

# Well-being at the heart of Learning

**Prof Sonia Blandford, Founder and CEO of Achievement for All, kicks off our build-up to World Mental Health Day with a reflection on the “new normal” facing learning communities, and the critical importance of putting wellbeing at the heart of learning**

2020 continues to be a year like no other, with the COVID-19 global pandemic experienced by society at large, perhaps the greatest impact over time is on the wellbeing of the current generation of children, those who ultimately will be responsible for all our futures.



“We are getting reports from all over the country of school leaders being so grateful to reconnect with their AfA coaches...lockdown has been an incredibly tough and lonely experience for many...”

**Marius Frank- Director of E-Learning Achievement for All**

The response to the pandemic by governments across the UK has been varied in terms of – lockdown and curfews, transport and travel, employment and home working, recreation and leisure, and face to face engagement within families and friends.

The singular consistent message has been school openings. Following five months of online learning for the majority face to face delivery of children’s education has been encouraged since the start of the school year (August and September 2020). The aim of return to school has been predominantly to limit the impact of COVID-19 on academic learning. Several reports have indicated a dramatic end to any previous gains in closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers<sup>123</sup>. In England, the government

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/wps/WP202026-Inequalities-childrens-experiences-home-learning-during-COVID-19-lockdown-England.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/schools-responses-to-covid-19-pupil-engagement-in-remote-learning/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/schools-responses-to-covid-19-pupil-engagement-in-remote-learning/>

has promised an investment of 1 billion pounds to counter the impact on learning of school closures through an externally led National Tutoring programme <sup>4</sup>.

It is axiomatic that constant changes to the rhythm of a child's daily routine will impact on their wellbeing, an area where schools are in greatest need of support. We read daily of the physical impact of COVID-19 on schools, with the emphasis on the increasing time away from lessons <sup>5</sup>, and threat to the health of teachers and teaching assistants <sup>6</sup>, yet there is limited reporting on the impact of the pandemic on children's wellbeing. The University of Colorado commentary, *Pandemics differ from other disasters in that they generally affect a larger number of people, threat to life is prolonged, and illness and mortality come in waves, not all at once. There is an erosive effect due to the constant and prolonged exposure to stress*, alerts us of the dangers ahead<sup>7</sup>.

For schools, the message is clear, **wellbeing is at the heart of learning:**



**An anxious, frightened or angry mind cannot learn**  
**An anxious, frightened or angry mind cannot teach**  
**An anxious, frightened or angry mind cannot lead**

Put simply, we are all familiar with the African proverb, 'it takes a village to raise a child'<sup>8</sup>. In the current context the village is the child's school, possibly the only contact with anyone other than their immediate family.

COVID-19 has directed us towards a 'new normal' when planning in how schools (the village) can prepare a child for the future <sup>9</sup>the emphasis is on personal development, communication skills, self-efficacy, self-regulation, all central to the Achievement for All Core Strength model that underpins our wellbeing programme designed to support all children as they experience unprecedented challenges in their lives.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://nationaltutoring.org.uk/faqs>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/News/Parentkind-survey-finds-parents-want-more-say-in-how-their-child-returns-to-school>

<sup>6</sup> <https://schoolsImprovement.net/coronavirus-majority-of-teaching-assistants-feel-unsafe-in-london-schools-says-union-survey/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/psychiatry/about/in-the-news/mind-the-brain/how-covid-19-is-a-unique-threat-to-mental-health>

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It\\_takes\\_a\\_village](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_takes_a_village)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Schools\\_of\\_the\\_Future\\_Report\\_2019.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Schools_of_the_Future_Report_2019.pdf)

## Core Strength

Your brain is part of your body,  
and so exactly the same  
things apply.

Core Strength  
is all about the mental toolkit  
you can develop as you grow.



[Core Strength V2 0](#)

CLICK ABOVE TO WATCH A SHORT YOUTUBE VIDEO ON CORE STRENGTH

**Investment in wellbeing** would meet the immediate, medium- and long-term needs of children.

Children from birth to adulthood need wellbeing to counter the negative in their lives<sup>10</sup>. Core strength is needed if a child is to learn.

If we are to meet the needs of **all** children touched by the Covid-19 crisis, and support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of every teacher, non-teacher and leader in our dedicated and committed education workforce spanning colleges to early years, we need to put wellbeing at the heart of learning *now*.

**Prof Sonia Blandford**

**Founder and CEO Achievement for All**

Visit [afaeducation.org](http://afaeducation.org) to learn more about our leadership development and professional training approaches that have reached nearly six thousand education settings over nearly a decade.



The screenshot shows the Achievement for All website. At the top left is the logo. To the right are 'Get in touch' and 'Donate' buttons. Below is a navigation menu with links: 'About us', 'Coaching Programmes', 'Covid-19 Leadership Support', 'Step-Up Reviews', 'Our Impact', 'News', 'Join us', 'Blog', and 'Awards'. The main content area features a large image of two smiling children. Overlaid on the image is the text: 'We want to put Wellbeing at the heart of learning and help school communities across England and Wales to thrive emotionally, socially and academically, ensuring that social mobility is real.' At the bottom of the image is a pink button that says 'Read our Every Child Included in Education manifesto here'.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/24/my-familys-history-reveals-the-terrible-toll-a-pandemic-takes-on-mental-health>