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

RESEARCH DIGESTS

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ABOUT NICER

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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 transitionary 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 disproportionally 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 bought to the induction experience for year 7?

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BACK TO SCHOOL CHALLENGES, INITIAL STRATEGIES & FIRST REFLECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

A smooth transition and induction process is essential for pupils' wellbeing and sense of belonging. This process can have an impact on pupils' academic engagement as well as their emotional wellbeing. A major longitudinal study funded by the DCSF 1[1], recognised that, for secondary schools, *transition was a study that fell under pastoral care in order to establish secure and settled children ready to engage in academic work.*

> *[The pandemic] is a once in a generation opportunity to transform the wider education system around the child so that wellbeing is truly at the heart of the learning environment in schools.*
>
> (Barnardo's, 2020)

> *Secondary schools that manage to bridge the gap well between primary and secondary phases set up their students for a lifetime's successful learning.*
>
> (Leaton et al., 2021)

WHAT WE KNOW

- Due to the pandemic and home schooling, the majority of the current year 6 cohort (2020/21) have missed out on traditional face-to-face teaching during much of year 5 and some of year 6. This situation will have resulted in an array of consequences for children both academically and pastorally.

- Positive home and primary school experiences can contribute to a smooth transition and induction process.

- Experiences of trauma and loss may not be expressed for a significant amount of time after the actual event.

- All of us experience transitions during life and it is important to recognise that children who are transitioning to secondary school may be dealing with multiple life transitions simultaneously, such as the birth of a sibling or joining new clubs. The pandemic itself has also initiated further transitionary experiences. (Jindal-Snape, 2020)

> *Planning and teaching should take into consideration the experience of the children over the past two years and make a sincere attempt at meeting the children where they are. Flexibility and an acceptance of reality will be key here as children coming from a range of feeder schools may have had different experiences.*
>
> (Severs, 2021)

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1   The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 (EPPSE 3-14 project) 2008

RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM 2020 -2021 TRANSITION AND INDUCTION EXPERIENCES

- Many of our initial findings emerging from the first community of practice meeting with chaplains resonate with those of Leaton et al., (2021).

- Transition and induction during the pandemic generated various responses from children. Leaton et al's (2021) study reveals that generally when children were asked in the autumn term how they were finding secondary school, most agreed that it was *the same or better than expected.*

- For some children however, the transitioning and induction experience was met with significantly raised levels of anxiety.

> *Within the current context, we can expect greater anxiety, not just in children but also in their parents and guardians.*
>
> (Hady, 2021)

- Traditionally, the transition from primary to secondary school symbolically coexists with a developmental shift, during the induction phase, towards maturity and independence. However, due to enforced pandemic restrictions some students felt hindered from gaining this sense of maturity and freedom as they were *unable to access specialist subject rooms and facilities such as food technology, art rooms and science laboratories… It became clear … that many children associate the ability to move around a building for learning, and to use specialist subject rooms and equipment, with a greater sense of maturity, which they see as an important aspect of the secondary school experience that they were missing,* (Leaton et al, 2021).

- Other children welcomed restricted and closeted school procedures as it was closely related to their primary school experiences, (Leaton et al, 2021) It gave them a sense of security and safety.

THE ROLE OF THE CHAPLAIN DURING THE PANDEMIC SCHOOL YEAR 2020-2021

Creating and fostering an environment where a climate of hope exists and where relationships can develop, built on trust, underpin the chaplain's role. Chaplains have faced demanding and changing roles during 2020- 2021.

Among other things, they have:

- Transferred many of their activities and interactions online.
- Created new and interactive ways of engaging the school community in acts of worship.
- Responded to the increase of students presenting with pastoral and mental health concerns.
- Provided support for the escalating anxiety amongst the staff population.

> *There is a sense of people still being in shock. Living through this storm has been utterly exhausting. As chaplains, we create safe spaces.*
>
> (Revd Mike Haslam, quoted in the Church Times, 2021)

> *Due to COVID, a lot of the students are wobbly. All the uncertainties are very hard for them. They just need somebody to talk to.*
>
> (Becky Cox, quoted in the Church Times, 2021)

> *Some chaplains have seen an increased interest among those who seek them out in talking about big issues of meaning and mortality, and sometimes about faith and God. In their conversations with students, chaplains have also been challenging disinformation about COVID-19, and also religious beliefs about the pandemic they think are unhelpful, such as that it is a punishment from God.*
>
> (Perfect, 2021)

> *Chaplains are continuing to do the work they are called to do, albeit they are finding new ways to do it.*
>
> (Hilborn, 2020)

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

A survey carried out in 2020 by Young Minds questioned just over 2000 young children with a history of mental health needs over a one-month period. They found the following:

- 80% of respondents said their mental health problems had increased as a result of the pandemic. Key indicators were elevated levels of anxiety, loss of motivation, isolation and a loss of coping mechanisms.
- 87% said they felt a sense of loneliness and isolation, despite 71% having said they had contact with friends.
- 11% indicated that their mental health had improved, but this was mainly due to the lack of pressure from having to engage with school or social environments susceptible to bullying.

The pandemic has also exacerbated the existing deprivation experienced by some of the most vulnerable groups in UK society.

- Children growing up in poverty and deprivation are less likely to succeed at school.
- Boys are more likely to underachieve than girls, especially those of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and black African origin, (Hirsch, 2007).

> *Among secondary school children, there was a gap of 45 minutes a day in learning time between the richest and the poorest third of children before the lockdown. This gap is now 15 minutes larger.*
>
> (Andrew et al, 2020)
>
> ---
>
> *People from ethnic minority groups saw significant increases in deprivation. At the start of 2021, the share of Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults living in households where all adults are either jobless or furloughed remained 10 percentage points (ppts) higher than pre-pandemic. The rise in household worklessness for black adults (2.4ppts) was much smaller, but still somewhat higher than the national average (1.9ppts).*
>
> (Crib et al, 2021)

Pandemic-related death rates are also significantly higher amongst people of Black and Asian groups, and poor physical and mental health is more prevalent amongst ethnic minority groups in UK, (Cortina et al, 2020). UK schools shut their doors to most students during lockdown except for 'vulnerable' students and those whose parents are keyworkers. However, not all vulnerable students were included:

> *The definition of 'vulnerable children' did not include those receiving SEND[2] support without an EHC[3] plan. This accounts for approximately 1.1 million children and young people in England. Therefore, many children and young people with SEND were, like others, not able to go to school from 23 March until the start of the autumn term 2020.* (OFSTED, 2021)

Many of the children with SEND who did attend school during lockdown, flourished with smaller group sizes and increased support. (OFSTED, 2021).

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2   SEND is an acronym for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
3   EHC is an acronym for Educational and Health Care plan.

CONSOLATION AND HOPE: FIRST THOUGHTS ON TRANSITION AND INDUCTION IN SEPTEMBER 2021

> *Wellbeing should always be of the upmost importance to those supporting children in schools, but now more than ever, schools need to think carefully about how to make the first few days and weeks of high school feel as safe and supported as possible.*
>
> (Ainsworth, 2021)

LOSS

The step from primary to secondary school can be both exciting and daunting. As children and their families are welcomed into their new school community in September 2021, some may have experienced different levels of trauma that need addressing. Bath, (2008) identifies three key pillars of therapeutic support to aid healing, that can offer a common response to most incidents of trauma recovery.

These are:
1. Promoting a sense of safety
2. Developing healing relationships
3. Teaching self-management and coping skills.

> *The common thread that runs through the current lived experiences of our children, is loss… From loss emanates three significant dynamics that will impact majorly on the mental health of our children.*
>
> *Anxiety, trauma and bereavement are powerful forces. For them all to appear at once in an untimely and unplanned fashion is significant for the developing child.*
>
> (Guest, 2020)

> *The three treatment elements outlined here can be applied by anyone who has a role in caring for, teaching, or otherwise mentoring these children and constitute the essential features of healing environments.*
>
> (Bath, 2008)
>
> ---
>
> *All of our learners will need a holistic recovery, some may need a focused recovery intervention programme, personalised to their needs; others may need a deeper and longer lasting recovery period, enabling a fuller exploration of the severity of their trauma.*
>
> (Guest, 2020)

It is also important to remember that children entering the year 6- year 7 transition and induction phase of their education are also *dealing with the physical and psychological changes that the start of adolescence brings,* (Freud: 2021)

Although the loss of knowledge from lost days of schooling will need addressing, the primary focus should be on recovery from loss, anxiety, trauma and grief. *Without this there will be no results that have true meaning and deep personal value to the child in terms of their preparation for adulthood.* (Guest, 2020).

> *Emotional and educational recovery from the pandemic hiatus is likely to take years for some pupils, rather than months.*
>
> (Leaton et al, 2021)

CONSOLATION AND HOPE

> *We believe that for schools to become mentally healthy places for all, the value of wellbeing has to start at the very top, with organisations such as DFE, Ofsted and the Regional Schools Commissioners balancing the scales between outcomes (test scores) and emotional wellbeing.*
>
> https://www.traumainformedschools.co.uk

Leaton et al (2021) suggests the following for students joining secondary school post- pandemic:
- An extended induction period.
- Have part of the school and toilet areas dedicated to year 7 only.
- Quality break time provision.
- More controlled interaction with older students through extra- curricular clubs, school performances and trips.

> *Improving the quality of break times, dedicating areas of the school to younger students, and providing top quality technology experiences are all key to achieving this in the post-pandemic world.*
>
> (Leaton et al, 2021)

> *It should also include more mental health support and play, closer to the experience of primary school.*
>
> (Civinini, 2021)

This can then free up children's cognitive energies for enhanced learning and better-quality social engagement with their Year 7 peer group, setting a positive tone for the years ahead. (Leaton et al., 2021).

> *We talk a lot of making sure that year 6 children are 'secondary-ready'. But what if we've got that all wrong, or at least partly wrong? What if we actually need to make secondary schools 'primary-child- ready'?*
>
> (Severs, 2021)

REFLECTIONS

1. Does anything in the literature above resonate with your own experiences of student induction during 2020 -2021?

2. Chaplains have experienced a rise of anxiety amongst staff, and increased mental health issues amongst the student population. How are you, as chaplains, supported in meeting these challenges?

3. What provisions have been put in place to ensure a smooth transition and induction process during 2021-2022?

4. How will the induction process address the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children?

5. What measures will you use to ensure that year 7 students are experiencing a sense of safety and belonging to their new school environment?

6. How do you intend to nurture spiritual resilience amongst year 7, and provide opportunities for them to experience faith, hope, and a sense of meaning within the school community?

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NURTURING SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE IN YEAR 7 STUDENTS DURING THEIR INDUCTION YEAR

Canterbury
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INTRODUCTION

The working understanding of spiritual resilience for the Chaplains: Loss and spiritual resilience project is underpinned by the thinking of Masten (2014), who states that an individual's resilience is *'embedded in relationships and social systems.'*

In the context of this study, spiritual resilience refers to helping students nurture their sense of self and purpose while encountering adversity. Spiritual resilience is rooted in connections, in meaningful relationships with other nurturing and competent adults rooted in spirituality, faith, and hope.

> *Persistence and resilience only come from having been given the chance to work through difficult problems.*
>
> (Gever Tulley, 2020)

Recognising resilience involves two key strands of identification. Firstly, the individual's response to adversity and secondly, their ability to recover (Masten, 2014).

> *The word 'resilience' originates from the Latin word 'resilire' which literally translates to 'spring back'.*
>
> (Dutta et al, 2017)

> *The book of Acts is largely a case study in resilience. The early apostles experienced the seizing and execution of their leader, followed by exile, arrests, beatings, and further executions. Paul especially exuded resilience. He experienced repeated traumas, any one of which might have derailed him.*
>
> (Nolty et al, 2021)

WHAT WE KNOW

- If resilience is not communicated clearly and carefully it can put undue pressure on individuals. Communicating resilience as a character trait that one either possesses or does not possess, can inadvertently leave someone believing if they show resilience, they are strong and if they do not, they are weak. Resilience is fostered from a trusted relational context (Sunderland, 2021).

- Demonstrating resilience does not necessarily require extraordinary responses to life's challenges. Simply living a life that recognises the need to face and learn from adverse conditions demonstrates a sense of resilience (Vitale, 2015).

- Connecting with an individual's innate spirituality is key to nurturing a resilient outlook. Research has shown that spirituality is a conduit for meaning making and provides comfort, hope and support through times of tribulation and uncertainty (Ryan, 1998).

- Although spirituality need not be expressed through religious belief, for some young people their spiritual core is expressed through their faith in God. Therefore, providing opportunities for students to engage with the worshipping community and encounter the power of the Gospel is crucial for fostering spiritual resilience.

> *What do we mean by Spiritual Flourishing?*
> *A variety of terminology has been employed regarding the spiritual dimension life, some of which is a moving away from the terminology of faith formation employed in religious settings.*
>
> *NICER's understanding of spiritual flourishing draws on Biblical and church traditions rooting spiritual flourishing in the physical and spiritual connections between the human, nature, and God. Spiritual flourishing is linked to the Hebrew concept of Shalom and denotes a right relationship with God, with others, and with God's good creation. It is about living life to the full (John 10:10).*

> *To express Christian spirituality is to live in a state of loving awareness of God, the world around you and (crucially) with yourself.*
>
> https://exeter.anglican.org/schools/christian-ethos-siams/spirituality/

- If children and adolescents connect with their spiritual core, they are far more likely to face difficulties with resilience. (Miller, 2015)

- Adolescence tends to trigger a surge of spiritual awareness that engenders a thirst for discovery and meaning (Good et al., 2008).

- Neglecting a child's spirituality can be harmful and result in 'creating a brittle sense of self and a lack of resiliency.' (Miller, 2015)

> *If you want someone that persists and has grit and determination, build the spiritual core.*
>
> (Miller quoted in Borgeson, 2020).

WHAT ARE THE MARKERS AND INDICATORS OF SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE?

The actual markers and indicators of spiritual resilience can be revealed by connecting with and listening with the heart to students. Give young people the time and space to share their concerns and have their voices heard. Coles stresses the importance of actively listening, and of resisting the urge to overlay one's own interpretation on the experiences children describe, (Cited in Hyde, 2008).

> *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*
>
> (Phil: 4:13)

> *The truth is that in all the hardships of the past year, children and young people have responded and led with character. They've developed patience and resilience like never before…*
>
> (++Stephen Cottrell, 2021)

Resilient Youth[1] , an Australian program established to help young people build a resilient mind, outlines 3 key components as indicators for resilience: connected, protected, and respected.

- **Connected** – having the ability to connect to self and others through positive relationships, good social skills and being able to recognise self in this context.

- **Protected** – through an awareness of being valued by those around you and nurturing a healthy mindset that includes a good diet, positive sleeping patterns and the strength to avoid unhealthy substances.

- **Respected** – to respect self and feel respected by others through nurturing a positive awareness of self and purpose in life, underpinned by a deep sense of personal values that guide and steer their choices in life and motivates them to contribute to the lives of others.

> *Actions to increase resilience can be targeted at different levels – they can aim to increase achievements of pupils; to support them through transitions and encourage healthy behaviours; to promote better interpersonal relationships between people.*
>
> (Allen for IHE, 2014)

As well as having a sense of connection to self and others, having a connection to the natural world can awaken the spiritual core and engender a sense of resilience. Children's spirituality is about relational consciousness. Hay and Nye identified four categories: child-God, child-people, child-world, and child-self (Hay and Nye, 2006). These relationships are to be understood as Martin Buber's I-Thou relationships, characterised by a depth of encounter and engagement, rather than the more distant, disengaged I-It relationships (Hay, 1998, p.15).

> *Practical gardening can bring fresh insights and meaning to exploration of Christian spirituality… together, the seasons make up a complete year, and can illustrate different stages of journeying through our lives…Parallels in life can be drawn from every aspect of seasonal cultivation.*
>
> https://gardeningtheheart.co.uk/aboutpg/parable-garden-design

> *When we provide time and space for children to explore their connection with nature, we afford them "moments to wonder," room to explore their questions and nurture their own innate dispositions.*
>
> https://growing-wonder.com

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[1] https://resilientyouth.org/what-we-do

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE AND YEAR 7 INDUCTION

In a school environment, spiritual resilience is nurtured by:

- positive relationships with nurturing adults rooted in spirituality
- strong bonds to an effective school community.
- faith, hope, and a sense of meaning in life.
- a commitment to spiritual values and practice in a community with positive standards, rituals, and relationships. (Masten, 2010)

Nurturing a sense of resilience is a whole-school responsibility that permeates the life of the community. It cannot be confined to any one part of the curriculum, nor to a specific time, nor is it solely the responsibility of the chaplain, Religious Education team, worship coordinator, or head teacher.

The process of transition and induction to a new school environment can be simultaneously exciting and challenging for students. Having a sense of belonging provides a crucial anchor and foundation for spiritual resilience.

Attachment relationships beyond the caregiver are sought and formed as young people grow up. Thus, providing opportunities for new students to connect with competent, caring adults can facilitate resilience in children and enable them to feel secure, freeing them to explore their new environment (Masten, 2014).

Forging trusted links with parents and guardians of young people can further cement the power of attachment relationships. *Preventive intervention research with families going through divorce and other kinds of adversity has demonstrated that helping and supporting parents has a protective effect on their children, with positive effects that can last for years after the intervention* (Masten, 2010).

Creating an environment where risks from bullying and intimidation are significantly reduced enable students to feel protected. Equally, restorative approaches involving all those affected can engender a sense of self-reflection and awareness.

> *Given the pervasive significance of attachment relationships, it is not surprising to find that positive school-based relationships – with teachers, friends, coaches, and mentors- are implicated in many studies of resilience.*
>
> (Masten, 2014)

> *There is the potential of restorative justice in schools: to foster coping, resilience, civic development and engagement, and other positive psychosocial and developmental outcomes for young people.*
>
> (Valez, 2021)

A school community that ensures students' basic needs also fosters a sense of spiritual resilience. If students are supported with healthy meals, the right classroom equipment, caring tutors, and trained professionals who can help mitigate *the effects of high-risk situations* (Masten, 2010), they are more likely to feel protected and valued.

Having positive role models is crucial in helping students flourish and gain a sense of purpose and meaning within their own lives. Connecting and learning from those around them can create a positive awareness and commitment to self.

> *Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.*
>
> (Pope Paul VI, 1975)

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE AND VULNERABLE STUDENTS

The turbulent effect of the pandemic on people's lives will have tested resilience on many levels. A sense of vulnerability will have equally invaded lives as usual living conditions crumbled, and the various anchors of connection, safety and protection were uprooted. Not everyone has the same core reserves to draw upon when faced with adversity, and therefore their ability to respond with resilience is impaired.

Students are more likely to experience an increased frequency of adversity in life and are less likely to have a sense of hope and positivity about the future when they experience various levels of deprivation through exposure to poor housing conditions; relentless family difficulties and conflict; mental distress; poor educational and employment outcomes.

Inequalities in all of these areas are likely to reflect and contribute to inequalities in resilience, as the presence of damaging risk factors and the absence of protective factors increases vulnerability and reduces resilience. (Allen, 2014). Thus, any presence of determination and grit can be worn down by life's challenges and constant 'knock-backs'

It is essential for students who suffer adversity without the support of positive relationships and nurturing guidance beyond the school community, to have opportunities within school, to connect with a surrogate parental figure such as a member of staff, who can offer stability and safety (Taplin-Wilson, 2016).

> *Having just one emotionally available adult in the child's life, in an ongoing consistent relationship results in the child's toxic stress calming down to tolerable stress.*
>
> (Sunderland, 2021)

Recovering from challenging encounters like the pandemic
Generally stepping into circumstances that are new and unknown can raise anxiety as well as stress levels. For year 7 transitioning to a new school environment, raised anxiety is a normal reaction that allows them to risk assess their unfamiliar surroundings. When such anxiety and stress is experienced against the backdrop of COVID-19 disruption, it can raise their sense of anxiety to the edge of overwhelm.

> *The significance of Jesus calming the storm is pertinent to what's happening in our world today and is evidence of God's love for us.*
> *COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our lives. We're flooded by numerous types of storms daily.*
> *These storms are both internal and external. The intense surges of emotion within us are due to our humanity while the chaotic circumstances around us are beyond our control.*
>
> (Bernock, 2020)

Through trauma situations it has been found that connection or belief to a higher power, such as God can provide a source of comfort and strength during adversity. (Ryan 1998)

> *Respondents asserted that God/a higher power/divine energy of the universe has been the agent for survival and healing in their lives.*
>
> (Ryan 1998)

> *Don't be afraid and don't panic, for I, the LORD your God, am with you in all you do.*
>
> Joshua 1:9

Spirituality that is expressed through faith in God can offer those experiencing adversity a stronghold that sustains them and offers them hope.

> *The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.*
>
> Psalm 145:14.

The pandemic has confronted our usual routines. It has disrupted our core human needs for social connection, productivity, and systems of order. With so many of these needs affected simultaneously, it can mean our brain goes into crisis management and we live in the mode of hyper-alert. With our brain in this mode, we naturally shut down our analytical thinking brain, and our capacity to think rationally and clearly is diminished. (Middleton, 2021)

Living in this hyper – alert state can lead us to become pricklier in reaction to others, our tolerance levels are fragile, and our overall demeanour can be irritable. We can find it harder to manage the smaller challenges in life, let alone the major ones. (Middleton, 2021). Although this mental state is not specific to young children, being aware of this within a community can help us understand our possible reactions to others and theirs to us. It is also important to recognise that adolescents are more prone to operating in the crisis zone due to their maturing emotions (Middleton, 2021).

How do we reduce this sense of high anxiety?
1. Ensure that predictable routine is embedded into the school day and think carefully about suddenly introducing new changes during this time of recovery.
2. Prioritise the need for rest and relaxation. Where can moments during the school day be handed over to moments of rest? A high- alert mind cannot concentrate, a healthy balance between productivity and rest may improve engagement in study.
3. As well as moving forward with a positive outlook post lockdown, deal also with the frustrations of loss and the anxiety that remains. Find time to discuss and share these feelings.
4. Find time to share positive and fun things in life.
   (Middleton, 2021).

> **Rest even though you are busy.**
>
> *Six days you shall labour, but on the seventh day you shall rest, even during the ploughing season and harvest you must rest.*
>
> (Exodus 34:21)

REFLECTIONS

1. Does anything in the literature above resonate with your own thoughts on spiritual resilience?

2. What do you think are the markers and indicators of spiritual resilience in your context?

3. How do you see the connection between spiritual resilience and the nurturing of faith in your role as chaplain?

4. What role can chaplaincy play in nurturing spiritual resilience amongst year 7, and therefore help mitigate the sense of loss and anxiety some of them may have encountered because of COVID-19 disruption?

5. How can Year 7s see spiritual resilience modelled within the school community? How are staff and other students modelling this?

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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

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THOSE DISPROPORTIONATELY DISADVANTAGED BY COVID-19

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH

Canterbury
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INTRODUCTION

The pandemic has impacted everyone, and so in this sense, all have been vulnerable to the consequences of this global situation. Loss in its various forms, whether it is loss of social gatherings, loss of confidence, loss of health or loss of loved ones, has touched our lives and bought the fragility and vulnerability of life to the forefront of our minds. Nevertheless, the effects of the pandemic have been exacerbated for those who were already disadvantaged and challenged with hardship.

> *There are some children, who before this crisis were already vulnerable or living in precarious situations, who are facing particular hardship.*
>
> (Children's Commissioner, 2020)

WHO ARE THE VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS?

Vulnerable Students

There is no conclusive definition of the term *vulnerable* when referring to the needs of some children (Children's Commissioner, 2017). Vulnerability is so complex in nature that it usually triggers an 'accumulation of adversity' (Bryce,2020). How often do we encounter a vulnerable child who presents with only one isolated vulnerability?

> *A child can be vulnerable to risks and poor outcomes because of individual characteristics; the impact of action or inaction by other people; and their physical and social environment.*
>
> (Public Health England, Sept. 2020)

Disadvantaged Students

Disadvantaged pupils are defined as students:
*   who have been eligible for Free Schools Meals (FSM) at any point over the last 6 years
*   who have been 'looked after'[1] continuously for at least one day in the previous year
*   who have left care through a formal route such as adoption.

(Department for Education, Dec. 2021)

Disadvantage and vulnerability can be manifested in a variety of ways. Children who are identified as vulnerable and disadvantaged may not be susceptible to academic underachievement or face learning barriers, (Welsh Government, 2020). Equally, students not formally identified by the criteria above can still be vulnerable and disadvantaged by life's challenges. This has become especially apparent during the outbreak of Covid-19.

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1   A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child. https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/children-and-families-at-risk/looked-after-children

Seeing students as individuals with their own needs, challenges, skills, and talents is core to establishing a culture where all have the support and opportunities to achieve their potential and flourish. Students will have different starting points and hurdles to overcome, there is no 'one size fits all' solution, but with sustained commitment from all who are invested in nurturing a child's full capacity, the chance to succeed is tangible.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED THOSE WHO ARE STUDENTS PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED AS VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED?

The pandemic has had a significant impact on all school children with some facing enduring consequences. With a specific spotlight on Year 7 transition and induction students, school leaders have said that these students have arrived taking longer to settle in and establish themselves, (Ofsted, 2021). No doubt wider socio-economic strains and inequalities are contributary factors resulting in unsettled transition procedures.

The research project: *Consolation and Hope in a Time of Crisis* is considering the impact of the pandemic on Year 7 induction students with an emphasis on how children from different ethnic minority groups and children who are in receipt of pupil premium (pp) funding have been disproportionally affected. Although, this research digest cannot address every need of pp students, and the full complexities of ethnic disparities that exist, it highlights below some of the findings from recent studies linked to SEND and Mental Health issues.

Ethnic Disparities

During the initial wave of the pandemic, people from Black and Asian communities were more likely to contract the virus and encounter serious consequences, including death (Lally, 2020). As the Covid-19 virus continues to spread amongst the UK population, recent studies suggest that children from the Asian communities are more likely than any other ethnic group to be admitted to hospital with the illness (University of Oxford, 2021).

> *People from ethnic minority groups are almost three times as likely to contract COVID-19 and five times more likely to experience serious outcomes.*
>
> (Lally,2020)

Bangladeshi and Black African communities seem to have suffered more with financial and mental health issues during lockdown than those from white communities (Lally, 2020).

The Runnymede Trust found that inequalities related to Covid infection and outcomes are likely driven by longstanding racial and socio-economic inequalities such as poor employment

and pay opportunities, poor housing, and overcrowded living conditions in areas of poverty and deprivation. The report also points out that many people from ethnic minority groups are employed as key workers that not only leaves them exposed to the virus, but if they live in households with extended family members, they too are more vulnerable (Nazroo et al., 2021).

> *People of Pakistani ethnicity are over three times as likely to live in the most overall deprived 10% of neighbourhoods compared with those of White British ethnicity.*
>
> (Lally, 2020)

> *UK Government statistics show that the highest rates of overcrowding are in Bangladeshi (24%), Pakistani (18%), Black African (16%), Arab (15%) and Mixed White and Black African (14%) background households. In comparison, only 2% of White British households are classified as over-crowded.*
>
> (Lally, 2020)

Pupil Premium Students

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic took root on a global scale, crisis activated remote education became the substitute for face-to-face teaching and learning, and the home environment replaced the classroom. Lockdown magnified and shed light on a plethora of socio-economic issues that has impacted all lives, but more drastically those from deprived backgrounds.

> *Homelife during lockdown was functioning amid the blurring boundaries between workplace and personal space.*
>
> (Schwartzman, 2020)

In some homes tensions arising due to lockdown conditions were coupled with longstanding social problems such as abuse, maltreatment, and financial hardship, now exacerbated and aggravated by isolation and social distancing restrictions. Certainly, the environment in which we learn is crucial. According to Warfield (2016) a disruptive and unhealthy environment can affect academic progress by up to 25%, with students finding it difficult to engage in learning. Although affluent households are not immune from challenging environments, it is far more prevalent amongst the deprived. Often disadvantaged children lack even the most basic resources.

> *While the government published a list of online educational resources shortly after schools closed, the issue of access to technology was not addressed until the 19th April (over one month after the 18 announcement that schools would be closing).*
>
> (Education Policy Institute, May 2020)

> *Households on universal credit in England and Wales must earn less than £7,400 a year to be eligible for free school meals, regardless of the number of children in the family… These low limits on income mean that many children from working families are in poverty but unable to access free school meals.*
>
> (Child Poverty Action Group, August 2021)

SEND, Pupil Premium Students and Ethnic Disparities

A recent Ofsted report on SEND students has stated that rather than the pandemic creating new problems for these students, it has highlighted and exacerbated issues that were already present pre- covid, (Ofsted, June 2021).

> *Schools said that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND have been particularly affected by the pandemic. They had concerns about the social and emotional health of pupils with SEND.*
>
> (Ofsted, 2021)

The report noted that some SEND children who transitioned to secondary school in September 2020 felt lonely and isolated in their new environment. Working closely with families of SEND children seemed to mitigate this situation, even when formal support systems were deficient due to pandemic disruption (Ofsted, June 2021).

> *Some of those transferred to new schools in September 2020,* ***'had not made new friends, having missed out on some of the usual transition activities. Some had just settled when the November national lockdown began.'***
>
> (Ofsted June 2021)

Pupil Premium Students and SEND

Students identified with SEND are twice as likely to be eligible for free school meals (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020)

> *38.0% of pupils with an EHC plan and 34.3% of pupils with SEN support are eligible for free school meals in 2021. This compares to 20.8% of all pupils in all schools.*
>
> (Gov. UK, June 2021)

However, data also reveals that children living in disadvantaged areas are less likely to receive SEND support than their more affluent peers. Most at risk of SEND under- identification tend to be children who are moved between schools, those who have a high absence record and those who have encountered abuse and neglect (Simpson, 2021)

> *While access to SEND support was already very unequal, the pandemic is very likely to have resulted in more children falling through the cracks or facing long waits for support. We need to significantly improve how we identify pupils with SEND, so that we can deliver consistently for families and ensure that no child is denied the support that they need.*
>
> (Hutchinson, March 2021)

Ethnic Disproportionality in SEND Identification

Recent studies have found that there is an imbalance of SEND identification and support for some ethnic minority children. In some cases, there is an under identification of needs and in other, an over- identification. For example, children from Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Other Asian communities are 50% less likely than White British students to be identified with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), whereas children from Black- Caribbean and Mixed White and Black- Caribbean students are 50% more likely than White British students to be identified as having Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH). Furthermore, it is more likely, (1.5 times higher) for Black Caribbean and Pakistani pupils to be identified with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) than White British pupils, (Strand et al, 2018).

> *Ethnic disproportionality exists when an ethnic group is significantly more, or significantly less, likely to be identified with SEN compared to the ethnic majority*
>
> (Strand et al, 2018)

> *Under-representation of some ethnic groups is just as important to understand as the overrepresentation of others, as it may indicate barriers to accessing services and provision.*
>
> (Strand et al, 2018)

Mental Health Issues, Pupil Premium Students and Ethnic Disparities

> *Evidence suggests that those at greatest risk of poor mental health during the pandemic include children with previous mental health or learning difficulties and those at socioeconomic disadvantage.*
>
> (Post Note 653, September 2021)

Serious concerns have been raised regarding mental health and the escalating impact the pandemic has had on this. From a survey in 2020 of 2000 young people already prone to mental health issues, 87% said their mental health concerns had escalated during the pandemic. Only 11% said their mental health had improved during lockdown, given the lack of pressure to socially interact with others (Young Minds, Autumn 2020).

> *Many experts agree that further action is urgently needed, including prioritising social and educational activities, addressing socioeconomic disadvantage, enhancing family support, and improving and expanding child mental healthcare provision*
>
> (Post Note 653, September 2021)

> *Approximately 60% of children and young people in need of mental health services are currently unable to access them. They often face high access thresholds and reject referrals followed by long waits, if they get accepted into the services.*
>
> (House of Commons Committees, December 2021)

Pupil Premium Students and Mental Health Issues

The link between mental health issues and poverty is significant. A recent NHS report revealed that children were more likely to present with a probable mental health disorder in households that have fallen behind with finances and payments (Vizard et al, 2020). There is also a concern that although mental health issues amongst secondary students seemed to remain on an even keel over time, including during and after lockdowns, with a sense of post -lockdown recovery, the reality for those living in low-income households was different. Mental health issues continued to rise and impact young people from disadvantaged families with little indication of post- lockdown recovery (Co-Space Report 11, 2020-2021).

The record number of contacts to our helpline reinforces the need for Governments across the UK to put children at the heart of their recovery plans. These must go beyond education and address the harm some have experienced so the pandemic doesn't leave a legacy of trauma for children.

(Sir Peter Wanless, NSPCC CEO, 2021)

The NSPCC has revealed that with children hidden from sight during lockdown restrictions, cases of neglect and abuse have increased and therefore, following the return to school, much work needs to be done in addressing the harm and trauma caused by this (NSPCC, 2021).

This has been reflected by our helpline service, which has received nearly 85,000 contacts from April 2020 to March 2021, a 23% increase on the previous year. Out of these calls, 47% led to a referral to an external agency, such as the police or children's services.

(NSPCC, 2021)

Ethnic Disparities and Mental Health Issues

Mental health disparities amongst ethnic minority communities have long existed but the current pandemic has intensified the problem.

Given the higher risks of mental illnesses and complex care needs among ethnic minorities and also in deprived inner-city areas, COVID-19 seems to deliver a double blow.

(Smith et al, 2020)

Kooth is an online forum reaching out to young people who need support with mental health issues and according to the Guardian, the number of under-18 ethnic minority groups contacting this forum with suicidal thoughts during the pandemic, (March – May 2020), increased by 26.6% in comparison to an increase of 18.1% by their white peers (The Guardian, June 2020).

Racial discrimination affects people's life chances and the stress associated with being discriminated against based on race/ethnicity affects mental and physical health

(Public Health England, 2020a)

Deep rooted racism and discrimination has left some members of ethnic communities lacking in trust and therefore reluctant to reach out for help.

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE AND VULNERABLE STUDENTS

No one should feel that a characterization or label defines who they are. Irrespective of background, culture, capabilities, beliefs etc. each person is unique and by the very nature of our humanity, we all have need.

Labels carry messages that often confine a child to a particular role or behaviour.

(Nicholson)

While specific identifications can be helpful as a medium for communication across various teams supporting children, such identifications can equally act as barriers that restrict and hinder personal growth. In enabling and encouraging students to flourish, it is need, not labels that should be recognised and nurtured.

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

(Psalm 139: 1)

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

(Psalm 139:14)

A Recovery Curriculum

A recovery curriculum for students as they emerge from the various levels of loss and disruption is essential. Many schools are targeting gaps in learning by adapting their curriculum. Mental health and student wellbeing is also a key focus. In some schools, staff are being trained to be able to help students with initial mental health support and other schools are employing more specialist support through trained counsellors (Gov. UK, December 2021).

Spiritual Recovery

There is no single factor that will protect your adolescent like a personal sense of spirituality.

(Miller, 2015)

To address the academic and emotional wellbeing of students is important as part of a recovery process, yet it is also essential to connect with, and build the spiritual core. Shein (2017) argues that nurturing the spiritual core of a person is a precursor for all levels of human development.

The Role of Chaplains in Spiritual Recovery

Chaplains have a central role in fostering this level of spiritual support for students. Working as part of a team around the child, offering support on different levels of expertise builds those important steppingstones of trust that can demonstrate to the child that they are known, valued, and respected.

With the surge in mental health issues post -lockdown, participant chaplains in our virtual community of practice spoke of the frustration of not being able to build key relationships with vulnerable students because the students were being referred to specialists. However, the chaplains also reported that nurturing spiritual resilience was critical and emphasises the necessary focus on the role of spirituality and faith as an underpinning foundation.

> *Staff will send me a student that they are desperately worried about. I'll have a conversation with them and within a couple of minutes I know full well that I'm going to be referring them for counselling.*
>
> (Chaplain, VCoP 1)

> *In terms of spiritual resilience, we're trying to sort of make a distinction between spiritual resilience and any other kind of resilience, I think that's referring even more to that inner sense of who am I and what is my worth?*
>
> (Chaplain, VCoP 3)

When nurturing the spiritual flourishing of all children, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable, is it important to bring to the forefront Jesus' words, *I have come that you might have life –life in all its fullness,* (John 10:10).

REFLECTIONS

1. Does anything in the literature above resonate with your own thoughts on spiritual resilience and support for disadvantaged and vulnerable students?

2. How do you support pupil premium students in Year 7 through transition and induction?

3. How do you support ethnic minority groups in Year 7 through transition and induction?

4. Where does your role as a chaplain sit in relation to school recovery plans for students needing support?

5. What needs to be put in place to offer vulnerable children ways to develop spiritual resilience?

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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

RESEARCH DIGEST | ISSUE 5 | SEP 2022

HOPE IN THE SHADOW OF LOSS

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH

Canterbury
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INTRODUCTION

Amid the COVID-19 disruption, people's lives were thrown into disarray as the 'norms' of life were ambushed, dismantled and in many cases destroyed. It was during this time of global disorder that many people turned towards religion and spirituality for comfort. Data collection from 95 countries on Google searches during the month of May 2020, that included the word 'prayer,' reached the highest levels ever recorded and demonstrated an increase of 50% when compared to previous searches for prayer (Bentzen 2020). At its height, the pandemic crushed our world of routine and predictability, confronting us with our human fragility and mortality.

As our world now starts to restructure from the impact of the pandemic, holding a sense of hope helps navigate us towards renewed optimism. In some way the pandemic has impacted all our lives and reflecting upon the multitude of consequences it leaves in its wake, the ramifications continue to be revealed.

Within the school context, it is emerging that the pandemic has influenced the lives of students in various ways, emotionally, academically, mentally, and spiritually. Although schools are working hard to help students recover, this is a challenging and continuous undertaking. (Nuffield Foundation: 2021).

> *School leaders feel the government's current approach to learning recovery is misconceived. They see the emphasis on academic 'catch up' as unhelpful and want an equal focus on emotional/well-being recovery and enrichment alongside academic catch up.*
>
> (Nuffield Foundation, 2021)

HOW IS THE TERM HOPE GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD?

The definition of hope is multifarious. According to the Oxford Dictionary, hope means 'to want something to happen and think that it is possible'[1] To embrace an optimistic outlook on life and what the future might hold is akin to hope. Future optimism in a general understanding of hope tends to be restricted to aspirations of what this world can bring.

> *Our human compassion binds us the one to the other – not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.*
>
> Nelson Mandela

> *We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon.*
>
> Franklin D. Roosevelt

HOPE WITHIN A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING

Hope within the Christian faith is underpinned with a sense of trust and expectancy of what God has promised. That through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have been forgiven, redeemed, and restored. Hope in a Christian context looks to the promise of eternal life. Hope and faith are intricately interwoven as "faith is confidence in what we hope for" (Hebrews11:1).

> *For in this hope, we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?"*
>
> Romans 8:24

> *Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord.*
>
> Psalm 31:24

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1 https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/hope_1

HOPE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah speaks of the Babylonian exile and captivity, during which the people of Judah were plunged into an all-encompassing spiritual crisis. They found themselves captives in a foreign land, having to worship without the Temple in Jerusalem and feeling distanced from God. Initially they were compelled to lament honestly on the reality of the situation they found themselves in, and then eventually look anew at God and life (Lawrenz, 2020).

> *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept*
> *when we remembered Zion.*
> *There on the poplars*
> *we hung our harps,*
> *for there our captors asked us for songs.*
>
> Psalm 137: 1-3

> *…but those who hope in the LORD*
> *will renew their strength.*
> *They will soar on wings like eagles;*
> *they will run and not grow weary,*
> *they will walk and not be faint.*
>
> Isaiah 40:31

Persevering with hope for the exiled was challenging when everything they cherished had been destroyed. Encouraged by the insights of their prophets, psalmists and scribes, their focus turned to the very foundations of their faith. Amidst their experiences of mayhem, they reflected on the origins of life and Creation, of God bringing order and life out of chaos. In the shadow of loss, the prophets proclaimed a sustained message of hope (Dowling, 2020).

> *The experience of exile was a catalyst for developing a new understanding of themselves and of God's presence in their life.*
>
> Dowling, 2020

The suffering and loss caused by the bitter experience of the exile was traumatic for the people of Judah and yet transformative. From the tribe of Judah, 'Judaism emerged as a religion of hope' (Wilson, 2020). While they still longed for their Temple, they adapted to their current situation to ensure their covenant with God was maintained. Synagogues became their place of gathering; oral traditions were written down and the rich heritage and wisdom arising from traditional faith stories were recited and interpreted for their new context (ibid, 2020).

> *We are in coronavirus exile. We have a chance to reflect upon what was, to experience what is, and to hope for and work toward what might be in the months and years ahead.*
>
> Wilson, 2020

HOPE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Woven throughout the New Testament is the idea that because of Jesus, Christians are a people of hope. As St Paul states, Jesus is 'our blessed hope' (Titus 2:31). Such hope anchored in Jesus has the resolve of God's promises. It reinforces the conviction that what God has proclaimed will come to pass, irrespective of the trials and tribulations life can present us with.

New Testament devotion is consistently oriented to this hope; Christ is "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1) and we serve "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13). Faith itself is defined as "being sure of what we hope for" (Heb. 11:1), and Christian commitment is defined as having "fled to take hold of … this hope as an anchor for the soul" (Heb. 6:18–19).

Packer, 2020

Luke 24:13-25 tells the account of two disciples on the road to Emmaus following Jesus' death and subsequent initial rumours of his resurrection. They were discussing the recent events as they journeyed and when joined by Jesus walking along side them, they failed to recognise him as they were consumed by their own distress. When Jesus spoke to them, 'they stood still, their faces downcast' (Luke 24:17). On recalling the recent events of the crucifixion, the two disciples said what a powerful prophet Jesus was, 'but we had hoped…' (Luke 24:21). The past tense 'hoped' reveals to the reader that whatever aspirations they once held had now expired because, from their perspective, Jesus was no longer present amongst them. It was not until they broke bread together at the table (Luke 24:30) that once again their hope was restored as they experienced Jesus' presence. In reflection the two disciples asked 'each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)

…my prayer is that we will each recognize Jesus once again in the situations and circumstances we find ourselves today so that we too can be restored and have our hope renewed.

Lepp, 2020

HOPE FOLLOWING THE PANDEMIC

> *Before we think about the future, we must acknowledge the past…Lament is a huge part of the biblical tradition: God is big enough to hear our anger and stand with us in our sorrow.*
>
> Archbishop Justin Welby, 2021

Archbishop Justin Welby points out that in moving forward, when all around us is shattered, there is still the opportunity to rebuild and renew in such a way that the new reflects the world God hoped for us all. The cross stands as a beacon of hope (Welby, 2021)

Pope Francis has noted that the pandemic has not only challenged us with death but also the uncertainty of existence and has therefore changed our way of living (Wooden, 2022). He said, *'All of us saw certain freedoms curtailed, while the pandemic generated feelings not only of grief, but also, at times, of doubt, fear and disorientation.'* Wooden, 2022). Referring to the next Holy Year of Jubilee in 2025, Pope Francis has chosen the motto, 'Pilgrims of Hope.' (ibid, 2022). He states, there should be a renewed commitment to restoring 'the fruits of the earth for everyone' especially the poor and vulnerable (ibid, 2022). Pope Francis calls for a *'Church that is bruised, hurting and dirty because it's been out in the streets, rather than a Church that is unhealthy from being confined to his own security" or being caught up in "a web of obsession and procedures".'* (Kostoff, 2020)

> *We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision*
>
> Pope Francis in Wooden, 2022

HOW CAN CHAPLAINS CULTIVATE HOPE AMONGST STUDENTS?

What chaplains said.

1. **Giving space for reflection first.**

   As a whole school, we lamented the things that we'd lost due to Covid. And then with then with the 7s and 8s last year (2021) as part of prayers, we did quite a bit that was on lament and what we've lost, and I think that was really helpful actually to give space within the school community for that. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

   I did some training with all the staff at the beginning of this term about use of our worship time in tutor groups and to make those tutors aware that this isn't just another school process and to just slow everything down and create that sacred space… I kind of thought ''Is this going to be a bit patronising?'' but it was really well received actually, people needed permission to stop, to slow down and to be. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

2. **Planning ahead with confidence**

   Schools are great at planning, we know what we're going to do on the 3rd July now but actually that kind of giving people confidence, the students confidence, and staff probably, to start planning ahead, planning nice things, planning things where you can be together. (Chaplain VCoP 7)
   I think it does come from the adults first. Working in schools, whatever our role, we're in the business of hope, aren't we? We're taking these young people and hoping the very best for them. Sometimes we have to push, sometimes we have to pull a bit, but that's what we do, and I think maybe just reminding the adults of that and then that comes out in the classroom and other interactions with children. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

3. **Inhabit the ministry of hope**

   I do think there's a significant role for chaplains to inhabit the ministry of hope. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

   I think there needs to be something that a chaplain can communicate about the fact that they have a still centre, that they are rooted and their role within school is about providing for the school, that still centre… it's not all about the chaplain it's about the whole school but one of the chaplain's role is that kind of representative role…the chaplain as the individual person needs to be able to embody the hope that we talk of as being a distinctively Christian hope. And it's the intangible stuff, the soft stuff that you couldn't put on a job description, or a job advert necessarily but you know when you've been in contact with someone who embodies and inhabits some of that, that there's just something about that person that make life seem better of whatever it might be. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

   Why is it that we are called to be chaplains? Well, it's God has called to that still centre inside us and said ''I want to speak out of that to others and you're the person I'm doing that to'' and we're in that particular place. So, something about that calling of the individual person to embody the hope of the Christian faith. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

4. **Point to the direction of hope**

For me there was something about, you know in terms of hope, the first bit of chaplaincy is about listening and acknowledging and reassuring, and from that reassurance we can point the direction to hope. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

…there's always something in our history where we are challenged and where we can be floored and derailed by what's going on and I think that our history is quite important to share with young people, to say look, you know, we've got through Covid and, yes, there've been casualties along the way but look, we're still here and we're still working through it and what have we learnt by this? And look at how we've grown. So, I think there is something about acknowledging that this is part of life, it's part of things that happen across the generations, you can go back to the biblical times and what was happening to the Israelites and them having lost their homes and all these different kinds of scenarios, it's part of life, the ups and downs of life. And I think that kind of listening and acknowledging and reassuring is a huge part of chaplaincy in terms of hope. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

REFLECTIONS

- Does anything in the literature above resonate with your own thoughts on hope?
- Has your school community had time and space to lament on the impact of the pandemic in your context?
- What does hope look like in your school context?
- Do all in your school community have the same vision of hope?
- What do you do as a chaplain to hold hope in your school community?

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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

REFLECTIONS ON LESSONS LEARNT

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past 18 months, our journey with the chaplains involved with the virtual community of practice (VCoP) has been one of reflection, insight, and hope. They have shared the consequences of working in secondary schools during the pandemic and the journey towards renewal post lockdown. The clear message from the VCOP meetings is that all lives, on different levels, have been impacted because of the COVID- 19 disruption.

As we move towards the latter stages of the VCoP meetings, we can reflect on what we have learnt about transition and induction during a crisis situation, through the eyes of the chaplains, and how these experiences can shape future procedures. This digest captures the thoughts of the chaplains from June 2021 to November 2022 and has been ordered into 5 main sections:

- Year 7 transition and induction experiences from the academic year 2021 and 2022.
- The escalation of Mental Health issues from 2020 through 2022
- Vulnerable Students
- The Role of Chaplains
- Spiritual Flourishing and Worship

Each section concludes with the reflections of the chaplains; however, it is hoped that some readers of this digest may use the comments and reflections as prompts for consideration within their context. It has been structured so that readers can dip into the various sections that are of priority for them and their context.

> *Before we think about the future, we must acknowledge the past...Lament is a huge part of the biblical tradition: God is big enough to hear our anger and stand with us in our sorrow.*
>
> Archbishop Justin Welby, 2021[1]

> *Voicing lament and pain can be a ... path to healing.*
>
> *Then hope can dare to be expressed actions.*
>
> *The public practice of lament is a way of keeping hope alive amidst the despair.*
>
> Ross, C., 2021[2]

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1   Welby, J, (2021) 'God's vision for a post-pandemic world'
2   Ross, C. (2021). Hope is tough: Reflections in a time of COVID-19. Practical theology, 14(1-2), 86-97.

To give a sense of what was happening in the UK during the pandemic and how this may relate to the thoughts and reflections of the chaplains, the chart below details events and government guidance (2020-2021)

Institute for Government Analysis and accessed via
https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/timeline-coronavirus-lockdown-december-2021.pdf

Timeline of UK government coronavirus lockdowns and measures, March 2020 to December 2021

Source: Institute for Government analysis.

1. YEAR 7 TRANSITION AND INDUCTION EXPERIENCES FROM THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2021 AND 2022.

a) June 2021 (Chaplains reflect on September 2020 induction)

14 September
'Rule of six' – indoor and outdoor social gatherings above six banned in England

22 September
PM announces new restrictions in England, including a return to working from home and 10pm curfew for hospitality sector

30 September
PM says UK at a "critical moment" in the crisis and would "not hesitate" to impose further restrictions if needed needed

I think one of the main things from the students' point of view is that it hasn't felt that secondary, because they're having to stay in… that one room.

They're a still a bit like primary kids.
They've been kept together for a long while in one room with teachers coming into them. They kind of haven't had that full experience and they haven't been interacting obviously with older years.

We had vertical tutoring for 10 years, so we had to abandon that and so that's totally changed the whole structure of our school and how our school works. So, everything has changed but what I've also noticed is that the older ones are less caring for the Year 7's because they haven't been introduced to them.
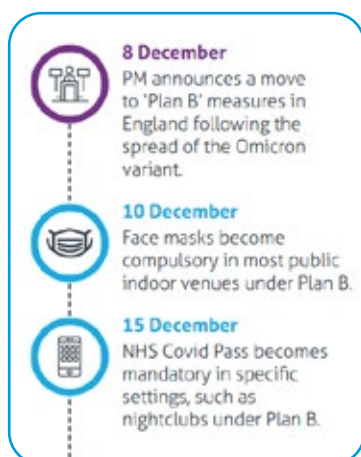
It's just they're in their building and they just think they've really become accustomed to secondary school and I don't think they realise that next year it will be like a double transition.

Since half-term, we have just started to circulate through the whole of school. So there's now a delayed anxiety about, "I'm going to get lost", "How will I know my way?" etc, that we would normally have dealt with by the end of September. It's coming now.

We had our first collective worship that was a real one, it wasn't a virtual one. Up to now it's been individual tutor group worships or the whole year via Zoom. So, it's the first time Year 7 were together in the hall, and I opened it with, "Have a good look round because this is our Year 7". I'm not sure they even know each other that well.

They just haven't had that kind of normal experience of being around people of different ages, which is one of the beauties of secondary school.

b) December 2021

8 December
PM announces a move to 'Plan B' measures in England following the spread of the Omicron variant.

10 December
Face masks become compulsory in most public indoor venues under Plan B.

15 December
NHS Covid Pass becomes mandatory in specific settings, such as nightclubs under Plan B.

Year 7 didn't get an amazing primary school sort of pathway did they? It was the most important sort of years towards the end that were just completely eradicated for them. And I think personally in our setting that they're just, as I say, just floating in…

They still haven't settled; they are needy and afraid of taking risks…they seem younger than Year 7s somehow collectively

c) September 2022

I think [transition this year is] more relaxed. It's just blown through very naturally… there is a marked difference between previous cohorts.

I don't know if others of you have found this but the ones who were, who are Year 9 now who were then Year 8 last year, that was probably our most complex year group where we saw the most impact from Covid… I've had so many of that year group coming to my groups, catching up with me, collaring me in the corridors and in
their different places and it feels like I've got a relationship with them that I haven't had with a year group before.

I know what you mean, there is that sense of connection with those that went through the greatest period of trauma with us that we're not obviously replicating now.

This year's Year 7s aren't so traumatised or they're easier to deal with maybe.

Certainly, compared to last year it'spretty wonderful actually. I'd say that it's normal in a way that it can be. It just seems calmer. I feel calmer, I think because I'm not anticipating what's going to happen next, not knowing what's happening next.

They [Year 7] seem to be more settled, a little bit more mature than the previous year groups have
Last year's Year 7 had a reasonable year, it wasn't brilliant, but the year before didn't and the year before didn't really, didn't know us well enough to trust us. I feel it's all about trust. .. I just feel like 9 and 10 have been so disrupted they don't have that trust of us.

> Some teachers are concerned about the ongoing impact of increased mental health issues that they can see in their pupils. This is contributing to higher absence levels and poor behaviour in some settings.
>
> https://theicg.co.uk/5-key-concerns-for-uk-schools-in-the-22-23-academic-year/

Reflections on lessons learnt

I think the issue with crisis…we know now what to expect, whereas before we didn't, which in a way makes it more frightening.

I would now prioritise making certain that the chaplaincy was having frequent contact with all students. I think previously, I sort of slightly sat back waiting for an opportunity. Now, I would make certain that the chaplaincy was having a very proactive and direct contact with students, particularly with the Year 7 cohort that's new and needing to find their way around and of course the chaplaincy is one of those parts of secondary school that they're not familiar with in primary schools, so they don't know what to expect.

I would say that we have to realise that we can't just go straight to addressing the academic because the impact on social skills, on friendships… I think schools could be much more focused on rebuilding the people, the human beings, rather than the students that they presently do.

Schools need to be prepared…there are many schools who do not take the chaplain's role seriously and they combine our role with teaching… chaplains can make a huge impact.

2. THE ESCALATION OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES FROM 2020 THROUGH TO 2022

Data in blue boxes below comes from:
https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up

a) June 2021 (Chaplains reflect on academic year 2020-2021)

Children and young people with a probable mental disorder were more likely to say that lockdown had made their life worse (54.1% of 11 to 16 year olds, and 59.0% of 17 to 22 year olds), than those unlikely to have a mental disorder (39.2% and 37.3% respectively)

What we've noticed in bucketloads is the mental health needs of the Year 7's have been on a different scale from previous years and we've noticed some really very complex needs around eating disorders, OCD, struggling to attend school at all and, you know, the whole plethora of needs which we might be more familiar in emerging in Year 9 and particularly Year 10 & 11.

We are concerned about both what is happening with our Year 7's but also about what the future impact is given how young they are when they're going through some pretty extreme experiences.

b) December 2021

10.6% of 6 to 16 year olds missed more than 15 days of school during the 2020 Autumn term. Children with a probable mental disorder were twice as likely to have missed this much school (18.2%) as those unlikely to have a mental disorder (8.8%).

This Covid, post-Covid situation is so very very different. I feel like we could do with a whole new tranche of mental health specialist staff in because those of us who were dealing with these sorts of things on a relatively manageable level previously can't do that with all the other responsibilities now.

It's of a different level from the mental health needs previously and that's quite scary, I think… There's that real worry about what students are going to do to themselves when they go home at night and that, we're carrying on a bigger level I think than we used to. Well, that's certainly what I'm finding in my setting.

There's an awful lot of development still to go and I suspect we're going to be experiencing the effects of this throughout their school career… I think when they're in Year 11 we're going to be finding Year 11 problems are a bit different from what they used to be.

We have also heard from young people who have urgently needed help but not looked for it, because of concerns about being a burden on services, uncertainty about what is available, or because of stigma.

https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/355gyqcd/coronavirus-report-summer-2020-final.pdf

c) March 2022

I think some of the issues around mental health for the whole country has been significantly impacted in terms of services not being available, GP appointments not available.

d) September 2022

We still have quite a few students wearing masks because they feel anxious.

I would say that we've seen a significant increase in young people needing support around mental health.

I do still feel that a significant part of my pastoral interaction with students is triaging for mental health support, so it's rare that I have a conversation with a student that is what I would describe as sort of pastoral care and general sort of support for young people as they're growing up through adolescence…

We've catapulted it seems into diagnosable mental health illnesses rather than dealing with just the general rough and tumble of life.

It's as though there's no space just for those kind of gentle conversations … whether people feel they can't ask for help unless they are self-harming or doing something pretty horrific… So just those general questions about why the world is the way it is, perhaps are not being asked now, you can only ask a question if it's a really serious question. It's a bit like we don't go to our GPs when we've got a cough or a cold, you know, we only go if we feel it's really, important…. We engage with them at crisis level and because we're constantly dealing with crisis, we're not allowed the space for just normal healthy development and so normal healthy development is compromised for many more students than it should be.

We're just seeing lots and lots more students seeking a diagnosis and I don't know if that's part of the way the culture's changed. Because obviously we want people to be able to talk about mental health but just to recognise that we all have mental health and it's normal that we all have seasons, I guess, that are good and not so good. I suppose that's part of the seeking of a teenager to have an identity, to be part of a tribe, has morphed into an identity that is associated with mental health and the labels that go with it.

Reflections on lessons learnt

We were already in a mental health epidemic for young people before Covid hit. Covid has accelerated what was already happening, having students presenting with diagnosable mental health disorders. That was already on the rise, but it's just been a bit more sort exponential during this time. So, there wasn't a golden era before Covid. This has intensified, speeded up but it was what was already happening.

In terms of chaplaincy, there might be a further conversation to be had within the world of chaplaincy about whether part of the skill set, part of the training of school chaplains, almost sort of written into the job description is to be mental health support professionals… actually having more tools at their disposal. There should just be an understood part of what chaplaincy is all about, because I think chaplains are very well placed to be involved in this way and almost certainly going to be, so why not almost formalise it more, and have ongoing mental health training for chaplains. It's not going away.

3. VULNERABLE STUDENTS

Data in yellow boxes below comes from:
https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up

a) June 2021

Children aged 5 to 16 years with a probable mental disorder were more than twice as likely to live in a household that had fallen behind with payments (16.3%), than children unlikely to have a mental disorder (6.4%)

I would say we are still seeing the vulnerable in more need. I think just the volume of what some of these children are dealing with, because whether it's pandemic induced or whatever, there's so much going on at home and outside of school and that seems to have escalated, so any issues in school just seem to be on top of another load of issues.

Since we've been back into school, some of the things that their Head of Year was talking about was that right from the beginning the vulnerable students as well as the others didn't have any actual face-to-face meetings. Some of them were likely to have been initially the students that might not have access to the internet and so, although some of that has been picked up more now that we're back in school, pretty much all of our teaching was online for a really big chunk and I know that the safeguarding team are doing a lot of home visits for particularly vulnerable students but then the others wouldn't have that.

b) March 2022

The proportion of 6 to 16 year olds with a laptop or tablet they could work on at home increased from 89.0% in 2020 to 94.4% in 2021. The proportion receiving regular support from school or college also increased, from 73.7% in 2020 to 79.9% in 2021.

I'd say that the pupil premium disadvantaged students are accessing more support than those in need but not specifically identified on school data as such.

We were all looking at everyone having laptops and making sure pupils were accessing learning and probably not having those other conversations as much as maybe schools and other services should have been.

Reflections on lessons learnt

Talking about vulnerability, I wonder whether students feel more vulnerable now. Whereas one time they were invincible and with the pandemic suddenly we're all vulnerable and we've got to be wary of who's next to us. I don't know. I'm thinking on my feet here but I just wonder whether students suddenly feel more vulnerable.

We've already said that they're talking more about, "I've got this issue" or "My mental health is bad." I mean we see it before exams or mock exams, "I'm really suffering with my mental health" "No that's exam stress, that's isolated. And that is normal." Yeah, so whether they're feeling more vulnerable.

4. THE ROLE OF THE CHAPLAIN

a) June 2021

I've recognised is that, whilst I'm giving so much more time to the whole pastoral and mental health support and very little to worship at all, partly because we can't gather together for worship but partly because there isn't the time.

…what I'm experiencing now is that what's needed is not so much or not exclusively pastoral care, these are specific diagnosable mental health needs which need to be dealt with by trained professional counsellors. So, I've turned into a triage service.

Before Easter I started drop-ins, I got Covid money for doing mental health drop-ins and I've been playing games and quarantine bonding matters and all that sort of stuff but doing things to create a more therapeutic area. So, I've changed the Chaplaincy completely into more of a Chaplaincy and wellbeing space and just, doing it within year group bubbles. It is creating something that catches the kids … when they can't cope in a classroom.

It's been trying to think about how we use the skills and the spaces that we've got…that meets the almost emergency needs that we are in.

I found that my role has changed to support the staff who are working with the students, and many more adults are coming to the chapel to talk about their days.

December 2021

It does feel like there's a lot to do, more than normal and all eyes are chaplaincy, from adults, from students as well.

I'm exhausted now and actually it's getting me down. I'm not coping as well as I would normally cope.
I'm not really carrying, I'm dropping rather than carrying. Or giving periods of carrying as far as I can, if that gives support to other people, but I know that emotionally and practically I've kind of gone almost beyond a point of really healthily and helpfully managing. So, sort of limping on till the Christmas holidays and I hope to regroup a little bit.

Nobody checks up on you. So, you're taking everything on your shoulders but then who's the person there at the end of the day who's going to go, "Right, what do you need to talk about because that must have been tough?"

I think the difference this term is that it's just become even more busy, so actually that point of contact with colleagues is evaporated... you know, all those means of communicating just seem to have been squeezed and shrunk and I don't feel so well connected and supported, not support for me but just sharing the load.

I wonder if I'm just getting a bit of compassion fatigue.

I kind of went into this with fighting spirit and ''Right, this is an opportunity and we're going to do this, and the Lord is with us''. But yes, it's the relentlessness.

I think from a spiritual point of view an external spiritual director is really valuable, just someone who isn't school who can just come in and you can just have an hour praying, talking, just reconnecting.

September 2022

Normal is not what normal was, so there is more to fit in... it's, what, 3 years since we've had a normal start to the year. So, you'd expect changes to happen in that time.

I'm finding with chaplaincy that we're kind of going back to how it was before Covid but there have been some changes which have stayed which have increased workload. So, for example, now in one of my schools we have a lower school lunch break and then we have an upper school lunch break which just means I have to run two groups... So that increases the amount of work that you're doing from group work.

We know what's coming now, we can plan, we're not kind of on tenterhooks just waiting for the next announcement. And that's got to take a lot of pressure off.

Reflections on lessons learnt

I thought I was invincible, and I learnt that I'm not.

I think I'm feeling quite aware of my limits which is a new learning curve for me. But you can't do it all. I think that self-preservation is important.

I think in situations like this the chaplain perhaps needs to speak to the whole staff, train the whole staff and just share some of that responsibility. Rather than staff sending everyone to one person if that one person can share with staff, I think that's been a big learning point. I have a slot on chaplaincy in every staff meeting and, in every staff meeting I have something to say, just putting it wider.

Almost every school that has a chaplain, there will only be one chaplain in that school. And yes, you might belong to an academy and there might be other chaplains in your academy, but to a large extent as chaplain you are working solo. Yes, you've colleagues in school obviously but the sort of chaplaincy role of things is solo. And I think we need to pay attention to that, that we're asking a chaplain to do a role that is distinct and different from all the other roles in school. Chaplains need to be supported in an ongoing way with meaningful relationships with other people who are doing the same role. And also, other people who have some sort of facilitating role or oversight role for chaplains as well. So, you know, a diocesan figure say who can have some kind of convening or facilitating role. It's not enough just to leave chaplains on their own and hope that somehow or other they might link up with another chaplain, they might meet somehow or other.

If the direction of traffic from the rest of the school is trying to drag you into doing, I don't know, lunch time duties and filling in reports here and covering that lesson there, what's distinctive about the chaplain gets lost in the functioning of the school. And if the chaplain is going to have that prophetic voice in the school community the chaplain needs to be fed as a chaplain and that's only going to happen in the context of other chaplains and other kinds of spiritual nourishment.

5. SPIRITUAL FLOURISHING AND WORSHIP

a) June 2021

It has enriched worship in a way, by being more creative.
I think talking about loss, talking about death and illness has become more of the vocabulary, I think we as adults in schools were very wary about talking about death and our hand has been forced somewhat.

I think particularly in my school anyway in terms of worship liturgy, we're going to have to have a rethink. I think we're going to have to do things differently now.

b) December 2021

With new restrictions coming in last week, we've stopped all of our collective worships.

There's much more openness to spirituality, there's much more value being placed on prayer and in a way that's wonderful because chaplaincy's really come into its own and it's valued, and people want it.

In terms of spiritual resilience, we're trying to sort of make a distinction there between spiritual resilience and any kind of resilience. I think that's referring even more to that inner sense of who I am and what my worth is. And so, I think that is at the heart of the resilience…I think we're at a stage where we're seeing much more of the total meltdown and inability to go any further.

I do wonder what role models are our young people seeing when it comes to resilience. Are they seeing politicians, celebrities having meltdowns, making a mess-up, doing things very wrongly? Where are those solid stable role models? And whether they're seeing the adults floundering a little bit and panicking and that's unsettled them. In which case that's where faith comes in as the solid, you can rely on this, this is there.

We changed the worship programme to really focus on the issues of the moment and there's lots in there about identity and about hope and faith and stopping and thinking and how we behave towards each other as well.

We start and end every day with prayer so there's that opportunity…to obviously reflect on what they want to do throughout that day and then reflect on how it's gone

Something that has really surprised me with our Year 7 students is how they've dealt with loss. We've had a lot of students throughout the whole school who've lost grandparents ... The Year 7 students… come into the chapel, they're lighting a candle on our remembrance tree and they're saying prayers …sometimes they say prayers on their own and then they'll talk about happy memories, and they walk out of the chapel and say, "Thank you Sir". It's quite a positive experience.

c) September 2022

The assemblies are going back, it's a bit of a phased return to in-house assemblies because we've got such big year groups. We can only have one year group at a time in the hall for assembly. So some of them are still virtual and then some of them still live.

I think staff are finding that they quite like not having to do a live assembly but there is something about that connection that you have with the students when you're there being able to connect with them and feel their energy really.

People are really enthusiastic to be getting back to live services, planning for harvest festival services, you know, we have a Founders' Day service for Year 7s, and where they were all virtual before I've found that actually that's taking up a huge amount of time to get back to all of that and we seem to have more than we used to have because people are very excited about it

Reflections on lessons learnt

Something else that I've learnt is the real value of prayer and if you do nothing else, pray. It's been so valued by students, students that normally wouldn't engage with chaplaincy, ''Can I come and pray Sir?'', and it just fulfilled an immediate need.

It [the pandemic crisis] certainly demonstrated the value of chaplaincy and the value of worship like your prayer. We've learnt new IT skills. It's enhanced the way that we can worship, the way that we can communicate with people.

The new SIAMs framework from next September is, are you who you say you are? And I think that just gives us the way to say, look, all of you, all of us have to be able to talk this year about the biblical…next year the theological...so we've got to be able to not just understand the Bible, but be able to put it into practice. And I know, my Head is so included by this, my Head's just signed up for Bible Society stuff on being a Head in a Church school. Fantastic. Because he's recognised it.

With grateful thanks to all the chaplains who have shared their thoughts and reflections with us over the course of the last two years.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

INTRODUCTION

The research team met with the chaplains involved in the virtual community of practice (VCoP) for the final time in spring 2023. At the outset of this project in June 2021 the researchers naively thought by the time we came to the end of our project with the chaplains, the pandemic would be completely relegated to the past and usual school life, particularly Year 7 transition and induction procedures would have resumed. How wrong we have been. The consequences of the pandemic are still present and while certain school procedures may have been reinstated, some young people are even now carrying with them the impact of the Covid crisis. However, as one chaplain said:

> *There have always been times of history where there's been anxiety and fear…*
> *there's always something in our history where we are challenged and where*
> *we can be floored and derailed by what's going on and I think that our history*
> *is quite important to share with young people, to say look, you know, we've*
> *got through Covid and, yes, there've been casualties along the way but look,*
> *we're still here and we're still working through it and what have we learnt*
> *by this? And look at how we've grown. So I think there is something about*
> *acknowledging that this is part of life, it's part of things that happen across the*
> *generations, you can go back to the biblical times and what was happening*
> *to the Israelites and them having lost their homes and all these different kind*
> *of scenarios, it's part of life, the ups and downs of life. And I think that kind*
> *of listening and acknowledging and reassuring is a huge part of chaplaincy in*
> *terms of hope.*
> (Chaplain, VCoP 7, Sept 2022)

Despite the pandemic's consequences in young people's and their families lives, schools are engendering a sense of hope as we emerge from this global crisis. Our initial research findings have demonstrated that school chaplains have a significant role in this journey. This digest sets out some key recommendations to ensure chaplains are recognised fully for what they can bring to school induction procedures and effective accompaniment through crisis situations.

The following recommendations are taken from conversations with chaplains who were part of our VCoP sessions as well as leaders and chaplains from our webinar series.

Recommendations for School Leaders

1. Ensure chaplains have adequate training and support

Chaplains come into the role from such a range of different backgrounds and with a range of different training. Some people may never have had any training that really is specific to being a chaplain or indeed working in schools.
(Chaplain, VCoP 9, March 2023)

You cannot assume a certain background of training with chaplains in the way that you would assume a certain background of training with teaching staff.
(Chaplain, VCoP 9, March 2023)

Chaplains don't necessarily go into chaplaincy thinking they are going to deal with mental health issues, they go into chaplaincy thinking they are going to deal with Jesus and faith and spirituality, and often we find ourselves unskilled. Unlike a counsellor and some other school staff who have supervision, we don't have supervision. Where do we carry that too, where do we take that to make sure we are safeguarding us and ensuring we are not making things worse through lack of understanding. Recognise and formalise (write it into the job description) that chaplains should have on-going training around mental health.
(Chaplain, VCoP 9, March 2023)

Chaplains are often on their own in their role… make sure a network of support is around them.
(Chaplain, VCoP 8, December 2022)

2. Recognise the distinctive role of the chaplain

Value Chaplains as Chaplains – having a chaplain in schools is bringing to the community a form of modelling that isn't seen anywhere else – respect the incarnational and prophetic role of the chaplain.
(Chaplain, VCoP 8, December 2022)

Chaplains have a distinct role and need to be allowed to do that distinct role and not just be used as a plug for everywhere else. Safeguarding the chaplain's role is crucial and while they should not be used routinely for cover… the occasional pitching up in front of the class actually could be hugely important, both with the way the students see you as the chaplain but also actually in informing the chaplain about what it's like to be in a classroom, and that enables you to appreciate what the students are saying more when they come to see you.
(Chaplain, VCoP 8, December 2022)

It's making sure that there's an understanding that our time is flexible, our time is not to be taken up with timetabled things necessarily. SLT…like lists and they like knowing who's available when and as chaplains our life isn't like that. You can have all the intentions to get X,Y and Z done and then a child rocks up at your door and you're like ''This is what I've got to do today.
(VCoP 9, March 2023)

Chaplaincy is different from being a pastoral leader, I do more of the creating space. You know I've done quite a few different things in terms of my own learning which is around … just giving students strategies to help to create that sense of peace and calm within themselves which chaplaincy sort of lends itself to anyway because it's not an academic space…I think it's quite important that we're distinct from being part of the pastoral team.
(Chaplain, VCoP 9, March 2023)

3. Recognise a chaplain's significant role in the transition from primary to secondary school

Chaplains should be at the heart of the planning of the transition process, working with the pastoral team … So being in those planning meetings as well as the times when we meet the children and the parents who go to schools and so on.
(VCoP 8, December 2022)

4. Recognise chaplains as experts

Teachers in a school are seen as experts in their field and often chaplains are not seen as experts in the field and so not listened to or acknowledged in this way by SLT. See them as professional and experts in their field and draw upon their wisdom.
(Chaplain consultant, March, 2023)

5. Give space and time for chaplains to journey spiritually with others in the school

Time for self-reflection is important for chaplains to discern their role, their needs and their limitations.
(Chaplain consultant, March 2023)

Recommendations for Chaplains

1. Protect your own wellbeing

In times of crisis…it's that spiritual nurturing, recharging of the spiritual batteries … that's what gets squeezed out because that's time when I could be doing something else. I am having to get stricter with standing back and saying "no" …I need to protect my own wellbeing.
(Chaplain, VCoP 3, December 2021)

We kind of put our own needs to one side and maybe that comes back to bite us.
(Chaplain, VCoP 3, December 2021)

Although I was tired at the end of term and had no energy, I wanted to ensure fun activities for the students, so I pulled in visiting organisations to do this, and it helped loads as the onus was not on me to deliver.
(Chaplain, VCoP 3, December 2021)

2. Encounter stillness and reflection in your day

Something else that I've learnt is the real value of prayer and if you do nothing else, pray. (VCoP 8)

So many of our staff now are coming to the weekly staff prayer meeting. It's only for about 10 minutes before school, and they're just saying this is, you know, recharging the batteries, it's good for them. Yeah, there's such a need there I think with reflection and prayer and stillness.
(Chaplin,VCoP 7, Sept 2022)

3. Create a network of support around you

I think from a spiritual point of view an external spiritual director is really valuable, just someone who isn't school who can just come in and you can just have an hour praying, talking, just reconnecting.
(Chaplain, VCoP 7, September 2022)

I would say yes, I do feel very supported and that is partly because I'd say there's a good relationship with the senior leadership team. And I think that's really important that I feel supported from the top so to speak, that I feel I have their confidence that what I've been doing as chaplain has been well received and approved of and such like. (Chaplain, VCoP 2, September 2021)

I'm in a group of Christian teachers and we pray together once a week. We support each other and I think that's a great source of support. Also we have a diocesan group of chaplains and we meet obviously due to Covid online, sometimes we meet in physicality, and again we support each other as well as chaplains. (Chaplain, VCoP 2, September 2021)

We've got a weekly staff prayer meeting which is well-attended, colleagues I can talk to. I meet with the head teacher, who's a committed Christian, once a week solely to talk about the Christian ethos in the school. And we've got the same thing, a network of chaplains in the diocese that meets on Zoom regularly. Also I'm in regular contact with our local vicar.
(Chaplain, VCoP 2, September 2021)

4. Have a ministry of presence in your role

I make sure that every morning I do a tour of the whole school so that I can speak to staff at the start of the day and then I'm out every breaktime talking to students around the school, I'm not just in one place.

I try to get into the year 7 classes regularly, just to say hello.

It's developing those relationships and they've got to be long term, and not just in a couple of months while this is transition season.

5. Inhabit the ministry of hope

As adults working in schools, whatever our role, we're in the business of hope, we're taking these young people and hoping the very best for them.

NEXT STEPS

Further research

- There is a lack of qualitative research into students' perceptions of the role of chaplains, in supporting their spiritual wellbeing.
- There is a need for a particular focus on the year 7 2020 cohort whose induction into secondary school was significantly affected by the government restrictions in schools at the time.
- It would be beneficial to explore the chaplain's role further and identify what support is available for them to assist them in their vocational roles.

Practical recommendations

- Recognise the significance of the chaplain's role in transition and induction procedures.
- Formalise within the chaplains' job description the need for them to have on-going training around mental health.
- If chaplains are going to have the necessary prophetic role in the school, this needs to be valued and protected rather than relying on them regularly to shoulder other roles within the school.