*

### Challenges

Heads have reported that remaining upbeat and positive at all times, has occasionally been difficult during the crisis. Additionally, there is a balance to be struck between ensuring that the quality of learning and play for children is not lost amongst the focus on resilience and wellbeing. However, staff feel the real challenge is the next phase and acknowledge that the nurturing principles will continue to be the key.

*"Nurture is the crucial message going forward. It will be the key to blending teams back together"*

### What have we learned?

Nurture as a whole school approach has been fundamental in helping schools and nurseries through this period and Heads have discovered how deep the nurturing principles are embedded in their settings.

*"Glasgow as a nurturing city is not just a slogan – it is actually happening"*

The feeling of connection within the school staff team and the bonds between them have become even stronger. Catholic schools have reflected on seeing the 'gospel values' in action over this period. Schools highlighted that the ethos and values that they have been developing for years came to the fore during this time and it is helped to reinforce the importance of relationships.

*"The years of hard work have been realised during lockdown, our relationships with all have proved key in the provisions we made in the uncharted waters of Covid-19."*

The situation has highlighted the high levels of resilience shown by pupils, their families and staff and the development and growth that has occurred during this time.

*"I feel like a different person now. Everyone has had to grow and learn. It is important to recognise the strength you have within yourself. The key has been good relationships. We are stronger together"*





## Working with partners

### What has gone well?

Schools and nurseries worked closely with colleagues from Social Work Services, the Health Board as well as third sector and charity organisations throughout the pandemic.

Many had extensive networks of community partners prior to the coronavirus outbreak and these existing partnerships played a key role in quickly mobilising support for children and families.

*"It has been long held ambition of ours to foster meaningful and lasting partnerships with families, community partners and others."*



Image provided by FARE Scotland

Working closely with partners enabled schools and nurseries to provide a wide range of practical and emotional support to pupils and families. Many Heads reported working with organisations to provide food parcels, pre-prepared meals and other basic necessities to families in need, with many education staff helping with the delivery of those parcels.

*"We are working with Launch Foods and have been delivering chilled meals every Friday afternoon to provide food for 109 people in our school community. We also identified 40 families who would benefit from a fortnightly food pack delivery through Gorbals Housing"*

Other forms of practical support include financial assistance from charities to assist families with utility bills, internet access, and in supplying household goods to those who require them.

Good relationships with partner organisations also facilitated additional wellbeing support for pupils. Establishments have used links with third sector organisations to provide additional support to maintain regular contact and connection with families, in many cases by offering counselling over the telephone.

*"Our partnership with WithKids has ensured some of our most vulnerable children are still receiving quality one to one time with a key adult in their life"*

Heads recognise that working closely with colleagues in other council services such as Social Work helped them to stay informed with what has been happening in children's lives and this has helped them to identify those who require additional support.

From a secondary perspective links with MCR Pathways provided excellent additional support to pupils and families and Skills Development Scotland have helped to support school leavers, providing information on available opportunities and also supporting young people as they decide their next steps beyond school.





## Challenges

There was a concern raised about the challenges charities may face as a result of the pandemic. A Headteacher reported that very few of the usual summer holiday programmes or holiday support networks offered by partners are currently available this year. The uncertainty of offering programmes during lockdown and the instability of funding for these organisations because of coronavirus was suggested as a reason for this lack of summer provision. The continuing involvement of partner organisations was seen as essential.

*"We need to make sure third sector organisations are given all the support they need"*

## What have we learned?

The pandemic has underscored the importance of partnership working with Glasgow's schools and nurseries. The role of partners was frequently highlighted as providing key support to children and their families as well as supporting staff wellbeing.

*"This also gave a little time for the teachers to decompress and write reports"*

Open and direct channels of communication with partners was often emphasised as a key element of maintaining close links and ensuring effective targeting of support.

*"Communication is key to all of this and we have kept in regular contact with all partners through email and phone calls"*

Whilst presenting many challenges, the pandemic has also provided opportunities to foster closer working relationships between services and organisations, as well as with families themselves -

*"Identifying children to attend a Hub for vulnerable children has allowed the senior leadership team to work in closer communication with Social Work colleagues and families during a time when the landscape has changed for many families"*





## Hopes moving forward

Schools and nurseries have had a lot of personal contact with families over the period of closure and strong connections had been made as a result of this. Schools and nurseries across Glasgow strived to stay connected with their children and families through various means such as weekly telephone calls, online platforms and by distributing physical learning packs. They were there for families and families knew they could contact their schools or nurseries any time.

Staff now feel closer to many families and they want these relationships to be maintained. Engagement with families through online platforms, particularly Twitter, was felt to have been influential. Moving forward schools aim to continue to use online platforms to increase parental involvement in supporting their children's learning.

Heads spoke of enhancing the quality of children's learning and potential alterations to the curriculum following the pandemic such as more outdoor learning.

Nurture remained at the forefront as schools and nurseries discussed their hopes for the future. Heads outlined their plans to ensure that children and staff feel safe on their return. Consideration will be given to classroom and playroom layout, word choice, body language and tone. The principles of nurture will be deployed for the benefit of children, families and staff, particularly with a focus on the classroom/playroom offering a safe space.

The continued value of these relationships is not underestimated by schools and Heads expressed a desire to continue to build on existing community partnerships and to develop new partnerships formed during the pandemic as a result of working well together.

*"I couldn't be prouder to work in a community of helping hands, when things get tough we stick together"*

*"We are looking forward to welcoming everyone back when it is safe to do so. While there have been many challenges during this pandemic there is hope for the future. We are continuing to make plans and the sense of unity in our staff group has never been stronger."*

Community partners and other local authority services formed a crucial part of a coordinated and effective response to the lockdown. The demonstrative impact of partnership working in the wider community during these times has "strengthened belief in the community" amongst families and members of the public and has, in some cases, improved the perception of public services.





## Conclusion



This paper has highlighted the hard work, flexibility, dedication and commitment by Glasgow education staff throughout the period of school/nursery closure, to ensure they continued to provide nurture, support and important learning opportunities to all of their children and their families.

The three key themes that emerged following the Heads' written submissions and online focus group discussions reflected their priorities around building and maintaining strong connections with their children and families, providing nurturing approaches to their staff, children and families to enhance wellbeing, and working with external partner agencies including Health, Social Work, third sector and charity organisation colleagues.

It was clear that schools and nurseries were very cognisant of ensuring no family was left behind and they tailored their engagement and support depending on the families' circumstances. Most children and parents were telephoned regularly, and school hubs were set up to accommodate children of key workers and those that were vulnerable, with Heads viewing this as a vital way of connecting with those children and their families. Physical learning packs were either collected or delivered to homes where families were not able to access online learning content. Schools and nurseries also worked with partners

to help distribute food, along with practical and financial support to families in need of this assistance. Counselling was offered to those children and their families in need of emotional support.

Heads also spoke highly of their staff, detailing their passion and commitment in ensuring they were continuing to deliver high quality teaching, learning and support to their children.

Those key themes highlighted in this paper will be paramount in guiding education staff as they move forward into the next phase with planning for children returning to their schools and nurseries in the new session. Taking a whole school approach using the nurturing principles as their guiding framework was fundamental in addressing the balance between delivering high quality teaching along with focusing on and enhancing children's wellbeing and resilience.

The stories told by our Heads has shown that Glasgow truly is a Nurturing City with strong relationships, compassion and adaptive leadership at its core.



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