School & College survey:
What we found out
from young people

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Introduction

We are a group of young people and adults co-leading the Resilience Revolution in Blackpool, United Kingdom. We want to make sure that young people feel comfortable going back to school and college in light of the coronavirus pandemic. We created a survey to help young people to have a voice in what would be helpful from their school or college.

We asked young people how they were feeling about going back to school or college. We also asked them what they have found helpful and what extra steps they think schools and colleges could do to help young people to return safe and happy. We have used their thoughts and opinions to come up with some recommendations that schools and colleges might find useful.

We know staff have been busy working hard to make plans in line with government guidance, so we hope this report can be a helpful tool for checking how these plans match up with the ideas of some of Blackpool's young people. You might find it useful to consider this alongside the TRUST document that has gone out to schools. This has been prepared by our fellow co-leaders of the Resilience Revolution, including young people, parents and carers, teachers, workers and academics. If you haven't seen this already you can find it HERE.

Findings

Who did we hear from?

**129 young people** completed our online survey between 15th and 25th May 2020.

Most responses (93%) came from students attending Blackpool schools, including:

- 71 responses from primary schools
- 22 responses from secondary schools
- 19 responses from colleges
- 4 responses from the pupil referral unit
- 3 responses from all-through schools
- 1 response from special schools

The other 7% of responses came from schools outside of Blackpool, mostly the Fylde and Wyre area. A couple of responses were from a bit further out, including Preston and St Helen's.

You can see in the chart on the next page how many responses we got from each individual school or college.

**Figure 1. Response rate per school / college**
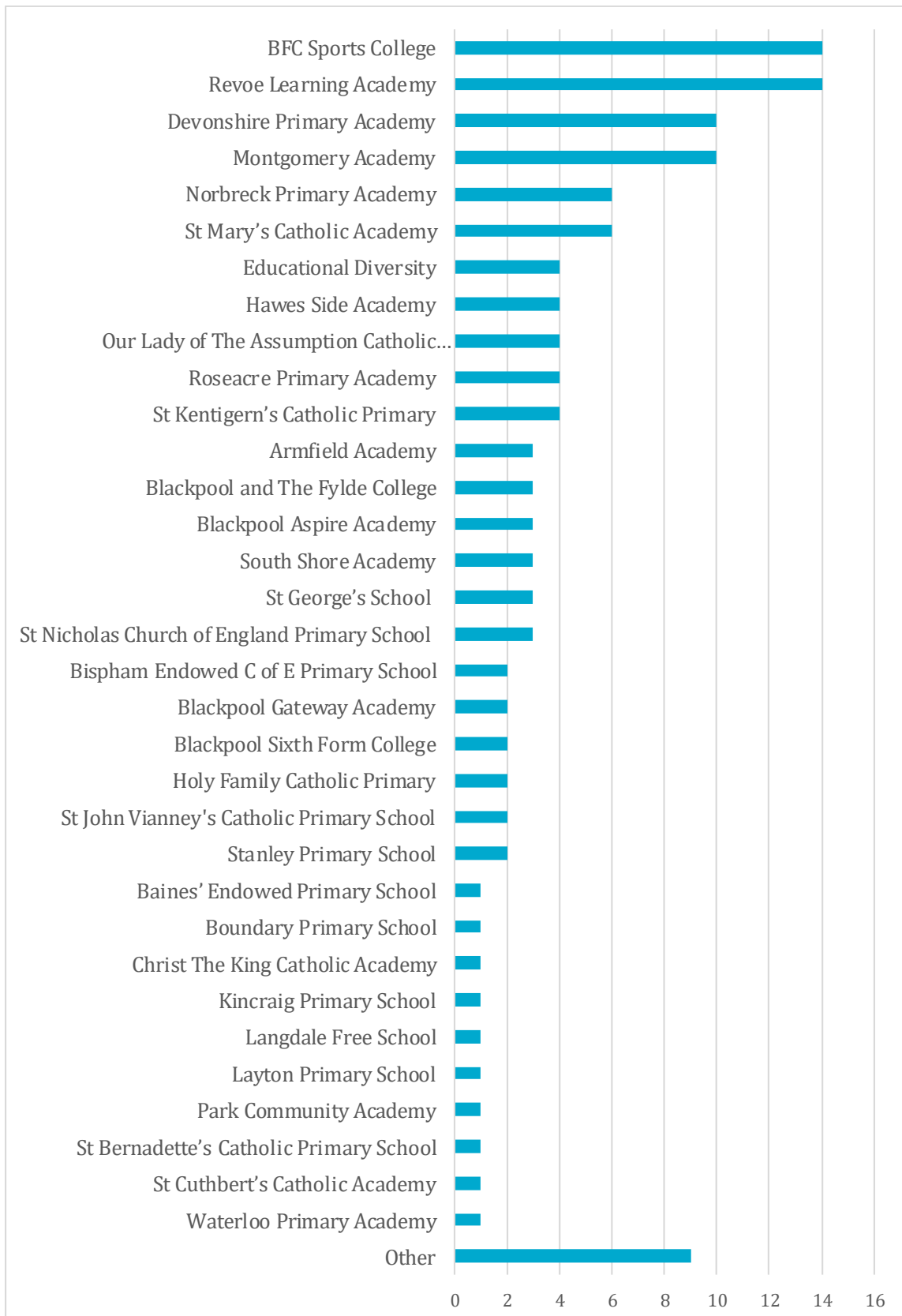
Additionally, we asked young people how they are attending school or college at the moment. The majority said they are accessing school or college remotely from home. Only 16% said they are still going into the physical school space. The remaining 2% said something else, for example a combination of both school and home or not attending at all.

Figure 2. How young people are attending school / college right now
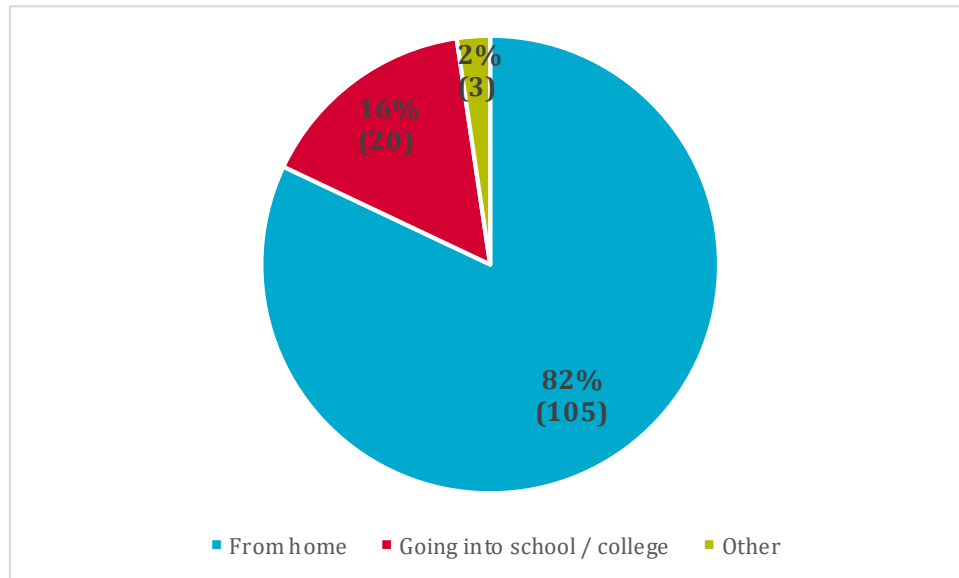
We also captured which year groups the young people are in right now. As you can see in the graph below, the most common year group we heard from was Year 6 and the least common was Year 11.

**Figure 3. Response rate per year group**
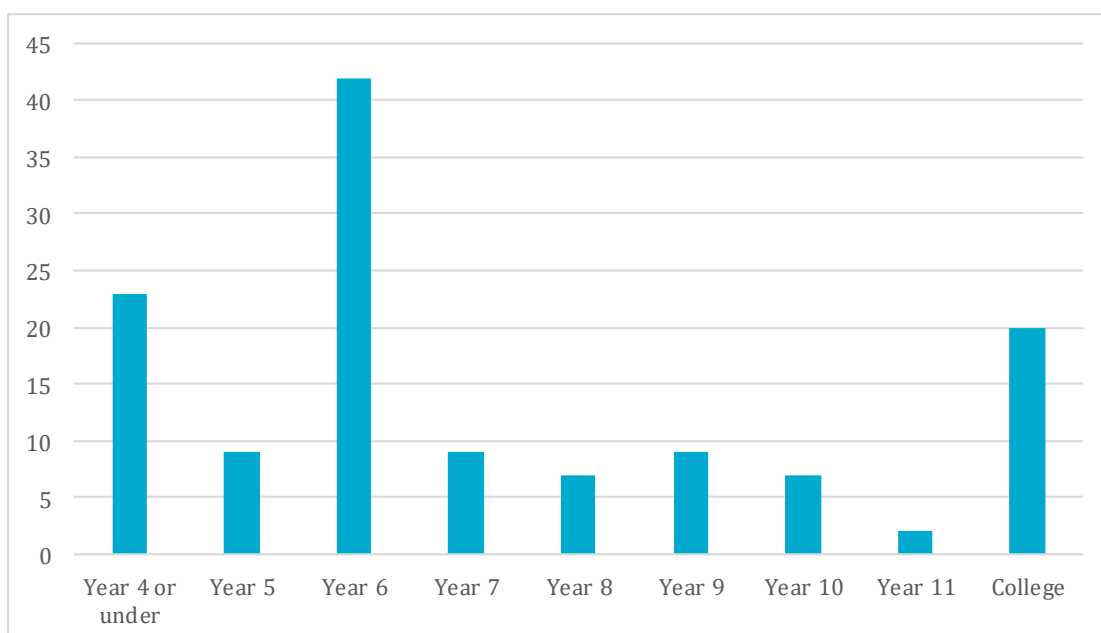
What did they say?

Feelings about moving up a year group were varied

We asked young people how they were feeling about moving up a year group before lockdown started, and how they feel now. We asked this because we wondered if this has changed, and we thought schools and colleges might like to know how students are feeling so they can plan the best support ahead of September. A couple of us will be starting secondary school in September so we were also particularly interested in hearing how other Year 6 students are feeling.

We let young people choose more than one answer to this question, from positive feelings like 'confident' or 'excited', to negative feelings like 'sad', 'nervous' or 'worried', and they could write other emotions too. We've grouped these emotions together into positive, negative or mixed/unsure to help us look for patterns and trends.

Figure 4. Overall feelings about moving up a year group
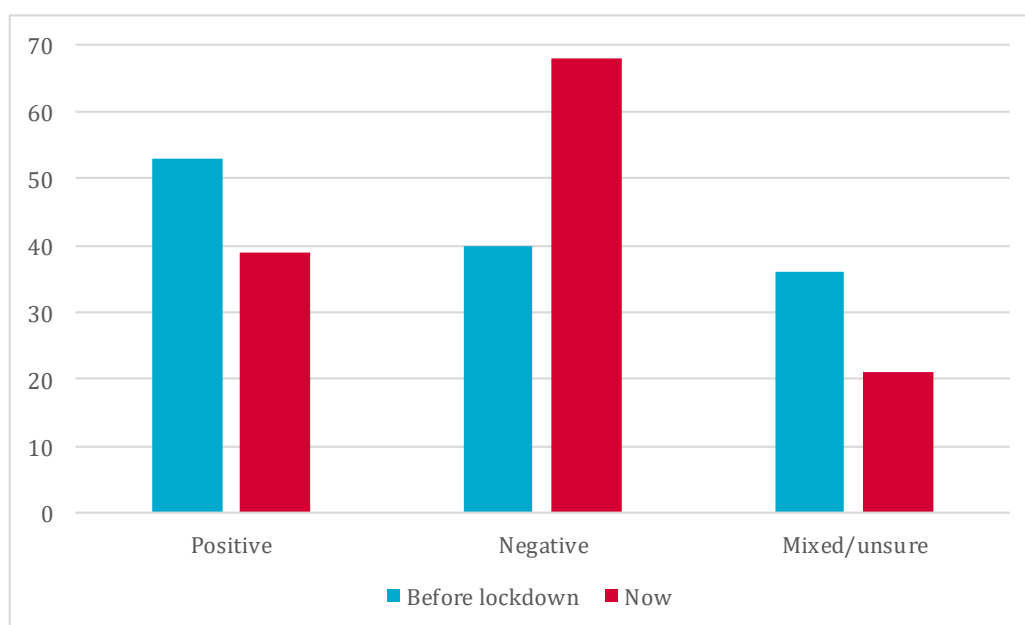
When we look across everyone's responses to this question, we can see that on average, positive feelings about moving up have gone down by 26%, negative feelings have gone up by 70% and mixed feelings / not being sure has gone down by 42%. So this would suggest that students might need a bit of extra help before September, across all year groups.

**Figure 5. Year 6 students' feelings about moving up a year group**
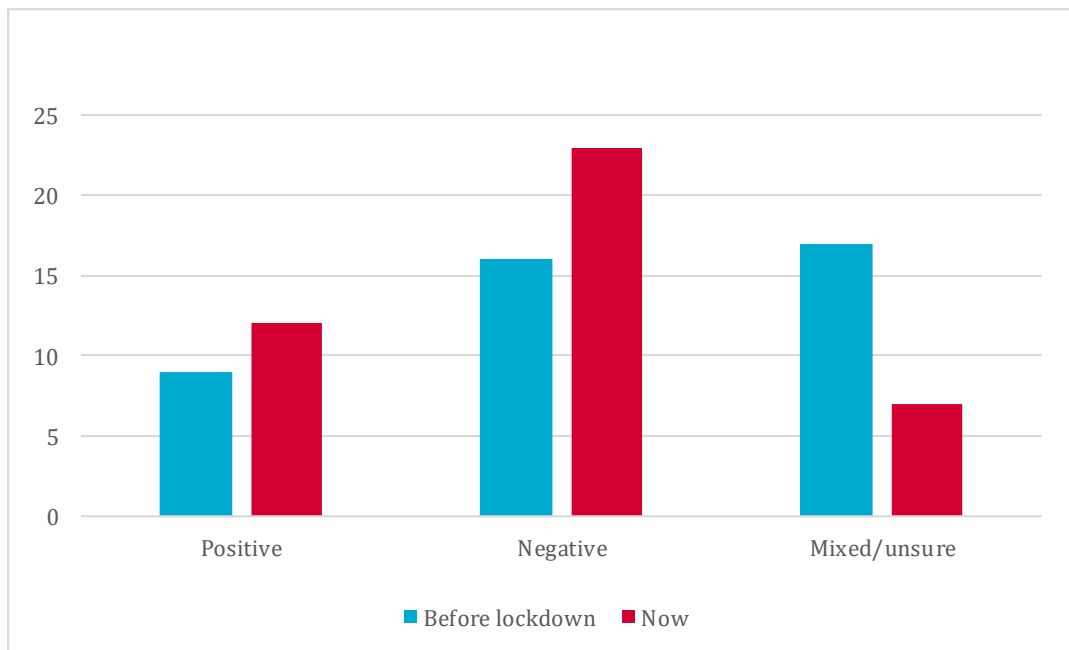
We also looked at Year 6 students specifically because they are a key transition group and the year group we heard from most. Interestingly we see different trends here; on average across Year 6's, positive feelings about moving up have actually gone up by 33%, negative feelings have gone up but not as steeply (by 44%), and mixed feelings / not being sure has gone down by slightly more (59%). If we focus on the here and now though, we can see that only 29% of Year 6 students surveyed are currently feeling positive about moving up, so more support might be needed for the other 71% of Year 6 students feeling negative or mixed emotions at the moment.

Additionally, we wanted to look at individual young people's feelings before lockdown and now, and understand how many were reporting:

- A positive shift – e.g. moving from negative/mixed feelings to positive feelings
- A negative shift – e.g. moving from positive/mixed feelings to negative feelings
- No change – e.g. staying the same as before with either positive feelings, negative feelings or mixed/unsure

The pie chart on the next page shows how many young people reported each different type of shift.

Figure 6. Types of shifts young people reported
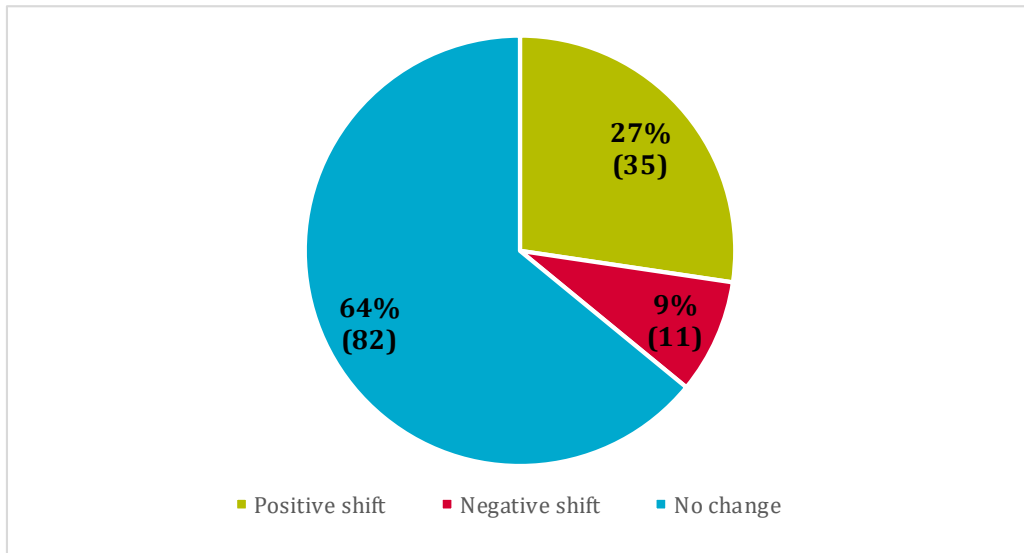
Interestingly, we can see that a lot of young people (64%) haven't reported much change in how they are feeling since before lockdown and now. While they might have picked slightly different emotions in the survey, they still fell under the same group of either positive, negative or mixed/unsure. The pie chart below tells us more about these young people that reported no change.

Figure 7. Young people reporting no change
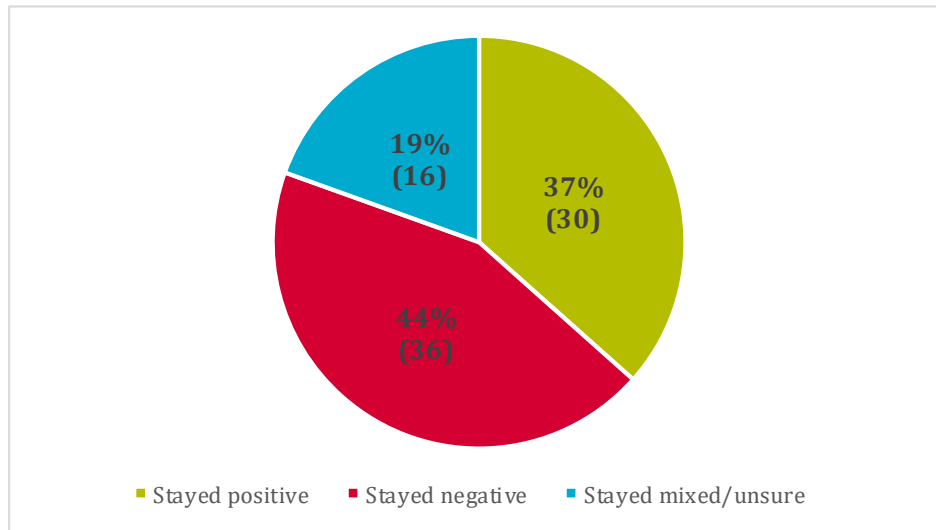
While it is good that 37% of these young people reported positive feelings both before lockdown and now, we can see that the other 63% of young people who showed no change are experiencing negative or mixed feelings about moving up. It's interesting to see that the coronavirus pandemic hasn't massively changed many individual young people's feelings. There is, however, still a lot of negative or mixed emotions remaining, so this is something that schools and colleges might want to look into with their students.

Schools and colleges have provided helpful things during lockdown. More of this would make their support even better

We asked young people to tell us about the things that their school or college has provided that have been helpful so far during lockdown. While a small minority (4%) of young people answered 'nothing' or 'very little', the majority of students listed things that they have found helpful. We also asked them for extra or different things that would make the support even better, though interestingly many said the same kinds of things as before. The main areas they talked about were:

- **Learning resources** – many young people have appreciated work being set regularly and have found resources such as home learning packs, textbooks, worksheets, test papers and videos particularly useful. There was a question around the right amount of work, as some young people said they are getting too much work and others said they would like more. One young person suggested workbooks should be introduced "*bit by bit*" to avoid overloading students. They also emphasised the importance of the right level of work, with requests for work to be appropriate for each year group and easier work for those who are struggling. Finally, specific comments were made about the accessibility of learning resources. This included asking for bigger fonts, more PDFs and PowerPoints, but also more physical copies of worksheets and preferably stapled.

- **Personal contact** – young people have found regular one-to-one contact with teaching / support staff helpful, including emails, texts, phone calls, video chats, and personalised letters. They have enjoyed the emotional support from staff checking up to see how they are doing, as well as extra support with schoolwork where needed. This wasn't the case for all young people though. Some said they would like more contact with school staff; some specified they would benefit from calls with a particular teacher, whilst others emphasised the importance of having different staff available to talk to. They also said that it would be helpful to receive more marked work back. Finally, some young people suggested they would like more contact with their classmates (for example group sessions or video calls so they can see their friends).

- **Technology** – young people mostly appreciated schools' use of technology, ranging from provision of devices, delivery of online zoom classes, use of systems like Google Classroom, and signposting students to useful apps and websites. More devices and more online classes would be even better.

- **Food** – some young people also found it helpful to have had practical support for healthy eating, including the provision of food parcels, school meals and food vouchers. Just one young person requested for more food parcels to be available, while another said more variety of lunches would be good.

- **Activities** – young people have enjoyed fun activities as a good distraction. Specific activities mentioned included PE and exercise, arts and crafts, educational games like 'Time Tables Rock Stars', board games and more. More of these activities would be even better. Suggestions ranged from learning-focused activities such as Cahoot quizzes and 'crazy science', to more "*silly things not to do with work*", like class competitions and challenges to help avoid boredom.

- **Information** – a few young people reported they've received good communication from school /college, finding it helpful to be kept in the loop around general school information, updates on covid-19, and also specific information around things like GCSE results. Other young people felt it would be helpful to have more information from their school or college. These young people said they would appreciate more communication around what schools are doing, if students will be returning, and plans specifically for Year 10 students. Information on college courses and prior notice about assessments would have been helpful too.

- **Flexibility with work** - while some young people said they have appreciated being able to request extensions, others suggested more time to complete assignments would be helpful. They also made a point around the importance of realistic expectations for work, asking schools and colleges to understand some young people are feeling stressed over the amount of work and to avoid adding more pressure.

- **Other** – some young people who have still been going into school / college said this has been helpful for them, with one calling it their "*safe place*". Other less common responses for support they have found helpful were things like counselling, no homework, and rewards such as certificates. Other suggestions for even better support included more teachers, improved English tutoring in colleges, a school youth worker, and extra-curricular work like music.

Thoughts for getting everyone back to school / college safe and happy

We asked young people what they would do to make sure students can return to the physical school space safe and supported to learn, if they were a Head Teacher or the Prime Minister for example. The main areas they talked about were:

- **Social distancing** – young people were very aware of the 2 metre rule and spoke a lot about ways they would encourage social distancing. This included changing classroom spaces so that desks were more spread out, splitting classes into smaller groups of 6-10 pupils, and staggering times for arriving, leaving and breaks in order to avoid groups mixing. They also suggested designating certain groups to certain areas, though there was a question around whether it would be easier to enforce social distancing indoors or outdoors. There was a concern that younger children wouldn't understand social distancing, so ideas around them not returning yet or restricting their break / lunch times were put forward. There was a common theme around the importance of being strict with social distancing, even when it might be difficult. One young person hoped teachers will enforce this as they worried about being teased by friends if they speak up themselves. Another young person said they would like staff to praise them and say "well done" when they socially distance from others successfully.

- **Hygiene measures** – young people commented a lot about trying to limit the potential spread of the virus. This included things like personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff and students (particularly masks and gloves), not sharing things (for example students bringing their own pencil cases and packed lunches), and cleaning chairs, equipment, etc. after use. They would also encourage lots of handwashing, through access to toilets but also spreading sanitiser stations across the school / college.

- **Phased return** – young people talked about phasing the return so everyone doesn't go back at the same time. Some discussed one year group returning at a time and thought about the order this might happen in; it was suggested that Year 6s, Year 9s, Year 10s and Year 11s are highest priority to return first due to exams, with particular emphasis on Year 10s. Another idea was for young people with the most challenges to come back first. Other young people thought more broadly about having different days of the week for different year groups, limiting to half-days, or swapping over two separate populations so everyone gets the chance to be in school / college.

- **Support** – there was a recognition that some young people might need extra support on return, for example if they have mental health problems or if they have fallen behind academically. A couple of young people were so concerned about having to catch up that they suggested repeating the school year. Other support options put forward included support groups, one to one time with tutors, extra group tuition sessions, and more after school learning. There was also a sense that young people more widely would appreciate patience, help and encouragement from their school / college. They would like staff to understand that it will be hard to concentrate on school / college and to take it step by step

rather than piling on work too quickly. In terms of more practical support, a couple of suggestions included a bus to get students to school safely and financial support for parents. There was also a call more widely for increased funding to help schools and colleges adapt to changes; for example more funding could help to support medically vulnerable students to stay at home.

- **Behaviour** – interestingly there was a bit of a split here. Some young people expressed worry about students with disruptive behaviour returning and the impact on other young people; they suggested stricter consequences for students not sticking to the rules or even bringing back students that misbehave later than others. Other young people felt that schools and colleges should use less punishments and show more lenience, particularly as students adapt to new rules. One young person also suggested using different methods for managing behaviour such as exercise.

- **Exams** – young people said they would like to see changes to exams. Some of this included more lenience around results, including lower GCSE target grades and lower boundaries. Other suggestions were for less exam papers, more continuous assessments, and more time. There was also a sense around having a calm dialogue to encourage students and not add extra pressure, for example avoiding saying "*If you fail your GCSEs, you won't get a job*".

- **Normality** – some young people spoke about trying to keep things as normal as possible. This is one of the reasons why they didn't suggest cancelling exams in 2021. Other ways to maintain normality included ensuring young people have the same teacher on return where possible, sticking to the same rules where possible, and also avoiding constant covid-19 talk.

- **Technology** – as discussed earlier, most young people have praised schools' use of technology during lockdown, and so some would like this to continue on return with things like online classes and use of phones still remaining.

- **The question of when** – some young people were concerned whether it is safe to return yet and talked about wanting to wait until September or even later, noting no vaccine is available yet. As we can see from their comments around social distancing and hygiene measures, they are very aware of the virus and the importance of avoiding spreading as much as possible. Reassurance from schools and colleges about all the measures that will be put in place could be helpful for young people to help ease some of this worry.

- **Fun with friends** – young people would like to still have fun and hope some engaging activities will be available on return. Even though they are keen to respect social distancing, they are missing their friends and would like to be put into the same small groups or 'bubbles' as their friends if possible to help them feel happier at school.

Recommendations

For teaching/support staff

1. **Be understanding**– young people suggested they would like some time to get used to the new school rules. For the first few weeks, we recommend spending time getting to know young people and being a bit more relaxed about punishments if they break the new rules. Try speaking to your pupils about how this might look and work together on it; co-produced solutions are more likely to work. Remember some young people are worried it isn't safe to return yet, so understand this may affect their attendance or behaviour. We also recommend understanding there will be particular stress around exams. Young people told us that saying things like "*If you fail your GCSEs, you won't get a job*" add extra pressure, so we recommend a calmer, more positive dialogue that encourages young people instead.

2. **Re-think transition support** – not a lot of young people reported feeling positive about moving up a year group in September. We recommend looking at additional support for all year groups but particularly Year 6. As taster sessions had to be cancelled, virtual tours of secondary schools might be helpful for Year 6 students to become more familiar with their new school. We suggest taking this slow though and showing one bit of the school at a time. We also think teachers shouldn't rush straight into conversations about transition right away. We recommend asking individual young people what they need and supporting them how they want, including listening to what they have been through and helping to reassure them that the school will be a safe place.

3. **Make social distancing comfortable for young people** – young people told us they understand they need to social distance and support a phased return. They would like expectations to be clear though and for social distancing to be encouraged in a fun way. We liked one young person's idea for a game where each group or 'bubble' has their own word to say if others get too close. We also recommend that staff give daily reminders to the whole school about social distancing, and pull up students that are not following it as their friends might not feel comfortable speaking up. Some changes to the school space like placing tape every 2 metres and spacing out desks could also be helpful.

4. **Keep the activities coming!** - Young people told us that they have enjoyed the variety of tasks to complete during lockdown, particularly art-based tasks set to help raise a sense of community spirit such as making rainbows. We recommend including community spirit enhancing tasks across all subjects; for example, writing postcards to residents in care settings in English and foreign languages lessons. They have also enjoyed quick boredom buster activities that take their mind off events. We recommend once schools and colleges are open to more young people, that these quick boredom busters are introduced within lessons, for example a guided mindfulness game or a class quiz. Young people told us they have enjoyed using technology during lockdown so don't be afraid to keep using it!

For school leaders

1. **Guide and support school staff in their roles** – we have recommended teaching / support staff to be more relaxed with punishments in the first few weeks back, re-think transition support for Year 6 pupils, help enforce social distancing in a fun but clear way, and keep providing activities young people have enjoyed during lockdown. This will require support from school leaders too and we recommend these approaches are promoted from the senior leadership level. For example this might involve providing the right environment and practical support to help school staff re-think transition plans, or linking social distancing into other school policies so it can be embedded right across the school culture.

2. **Tell us what is happening** – young people said they have found it helpful to be kept in the loop with general school / college information where possible, but more communication would be even better. One idea might be to send a newsletter to all students and families that showcases what schools have already put in place during lockdown, answers frequently asked questions, and includes any videos, guides or photographs of what the school / college environment looks like. Young people also asked for clarity and reassurance around specific things like exams, so we recommend keeping young people updated on this as and when this becomes clear, and if you don't know yet, then being open and honest about this so everyone knows where they stand.

3. **Plan support for summer holidays** – young people told us they have found school support really valuable during lockdown, with staff checking their wellbeing, extra help with schoolwork, ideas for activities to do and practical support like food parcels and food vouchers. While schools and colleges would typically close during summer holidays, during these unprecedented times we recommend considering whether any extra support could be offered over summer. This might be, for example, monthly check-ins, food vouchers in the school newsletter, sports equipment that young people can borrow over summer, schoolwork to complete from home for young people that fear they have fallen behind, or online 'coming back to school' support groups.

4. **Make mental health and wellbeing a priority** – young people expressed a range of fears, stresses and anxieties about returning to school or college, whether this be transition, exams, or safety from the virus. A supportive atmosphere prioritising students' mental health and wellbeing will be important, with young people recommending a variety of ideas that could help - from extra staff, to introducing peer support groups, to building in dedicated time for tutors to provide one to one support. We also recommend that school policies around things like mental health, resilience, and health and safety should be reviewed. This would help identify possible actions that can be put in place across the whole school / college to help make sure young people feel as safe as possible.

For policy makers

1. **More funding** – there was a call from young people for schools and colleges to get extra funding to help them adapt to changes, both right now and longer-term. For example, more funding could help medically vulnerable students to stay at home by enabling the bespoke support needed for this. We recommend regularly reviewing the way funding is allocated to schools and colleges and being flexible in order to match local needs, taking into account health inequalities within different communities. Some young people told us they were worried about the safety of returning right now, so would benefit from reassurance that schools and colleges can quickly buy in resources like PPE if needed.

2. **Consider changing exams** – some young people told us they are concerned about lost learning time due to the coronavirus pandemic and the impact on their grades next year. As a result, they told us they would like to see changes to exams – for example lower grade boundaries, less exam papers, more continuous assessments or more time. We recommend considering how best to organise exams next year so that young people don't feel disadvantaged by the pandemic, and communicating this swiftly to schools and colleges.

3. **Support schools and colleges to prioritise mental health and wellbeing** – we have recommended that school leaders consider measures to help foster a supportive atmosphere for students to return to. We recommend that this is driven by national policy and guidance. In addition to increased funding for extra staff, policy makers could help by making sure that social distancing rules are linked to strategies and PSHE guidance for mental health, relationships and bullying. Young people expressed concern that some students might break social distancing rules, and one young person was worried they would be teased if they tried to tackle this themselves. Therefore we think it is important for policymakers to lay out coherent guidance for schools and colleges, to help them consistently enforce social distancing whilst also protecting students' mental health and wellbeing.

Thank you for reading this report. If you would like to find out more about the Resilience Revolution or get involved with further opportunities, please email headstart@blackpool.gov.uk