

Insights from the DfE on pandemic recovery and major policies

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12 October 2022

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Having previously been responsible for COVID-19 Response and Schools Recovery, Ms. Kinniburgh explained how the DfE aimed throughout the pandemic to keep as many children and young people in school and learning as practically possible. The focus has now shifted to future departmental strategies which continue to aspire for high standards of education.

Pandemic response delivered some successful mitigation

We know all too well how the unprecedented impact and uncertainty caused by the pandemic brought new challenges to the sector, requiring greater agility and higher stakes results than ever.

The DfE implemented COVID-19 testing involving digital solutions, utilising the army and organisations to enable every child to be tested by 5 January 2021. 30% of all tests that were carried out took place within schools, with the DfE receiving feedback on increases of confidence evidenced by their speed to respond.

Further schemes were rolled out to help protect children which included ventilation schemes, focussing on circulating fresh air through school buildings assisted by Co2 monitors, as well as the DfE's promotion of their support for vaccination schemes across schools. All these projects enabled children, where and when possible, to remain in schools and made the priority of their health and safety paramount.

It was reported across primary education that whilst the pandemic had pushed back maths and writing skills, reading skills had increased nationally. Success was credited to the Oak National Academy, which set to improve home learning and assist with teaching. Improving accessibility to technology was a further target the DfE wanted to achieve, successfully issuing 1.35 million laptops and tablets to schools.

A drive for educational excellence

It was crucial when schools resurfaced after COVID-19 that the DfE's strategy prioritised the delivery of an effective recovery programme. This was achieved by the focus on school intervention, personal tutoring specifically provided by the state, increasing taught hours for 16-19 years from September 2022, and finally a focus on extra funding to ensure the development of "superb teachers".

Ms. Kinniburgh reiterated that a drive for educational excellence is still the DfE's priority, with further focus on improving the quality of schools being backed by the new Secretary of State, Kit Malthouse, who is keen to develop education as a national success story. She also highlighted that we have seen academic testing developments within the sector including the introduction of T-Levels and the drive for apprenticeships to be more widely promoted and accessible.

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